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# Intelligence Report

*The Soviet Ukraine -- the Politics of Nationalism*

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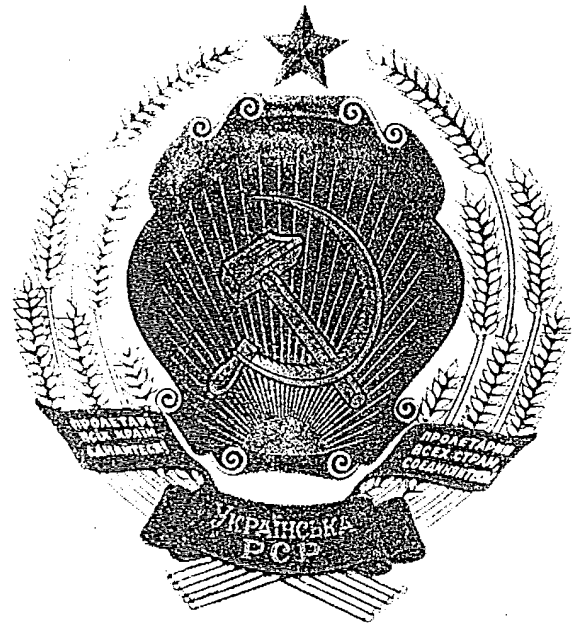
CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
Directorate of Intelligence  
31 December 1968

INTELLIGENCE REPORT

The Soviet Ukraine--The Politics of Nationalism

Summary

The Ukraine, the most populous and most richly endowed of the non-Russian republics, has emerged from the neglect of the Stalin era to occupy an important position in national affairs. Ukrainian party and government leaders have cautiously worked to strengthen the position of Ukrainians within the republic administration and to increase their influence on national policy. They have consistently favored measures to increase the authority of local officials at the expense of Moscow, and to this extent have had a relatively moderating influence on Soviet domestic policy. Their political viewpoint has also been affected by persistent pressure from Ukrainian intellectuals, the most vocal champions of Ukrainian cultural and national traditions. In an effort to build a local base of support somewhat independent of Moscow, a group within the Ukrainian leadership headed by party boss Shelest appears to



Seal of the  
Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic

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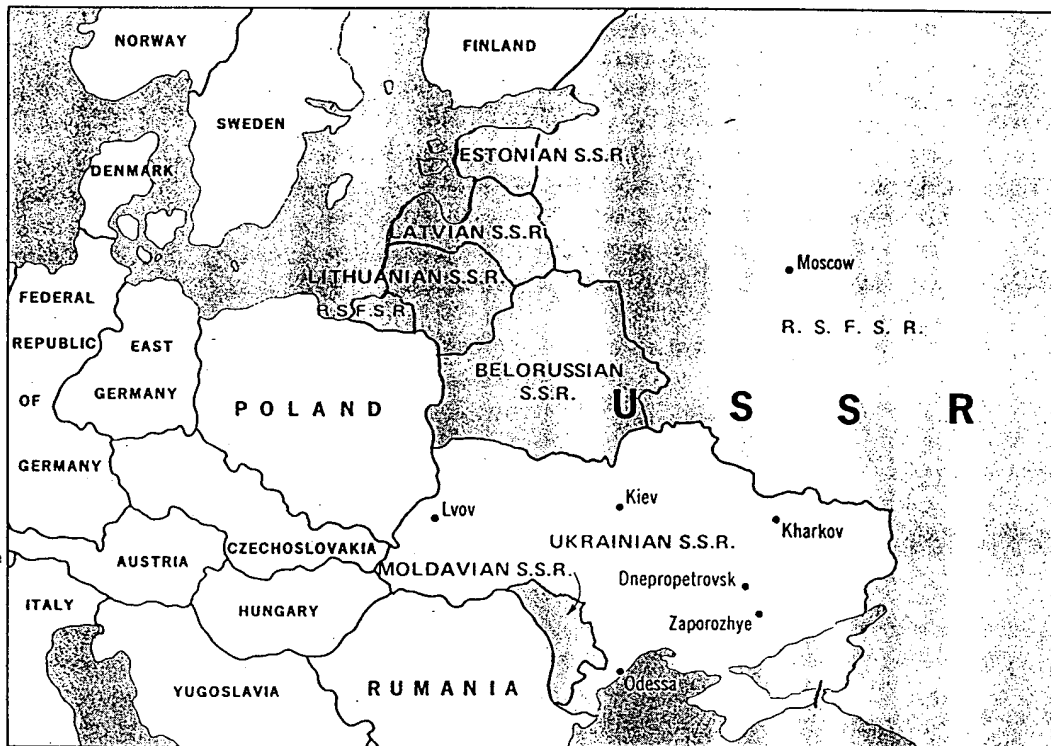
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have made some minor concessions to this nationalist sentiment.

