



Remarks

The Chapel at Wesley Theological Seminary
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Summary of Remarks of Ifj. Koszorus Ferenc on the Occasion of the Commemoration of the War of Independence of 1848

“Kossuth in America”

Sponsored by the American Hungarian Federation of Metropolitan Washington, D.C.

English part of the program.

As Hungarian Americans we want to share our commemoration with our guests who do not speak Hungarian. Also, we recall Kossuth’s trip to the United States and his championing the Hungarian cause in impeccable English. Kossuth was committed, passionate and eloquent. But, of course, his eloquence only explains in part the great enthusiasm that greeted him everywhere he went throughout the United States.

The renowned Ralph Waldo Emerson said in greeting Kossuth on his arrival at Concord, MA, May 11, 1852,

*"[we] have been hungry to see the man whose extraordinary eloquence is seconded by the splendor and the **solidity** of his actions."*

The key phrase is the “solidity of his actions.” Kossuth was a reformer before it was convenient to be one; he was a revolutionary not after the fact but when it was dangerous to be one; and he was an eloquent spokesman for Hungarian liberty when it was not easy to be one – “solidity of actions;” explains why we remember Kossuth as Champion of Liberty. We commemorate historical events, such as 1848, to remember and pass on our heritage. But, we also seek to draw lessons for today.

On January 5, 1852, Kossuth spoke at a banquet here in Washington D.C. that was given in his honor by Members of the House of Representatives and the Senate. The title of his address was, “NOVELTIES IN AMERICAN REPUBLICANISM.” The address reviewed various forms of government. Kossuth’s remarkable speech included the following observations:

“We Hungarians are very fond of the principle of municipal self-government, and we have a natural horror against centralization. That fond attachment to municipal self- government, without which there is no provincial freedom possible, is a fundamental feature of our national character. We brought it with us from Asia a thousand years ago, and we preserved it throughout the vicissitudes of ten centuries. . . . Our nation, through all its history, was educated in the school of local [141] self-government; and in such a country, grasping ambition having no field, has no place in man's character.

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It is sorrowful indeed, but it is natural. It is in the garden of centralization that the venomous plant of ambition thrives.

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With self-government is freedom, and with freedom is justice and patriotism. With centralization is ambition, and with ambition dwells despotism. Happy your great country, sir, for being so warmly attached to that great principle of self- government. Upon this foundation your fathers raised a home to freedom more glorious than the world has ever seen. Upon this foundation you have developed it to a living wonder of the world. Happy your great country, sir! [142] that it was selected by the blessing of the Lord to prove the glorious practicability of a federative union of many sovereign States, all preserving their States-rights and their self-government, and yet united in one-- every star beaming with its own lustre, but altogether one constellation on mankind's canopy.

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The respect for State-rights in the Federal Government of America, and in its several States, will become an instructive example for universal toleration, forbearance, and justice to the future States, and Republics of Europe. Upon this basis those mischievous questions of language-nationalities will be got rid of, which cunning despotism has raised in Europe to murder liberty. Smaller states will find security in the principle of federative union, while they will preserve their national freedom by the principle of sovereign self-government; and while larger States, abdicating the principle of centralization, will cease to be a blood-field to unscrupulous usurpation and a tool to the ambition of wicked men, municipal institutions will ensure the development of local elements; freedom, formerly an abstract political theory, will be brought to every municipal hearth; and out of the welfare and contentment of all parts will flow happiness, peace, and security for the whole. . . .”

Today, Hungary is free, democratic, a NATO ally and a member of the EU. Not all Hungarians, however, are permitted to exercise all the legitimate and democratic rights they desire. I speak of the Hungarian historical communities living as minorities and their request for internal self-determination, autonomy, local self-government – rights which are denied them.

As we see from Kossuth’s incredible speech, the concept of local self-government has been an integral part of Hungarians’ proud tradition, cherished by them not only today when part of the nation lives scattered in countries neighboring Hungary, but also when Hungarians lived within one border. As we advocate the cause of local self-government and autonomy – a prerequisite to democracy in a multi-ethnic state -- let us not forget this legacy. And let us leave this commemoration with a renewed commitment to support autonomy, with Kossuth’s eloquent words reminding us of this heritage.