

Address at  
Polish Day Celebration  
Court of Peace, New York World's Fair  
New York, New York  
October 14, 1939

Let me quote from the radio address delivered by the Polish Ambassador to the United States - Count Potocki:

"I also want to say a few words to American citizens of Polish origin. We wish you to remember that your first loyalty is to the country which has given you a new home and we trust that you shall faithfully fulfill your duties and obligations to the United States."

His advice is sound.

This is a time for you and me to remain cool and dispassionate.

I know it is so easy to be moved and so difficult to remain collected, and yet only by means of cool judgment can we meet our responsibilities as American citizens of Polish descent.

As citizens of this country we have assumed definite obligations and it is our duty to bear these in mind when touched by the suffering of the country recreated 20 some years ago whose representative sits on this rostrum.

Often before have we expressed to him our sincere congratulations. Often before have we expressed to him our pleasure with Poland's progress for the good of her people. Today we have a different message - we express to him our sympathies - express to him our sorrow at what has happened in his country in recent weeks. Guided, however, by his own advice "that our first loyalty is to the United States" we realize fully that our country is representative of the ideas of many peoples of various ancestry living together in peace and harmony for the development of their minds and their hearts - and so for the good of society at large.

The tragedies of recent weeks have risen to a great extent from the theory that different peoples can not live together within the same political boundaries. Application of this theory and practice means the forcible removal of people from their homes and acceptance of the idea that persons of different speech and different backgrounds must be more or less hostile to one another.

The United States exemplifies the antithesis of this theory. From the very beginning, a century and a half ago, the American tradition has been that our country could absorb different nationalities, different cultures, and weld them into one. We believe that the soundness of this principle has been continuously demonstrated. We believe that this country is great, not in spite of the fact that its population is derived from all parts of the world, but largely because of that fact. We realize that the process is not complete. We realize that much more can be done than has so far been done in the process of amalgamation, but we have no reason to believe that the principle will not work.

At the same time we have abundant reason to believe that the

opposite principle will not work. For once you start working on a principle of intolerance there is no limit to the extent you can go in discovering differences that may be magnified into reasons for mutual distrust and hatred. Behold, the war!

It is therefore logical for us to conclude that the most directly helpful thing we can do, it seems to me, is to strengthen our own country. The more stability and essential unity the United States can display, the greater is the hope for a better future for the world at large.

By this means we establish ourselves in our relation to the whole American Nation as an essential part thereof, and by this means we help preserve the American institutions - wholesome institutions - wholesome to world freedom and peace.

These make the American nation a great nation.

What makes a nation great?

It is not feats of arms, nor large governmental organizations, nor domination of others. It is rather the accomplishments and state of mind of its population.

In the past few weeks the incredible has happened.

There are two things we can turn our thoughts to in this unhappy juncture. The first is that history will not stop with the present nor confine itself to the events we now are witnessing. Issues far greater than the fate of one country are at stake, nor is the final fate of any one as yet determined.

This is not to say that I think we can look forward to a complete undoing of what has been accomplished. Lives can not be restored, the bitterness of suffering and deprivation can not be sweetened, and memories of horror can not be wiped out. Whatever restoration there may be for Poland, the future can not dissolve tragedies that have been visited upon her and the Polish people.

The second thing to which we can turn our thoughts is that, much as we are moved by what has happened to Poland, we nevertheless are Americans. We have many friendships, many memories, but only one paramount and permanent loyalty, and that we owe to America.

This loyalty to our country is not a merely selfish excuse to indulge in the comfort of forgetfulness. It is not an excuse for doing nothing. It is not a matter of thanking God that we have escaped and are safely remote from trouble. It is not a matter of passing by on the other side. On the contrary, our loyalty to America is one that entails its own sacrifices and devotions, its own requirements of intelligent citizenship. It is something we or our forefathers chose freely - knowingly and willingly.

The present position of the United States is one of grave difficulty.

We must protect our institutions. That is our first duty.

