



Department of Justice

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REMARKS

BY

ATTORNEY GENERAL ROBERT F. KENNEDY

AT THE

POLISH NATIONAL ALLIANCE CONVENTION

✿ BENJAMIN FRANKLIN HOTEL
PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA

SEPTEMBER 18, 1963

Poland was an old country when the United States was born, but our two national destinies have been interwoven ever since.

Poles were among the earliest, hardiest and most Democratic settlers of the new world; and no account of the American Revolution would be complete without the names of Casimir Pulaski and Thaddeus Kosciuszco.

Pulaski gave his life in our war for independence, after serving with Gallantry at Brandywine and Valley Forge.

Kosciuszco lived on to work and fight for the cause of freedom, both here and in Poland, for many years.

His close friend Thomas Jefferson wrote of him that "he is as pure a son of liberty as I have ever known -- and of that liberty which is to go to all, and not to the few."

Money and land were settled on Kosciuszco by a grateful congress after the war -- but it was typical of the man that he never used this bounty for himself.

Instead, he placed his will in Jefferson's hands -- and in that will, anticipating the Emancipation Proclamation by more than half a century, he directed that the whole of his American fortune be used to buy Negro slaves and set them free.

Today, the heroic statue of Kosciuszco that stands opposite the White House in Washington is a lasting symbol of our friendship with the people of Poland.

And it is appropriate, too, that the monument was built with funds of the Polish National Alliance, for surely there is no organization more truly dedicated to furthering that friendship than yours.

I think we can all agree that it has been a mutually rewarding friendship through the years -- though we must acknowledge that America has had the best of the bargain.

The millions of Poles who followed Pulaski and Kosciuszco to this country as immigrants brought a rich and vital strain into our national character: we would be a poorer and weaker nation today without them.

If I set out to read a list of all the Polish-Americans who have earned places of leadership and honor, in war and peace and in all walks of life, it would take all day -- so I'll settle for mentioning only one whose name is currently in the news, the distinguished John A. Gronouski, our new Postmaster General.

Within twelve years after the United States won its independence, Poland lost hers; and nearly all of her modern history has been a valorous and continuing struggle to regain it -- a struggle with which Americans have always been deeply concerned.

During the First World War, the United States was a leading advocate for re-establishment of the Polish state. And was influential in providing for its formation at the Treaty of Versailles.

And time and again since then, we have been inspired by the courage of the poles in fighting for freedom in their homeland.

We can never forget how Polish cavalrymen charged their horses against invading Nazi tanks.

Nor can we ever forget General Bor's uprising in occupied Warsaw, which held out for sixty-three days against the overwhelming forces of the German Army.

Several years ago, I climbed the rocky hillside at Monte Casino -- the scene of a hard-won allied victory in one of the bloodiest battles of the Second World War -- and there, on the monument to the Polish dead, is one of the most moving inscriptions I have ever read:

"We Polish soldiers, for our freedom and yours, have given our souls to God, our bodies to the soil of Italy, and our hearts to Poland."

The fate of Poland after the war, when the Communist Regime came into power, opened still another dark chapter in her troubled history.

But the Communists didn't reckon on the stubbornness of the Polish spirit. They soon found out that nobody can make a collectivist out of a Polish farmer -- and they still are discovering, more clearly every year, that nobody can stifle a Polish imagination; nobody can bend a Polish will.

Since 1956, the barriers have begun to come down.

The Polish people have won greater freedom to travel abroad, and to receive visitors from other countries. Many Americans, including some of you here today, have been able to welcome Polish friends and relatives to this country.

During 1962, an estimated ten thousand Americans visited Poland, and the figure will undoubtedly be even higher this year.

Under an extensive cultural exchange program, Polish scholars have come here to lecture at our universities, and a lively student exchange program has developed between the two countries.

American athletes now compete with Polish teams, and such renowned Polish performers as the Mazowsze Folk Dance Group and the Posnan Boys' Choir have toured American cities.

American newspapers and magazines are on sale at Polish news stands, and American broadcasts are received without interference in Polish homes.

In the field of International Trade, too, the barriers have been slightly lowered. The United States has sold large quantities of Agricultural surplus to Poland, and Polish exports to this country have increased.

We hope to see a steady widening of these economic relations, and for that reason this Administration is in favor of retaining authority to grant "most favored nation" treatment to Polish commodities entering our ports.

The United States has made it clear that we will continue to welcome those actions of any country, Communist or otherwise, which respond to the basic needs of the people of that country and which seek to improve relations with us.

Our Foreign Policy is to encourage such developments, and to show our approval of any progress made along those lines.

But this in no way suggests a weakening in our fundamental position -- and the Communists know it.

We as a nation will never retreat from our conviction that there can be no lasting justice in the world until people everywhere have the right to self-determination. And the cause of justice demands equal vigilance here at home.

We will never retreat from the belief of our fathers -- the belief for which Pulaski died and Kosciuszko lived; the belief that lives today in every Polish heart, no less than in the hearts of all Americans -- the belief that all men were made to be free.

Thank you.