Ukrainian party and government officials had perhaps more reason than other Soviet provincial leaders to fear the uncontrolled liberalization and nationalistic reform movement in Czechoslovakia, because it threatened to raise hob with their own cautious and limited program of reform. They reportedly lobbied forcefully in Moscow for military intervention in Czechoslovakia. Party boss Shelest apparently concluded that unless harsh measures were taken against Dubcek, a major crackdown against dissident nationalist elements in the Ukraine could not be avoided and his own political standing in Moscow would be in jeopardy. Thus far Shelest's strategy seems to have worked. He appears to have strengthened his position in the politburo and may have retained some freedom of action at home in Kiev.

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### Introduction

At the various Communist summit meetings that have punctuated the Czechoslovak-Soviet crisis, the round face of Ukrainian party boss Petr Shelest has been a familiar sight. By all reports Shelest was one of the politburo's strongest proponents of military intervention in Czechoslovakia, and this was undoubtedly a factor in his inclusion at many of the talks. Shelest was clearly concerned about the effect of the Czech reforms on his 40 million fellow Ukrainians in the republic. The increasingly nationalistic program of the Ukrainian minority in Slovakia and the ease with which its message reached intellectual circles in the Ukraine were particularly worrisome. Although there were no reports of any serious open unrest in the Ukraine, Ukrainian officials were clearly nervous about the potential impact of Czechoslovak developments.

The Ukrainians' jittery response to Dubcek's reforms takes on a new dimension, however, in light of reports that Shelest himself has been the leader of a moderate faction within the Ukrainian leadership. He reportedly is by no means liberal in outlook, but is committed to a gradual, highly controlled "Ukrainization" program to improve the status of Ukrainians and their culture. This program has been described as a modified "Skrypnykivshchina," a term derived from Skrypnyk, the name of a party leader in the 1920s who presided over a genuine national revival in the Ukraine after several centuries of Russification. Stalin had him purged as a "bourgeois nationalist" in the 1930s, but under Khrushchev his name was posthumously rehabilitated. It may not be accidental that Shelest today continues to cite Skrypnyk and other Ukrainian leaders purged in the 1930s among the heroes of the Ukrainian Communist movement, even though it is no longer fashionable to dwell on Stalin's victims.

The far more limited concessions to nationalist sentiment reportedly sponsored by Shelest and his followers appear designed to undercut the position of Ukrainian extremists and at the same time strengthen their own local base of support. This

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would be a high-risk venture under the best of circumstances, and the Czechoslovak events may have greatly worsened the odds. The liberal, spontaneous, and pell-mell nature of the changes under Dubcek had nothing in common with the tight, party-controlled reforms reportedly envisaged by Shelest. Furthermore, the Czech reforms threatened to generate dangerous ferment in the Ukraine and possibly to expose Shelest to the charge of nationalist deviation. In a very real sense, Shelest may have put himself in the forefront of Dubcek's critics to save his own skin.

Shelest's more than vigorous support of the invasion of Czechoslovakia has paid off. His bona fides in Moscow appears to have been strengthened and, no matter what the extent of ferment in the Ukraine before 20 August, the military invasion has made its point with the Ukrainian people. It is too soon to determine how Shelest's limited "Ukrainization" program will fare, but the Ukrainian leaders can be expected to continue to fight for local interests and to maneuver to increase their influence in Moscow. The same can be said of the leaders of the other Soviet republics, but the Ukrainians, because of the size and wealth of their republic, are in a special position and have made the most of it in recent years.

