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MUNICH, February 19, 1962 (Research and Evaluation Note - Sterner) -- Suspension of the activities of the Warsaw discussion club "Crooked Circle" has once again made the name of Professor Adam Schaff prominent in Western news coverage of Poland.

Professor Schaff became known to the West last year through his essays on "Socialist Humanism", a discussion of personal freedom under conditions of socialism. With his writings on freedom, Schaff, a Party Central Committee member, set off a chain reaction whereby articles from the nation's leading scientists on the subject of free discussion in a Communist society found their way into Polish publications. Similar articles from creative writers and other cultural personalities were not, however, carried in the press.

Though no direct connection between the suspension of the "Crooked Circle" and any action on the part of Schaff has been definitely established, it is interesting to note the key role he played in the last stormy session of the club on February 2. At that meeting, according to the "New York Times" of February 14, Schaff and the Chairman of the Polish Academy of Sciences, Professor Tadeusz Kotarbinski, were asked to "present their arguments for strictly limited but gradually expanding freedom of thought". As the evening wore on, and as Schaff was subjected to more and more hostile comment, he finally lashed out in a tirade against the United States, where, according to him, the cause of freedom was suffering more than in Poland. According to the "New York Herald-Tribune" of February 5, Schaff said:

"There is no question at all of us being behind them in this respect. I have been there and I have seen the worship of the golden calf. I have seen the working of the FBI and McCarthy, which is more brutal than in the worst times here."

It is altogether possible that "free discussion" Schaff's own creature, has gotten out of hand, especially where the "Crooked Circle" was concerned. Reprisals against the discussion club may have been underway for some time now. Western journalists have reported that the club secretary, Mrs. Rudzinska, was sentenced a few weeks ago to one entire year in prison for having "smuggled" a Western sociological work into Poland (from the Philosophical Library, New York University).

Writing in the "Sueddeutsche Zeitung" of February 16,

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Wanda Bronska-Pampuch suggests that the regime's decision to close down the "Crooked Circle" was in part influenced by the memory of the Petofi Club in Budapest, which fostered much revolutionary sentiment and opposition to Rakosi in the time preceding the October 1956 rising.

Unofficial information from Poland in the summer of 1959 also linked Schaff with a reprisal against the "Crooked Circle". A student allegedly asked him whether he thought the Party was strong enough to permit free and open public discussion of a wide variety of subjects. According to this information, Schaff declined to answer, and the student was arrested the next day.

It may also be pure coincidence that the editorial staff of "Nowa Kultura", the cultural weekly, was considerably shaken up shortly after articles appeared (by Professor Edward Lipinski and Czeslaw Bobrowski) which criticized points made in Schaff's series of articles published toward the end of last year. Lipinski, by the way, was very outspoken at the last session of the "Crooked Circle". When Kotarbinski spoke of "limits" on personal freedom, Lipinski replied, "You either have freedom, or you don't." Bobrowski has also been associated with the club in the past.

It should be repeated that there is no solid evidence which would connect Schaff with the action taken against either the "Crooked Circle" or "Nowa Kultura". However, it is indeed possible that Schaff, having had a hand in initiating the debates on the freedom of expression and stirring up a great deal of comment in the Western press, is now being called upon to restore some balance to the situation. He may have begun with the "Crooked Circle" and "Nowa Kultura".

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