

National/International Report

Pope meets with Walesa, endorses independent unions

By John Thavis

Gdansk, Poland (NC) — Pope John Paul II ended a two-day stop in Poland's Baltic port region with a ringing endorsement of "independent and self-governing" trade unions like those proposed seven years earlier by the Solidarity movement.

On the fifth day of a weeklong trip to his native land, the pope toured the busy Gdansk harbor by boat, addressed a youth rally on the peninsula where World War II began, then celebrated a long-anticipated Mass for workers and families in a suburb of the shipbuilding center. The day before, he had met with former Solidarity leader Lech Walesa.

In the most explicit remarks of his trip on the sensitive issue of the now-banned Solidarity movement, the pope said in his sermon that the worker "has the right to decide about the workshop."

"He has the right to self-management — and one manifestation of this is trade unions, 'independent and self-governing' as was stressed right here in Gdansk," he said.

During the visit, the pope met with former Solidarity leader Lech Walesa.

The Gdansk accords, by which the government recognized Solidarity before dissolving it in 1981, remain "a task to be fulfilled," the pope said. The statement echoed a similar call he had made during a trip four years earlier, when authorities would not allow him to visit Gdansk. Historically, the city has been the scene of labor protests and, in recent years, the center of underground political opposition to policies of the communist government.

The pope coupled his support for Solidarity with an implied criticism of Poland's system of state socialism and an attack on the idea of class struggle, a tenet of Marxism.

"If the organization of collective life provides too narrow a framework for human capabilities and human initiatives," he said, then the system is "against the society" and against common good.

He contrasted the ideals of Solidarity with the theory of class struggle, which he said defines certain people and groups as enemies "who are to be fought and destroyed."

The pope began the day aboard a small



Pope John Paul II embraces Lech Walesa, leader of the banned Polish Solidarity trade union, during a meeting in Gdansk, Poland. The pope strongly endorsed independent and self-governing trade unions like Solidarity, which began in Gdansk seven years ago but was later banned by the Polish government.

NC News/UPI-Reuters

boat, which took him past hundreds of ships anchored in the harbor. As he arrived at the tip of the Westerplatte Peninsula, he was greeted by a 21-gun naval salute ordered by Polish leader Gen. Wojciech Jaruzelski.

The event was billed as an expression of Polish patriotism and the desire for world peace, and the state-controlled press used the occasion to highlight the bravery of a small group of soldiers who were attacked by German gunboats in September, 1939 — the onset of the Nazi invasion of Poland. Two Polish battleships flying international flags, floated next to the Mass site in commemoration of the battle.

The pope praised the heroism shown at Westerplatte, then quickly turned to other

matters, urging some 12,000 young people gathered at the site to be courageous in their rejection of atheism and resistance to the abuse of alcohol, drugs and sex.

He asked the cheering crowd to show spiritual heroism, "especially at a time when, in various ways, they try to convince you that what is of 'scientific origin' and what is 'progressive' denies the Gospel."

The pope did not clarify his use of the pronoun "they," but was probably making reference to the government's introduction of a new "religion" course in state schools. The

Polish bishops have sharply criticized the course, saying it portrays Catholicism in a strictly atheistic perspective.

The pope's remarks also reflected church concern about youths' growing estrangement from traditional moral values. This estrangement is caused in part by economic problems and social discouragement and manifests itself through participation in religious sects "alien" to Poland's national spirit, the pope said.

"Danger looms from the climate of relativism" and the "loosening" of moral principles, he said, adding that the only real answer to the hopelessness youths sometimes feel is strong faith. "To a Christian, no situation is ever hopeless," he said, drawing enthusiastic applause.

Like many of the events along the pope's route through Poland, the Gdansk visit affected political as well as religious sentiment. When the pope arrived and walked through the crowd, Solidarity banners were unfurled. Up close, one banner appeared to be a design of red religious silhouettes, but from a distance — from where the pope was sitting — it spelled out "Solidarity."

When the pope left, youths holding their hands high in a "V" for victory sang a traditional religious song that has become an anthem of Solidarity supporters.

Afterward, the pope laid flowers at a monument to workers who died in shipyard strikes in 1970.

The previous night, during a 35-minute visit with the pope, Walesa, his wife and eight children gave the pontiff a leather-bound, French-language copy of his recently published autobiography. Walesa, who earlier had said he would tell the pope of a need to rebuild Polish society along pluralistic lines, described the meeting as "great" and he said had told the pope everything he wanted to say.

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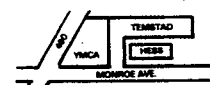
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