I should like to use this opportunity to consider what these institutions are. We speak often in general terms of how much they mean to us and how much we cherish them. But what are they? Does America stand in our minds for vague and uncertain benefits or for benefits that are concrete and substantial?

I shall pass briefly over the economic advantages of America, because it is not enough that the soil of a country be fertile, that its natural resources be abundant, that its products be varied, that its suitability for human habitation be unusual. That can be true of many lands and yet all such potential benefits may be offset by political tyranny that puts them in the control of the few and denies them to the many. It is the distinction of America that from the outset her institutions were devoted to the promotion of general well-being and the curbing of privilege. Our history is a history of the struggle to maintain that principle and we dread war because we realize that our constitutional rights are never in graver danger of impairment than in time of war, when the necessity of defending the national existence becomes an excuse for destroying the very things for which the nation has its existence.

During the past few weeks we had occasion to celebrate the 150th anniversary of our Bill of Rights - that portion of our Constitution which arose directly from popular demand and is comprised in the first ten amendments. I ask you to join me in recalling certain of these provisions that are today most precious to us - to join me in reflecting upon their significance to us.

#### Article I.

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

#### Article IV.

The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated, and no Warrants shall issue, but upon probable cause, supported by Oath or affirmation, and particularly describing the place to be searched, and the persons or things to be seized.

#### Article V.

No persons shall be held to answer for a capital, or otherwise infamous crime, unless on a presentment or indictment of a Grand Jury, except

in cases arising in the land or naval forces, or in the Militia, when in actual service in time of War or public danger; nor shall any person be subject for the same offense to be twice put in jeopardy of life or limb; nor shall be compelled in any criminal case to be a witness against himself, nor be deprived of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor shall private property be taken for public use, without just compensation.

Article VI.

In all criminal prosecutions, the accused shall enjoy the right to a speedy and public trial, by an impartial jury of the State and district wherein the crime shall have been committed, which district shall have been previously ascertained by law, and to be informed of the nature and cause of the accusation; to be confronted with the witnesses against him; to have compulsory process for obtaining witnesses in his favor, and to have the Assistance of Counsel for his defense.

Article VIII.

Excessive bail shall not be required, nor excessive fines imposed, nor cruel and unusual punishments inflicted.

Contrast this, if you will, with conditions elsewhere, and realize more fully the real meaning of these provisions of our Bill of Rights - an American institution.

These articles of our Bill of Rights have protected American citizens for 150 years. They are bulwarks of our freedom and well-being. They are safeguards that go along with our power to choose our legislators and our executives. They are safeguards that protect us from abuses by those whom we choose to make our laws and administer them. They are rights for which humanity has struggled successfully in this country and unsuccessfully in other parts of the world. They are rights for which we still must struggle to maintain, for they can be lost as millions of our fellow creatures have lost them. They can be violated; they can be destroyed. We can not afford to take them for granted, as natural rights possessed by all men. "Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty". It is for this reason that our country is remaining neutral and will try by every means to maintain its neutrality.

We have other tasks besides that of maintaining neutrality. We have immediate and pressing domestic problems, and preoccupation with the fate of other nations should not divert our attention from these problems.

I do not urge all this upon you in a spirit of selfishness, nor to make you forget what I know you can not forget. How close our American loyalties are to the cause of Poland is illustrated in these recent words of our Secretary of State.

"Poland is now the victim of force used as an instrument of national policy. Its territory has been taken over and its government has had to seek refuge abroad. Mere seizure of territory, however, does not extinguish the legal existence of a government."

These words mean to me that America is still what she always has been - the hope of the world.

We know well with what longing and aspiration America has been looked to in the past, and we who gather here today are living testimony to the fact that America did not disappoint those longings and aspirations. What she has been in the past, she must be even more in the future. For the world's sake as much as for her own she must remain sane, wholesome and united, so as to be ready and able to lead in some happier day, to the reestablishment of peace, order and justice. Here is our task. Against that time when wrongs may be more effectively righted than now, we are called upon to strengthen our country with our most devoted thought and loyalty - we are called upon to understand and defend her institutions and to perfect their oneness with the interests of civilization and humanity.