#### Stalin to Khrushchev

During the Stalin era, Georgia, Stalin's native republic, received relatively preferential treatment and the Ukraine was perhaps the least favored of all the Soviet republics. Stalin was pathologically suspicious of Ukrainian nationalism, and as a result the republic came in for more than its share of purges. The long battle in the postwar years with the

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Ukrainian underground in the newly annexed western oblasts did nothing to improve Stalin's disposition. At the time of Stalin's death, the republic was economically backward and the party was weak and heavily staffed with Russians. Although the annexation of the western areas with their more nationally conscious population injected some new nationalist spirit into what was fast becoming a Russified Ukraine, the effect was largely offset by constant purges.

The first step after Stalin's death toward restoring to the Ukrainians some measure of control in their own house was the removal of the Russian-born first secretary of the Ukrainian party, Melnikov, for excessive zeal in Russifying the western oblasts. Melnikov's downfall and his replacement by a Ukrainian was one of a series of ousters of Russian officials in the border republics on similar charges. There is some convincing evidence that police chief Beria was behind this campaign--that he hoped at a time when power in Moscow was in flux to win political support among the non-Russian leaders.

#### Khrushchev-Ukrainian Partnership

The Ukraine began to come into its own under Khrushchev, who had made his career there, although he himself was not a Ukrainian. He saw the Ukrainians as useful allies, but had no interest in promoting or preserving Ukrainian cultural traditions. In his climb to the top, Khrushchev looked to former party and government associates in the Ukraine for support, and many of them moved into important posts at the center. The Ukrainian party grew, as did the proportion of ethnic Ukrainians within it. The proportion of Russians in leading posts in the republic party and government was cut from a high of 50 percent in 1940 to about 30 percent in 1956 (Russians comprise about 18 percent of the population of the Republic). Equally important, the number of Ukrainians in leading organizations at the national level--the party central committee and the politburo (then presidium)--climbed spectacularly. The Ukrainians' sense of pride and national identity grew correspondingly.

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Khrushchev's alliance with the Ukrainian wing of the party lasted from 1953 through 1959. During this time, the Ukrainians' influence on domestic affairs was clearly recognizable. They were then and are today consistent in advancing programs advocating some form of decentralization--anything to increase local authority at Moscow's expense. They were strongly opposed to Stalin's centralized economic management, and they supported Khrushchev's move in 1956 to destroy Stalin's reputation as a leader and as a Marxist theorist. In fact, President Podgorny, a former party boss in the Ukraine, was still reaffirming the regime's commitment to de-Stalinization in March 1966 when all other members of the politburo had become silent on the issue.

Khrushchev's administrative reform in 1957--the division of the country into large economic regions to administer industrial enterprise--had a Ukrainian stamp on it. The reorganization allowed Khrushchev to disband elements of the entrenched Moscow ministerial bureaucracy that was antagonistic to his leadership. It also brought the Ukraine and other republics a substantial measure of control over the economic life of their areas. The Ukrainian leaders made the most of the opportunity, and charges of "localism" soon cropped up against them and other equally enterprising regional leaders. Khrushchev himself complained later that the Ukrainians had successfully lobbied for a factory to produce the Zaporozhets passenger cars--in his view a totally unnecessary concession to local interest.

The Ukraine with its strong rural strain has been an innovator in many areas of agricultural economics and management. Khrushchev's preoccupation with the problems of agriculture and his efforts to introduce various incentives to stimulate growth in this backward sector reflected his Ukrainian experience and the advice of his Ukrainian supporters. The Ukrainians, however, could not quite sell Khrushchev on one of their favorite ideas, a proposal to establish a decentralized system of elective unions to manage the country's collective farms. The scheme, which would have meant a considerable loss in central ministerial control over the farms, is now again being proposed to Moscow.

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The Ukrainians also produced the Kharkov economist, Liberman, whose proposal that an enterprise's performance be measured by its profitability was a prominent element in the attempts beginning in 1965 to reform the economic system. While Liberman himself has never publicly carried his idea through to its logical conclusion, other Soviet economists have done so, and it has led them to proposals for the ultimate in economic decentralization--the revisionist concept of "market socialism."

The marriage of political convenience between Khrushchev and the Ukrainian group began to go stale toward the end of 1958. The decisive break came with the ouster in January 1960 of his second-in-command in the party, who was a native Ukrainian and former head of the Ukrainian party. Khrushchev began to turn more to the Leningrad party organization for political support, and there was an accompanying shift in Soviet policies toward a greater emphasis on tighter central controls--an approach favored by the Leningraders. The regional economic councils (sovnarkhozes) came under increasing attack, and steps were gradually taken to nullify many of their features by creating new layers of management. The establishment of the supreme sovnarkhoz in early 1963 all but undid the original scheme. Khrushchev also adopted a stepped-up Russification drive in the minority areas, again perhaps partly as a result of the growing influence of his Russian advisers.

