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REMARKS

of

Rep. Gerald R. Ford, Jr.

May 3, 1960

Mr. Speaker,

The people of Poland have experienced the greatest national glory and have known the extreme in misery and degradation. In the past 1000 years the Polish nation has had its "golden age" but it has also been partitioned out of existence. It has known peace and war, freedom and slavery, democracy and dictatorship, culture and savagery. It is one of the great nations of man and as such has experienced all the joys and all the sorrows of mankind. But the Polish people, whenever or wherever they lived, have kept alive the spirit of freedom, the essence of culture, the zest for life, and the best of qualities which we admire in all people.

It is fitting that the United States House of Representatives should take a few minutes today to pay special tribute to this people and nation. One hundred and sixty-nine years ago today on May 3, 1791 a new Constitution was proclaimed in Poland. This constitution provided for an heredity limited monarchy and a cabinet of ministers which was to be responsible to the central legislature. It so impressed and frightened Poland's neighbors that a second partition of Poland in 1793 followed the first of 1772.

When the third partition occurred in 1795, Thaddeus Kosciuska led



a movement against the partitioners, but his forces were defeated. This was the same Thaddeus Kosciuska who served as an officer in George Washington's revolutionary army and was the engineer in charge of the construction of fortifications at West Point from 1778 to 1780. He was a "freedom fighter" both in Europe and America, and we Americans owe a special debt of gratitude to this Polish patriot.

Coming into the 20th Century, we are all familiar with the speech of the Polish Foreign Secretary Josef Beck on May 5, 1939 when he said, "The Poles do not know the concept of peace at any price." Subsequent history is all too well known. But the aspirations and ideals of the Polish "freedom fighters" of a thousand years remain. The American and the Polish people are one in these aspirations and ideals.

We all endorse, therefore, I'm sure, the recent announcement of the Postmaster General that there will be issued this fall a U.S. "Champion of Liberty" postage stamp commemorating the 100th Anniversary of the birth of Ignace Jan Paderewski, another eminent Polish patriot, and champion of liberty. As a statesman and a musician, Paderewski exhibited anew the true spirit of Poland.



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, D. C.

April 29, 1960

Dear Colleague:

Congressman Machrowicz, Congressman Kluczynski, and several other Members have asked me to request time to commemorate the 169th Anniversary of Poland's Constitution Day.

I thought you would like to know that we have put away one hour on Tuesday, May third, for this special annual tribute.

Sincerely yours,

Roman C. Pucinski

Roman C. Pucinski
Member of Congress

RCP:cs

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POLISH CONSTITUTION DAY

Prepared According to the Instructions of the

Honorable Gerald R. Ford

Arshag O. Sarkissian
Foreign Affairs Division
May 3, 1960

POLISH CONSTITUTION DAY

When people are suffering in misery and misfortune, their thoughts invariably turn back to their happier and inspiring days. This is particularly true of the Poles who, after enduring the oppressive yoke of foreign rule and after making great sacrifices for freedom, find themselves once more trapped in their homeland behind the Iron Curtain which has been imposed by Communist totalitarianism. Today, on the 169th anniversary of their first democratic Constitution, the Poles everywhere join hands in the commemoration of this historic event. The adoption of the Constitution of 1791 constitutes one of the brightest and most significant landmarks in Poland's history, and certainly it marks the most significant date in her political and constitutional history.

That Constitution made Poland a constitutional monarchy, one in which the monarch's powers were brought under the law, and a cabinet type of government with ministerial responsibility was established. Many ancient class distinctions and privileges were wiped out, and the government was strengthened by expanding the electorate. Local landlords' arbitrary powers over the peasants were abolished, and the latter were placed under the protection of the law. And, what was perhaps more important in those days in that part of the world, this Constitution guaranteed religious freedom. In this and in many other respects, the Polish Constitution of 1791 was in the vanguard of democracy's advance into Central and Eastern Europe.

Of course we know that the Constitution never had the chance to be tested. Foreign invasion and the eventual partition of Poland prevented the implementation of that Constitution. However, the spirit of that historic document has always been cherished by the Poles. By marking its 169th anniversary they want to show the free world that they still cherish the fine democratic and progressive ideals of their Constitution of 1791.