#### Language Problems

One of Khrushchev's most unpopular proposals concerned the status of minority languages in the schools. In the school reform bill of late 1958, Khrushchev proposed that parents in the non-Russian territories be allowed to decide whether their children were to go to schools taught in the native language or in Russian. Children who went to the Russian-language schools would not be required to study the native language, but the study of Russian by all pupils would continue to be mandatory. There was an immediate outcry from spokesmen from the non-Russian areas, charging that this system would put pupils who chose the native-language schools at a further educational disadvantage and that parents would feel

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compelled to send their children to Russian schools whenever possible. The bill was passed, however, with only minor modifications.

The status of minority languages in the schools is a sensitive issue. For Ukrainians, who have precious few other marks of cultural and ethnic apartness from the Russians, the Ukrainian language is a vital factor in the preservation of their national identity. Although 93 percent of the Ukrainians in the republic claimed Ukrainian as their native tongue in the last Soviet census, in 1959, only in rural areas does it appear to be used much any more. The pressure to learn and use Russian is enormous; knowledge of Russian is the key to educational and professional advancement, and in almost all higher educational institutions instruction is in Russian. Money, teachers, the best equipment, books--all flow into the Russian-language schools. Furthermore, the Ukrainian cities have long been heavily Russified and the Russian language has come to be a badge of cultural sophistication. Urbanized Ukrainians tend to look down on the Ukrainian language as a quaint, peasant dialect, the language of the lower classes. Moreover, a Ukrainian student who insists on speaking Ukrainian when he knows Russian runs the real risk of being classified by officials as a budding "bourgeois nationalist."

In the 1955-56 school year, the last time meaningful figures were published in the Ukraine, 72.71 percent of the children were reportedly enrolled in Ukrainian-language primary and secondary schools. Some unpublished official figures acquired by a visiting Western student on schools in the Ukrainian cities for the 1958-59 school year, however, give a clear picture of the trend toward Russification under the present conditions of rapid urbanization. In Kiev only 26.9 percent of the pupils were in Ukrainian-language schools; in Kharkov only 4.1 percent; in Donetsk 1.2 percent; in Dnepropetrovsk 17.4 percent. Even in Khmel'nitsky, in the western Ukraine, only 43 percent were in Ukrainian-language schools. Despite the best efforts of the nationally self-conscious Ukrainian intellectuals to instill a sense of pride among Ukrainians for their language and signs that Ukrainian officials are now taking some steps to end discrimination against the Ukrainian language,

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the trend toward the use of Russian seems irreversible as the population becomes more mixed and communications improve.

#### Post-Khrushchev Era and Podgorny's Eclipse

Several officials closely associated with the Ukraine were again named to leading posts in Moscow in the spring of 1963 and, with the ouster of Khrushchev in October 1964, the stock of the Ukrainians rose again. For a few brief months their influence on domestic policy was again dominant. One of the first acts of the new regime was to lift restrictions that Khrushchev had placed on the farmers' private plot. Significantly, the decision was announced by Ukrainian party boss Shelest. One week later he was elevated to full membership on the party politburo (then presidium). Of the 11 members of that body, five were the remnants of Khrushchev's earlier "Ukrainian group": party secretary Brezhnev, second secretary Podgorny, deputy premier Polyansky, deputy head of the RSFSR party bureau Kirilenko, and Shelest. Brezhnev and Kirilenko, although they consider themselves Russian, were brought up in the Ukraine and made their early careers in the Ukrainian party organization. The common background of this group has created a close political bond and some similarity in outlook.

Brezhnev heeded the Ukrainians' views in drafting the major agricultural reform in early 1965, but he soon moved to reduce his dependence on their support by working more closely with the Russians--Kosygin, Suslov, Shelepin, and Voronov, and with a regional group new to the national scene, the Belorussians. The Russians and Belorussians seem to be strong advocates of centralized control as opposed to the Ukrainians preference for decentralization--at least to the republic level.

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The major blow to the favored position of the Ukrainians was Podgorny's gradual eclipse. It has never been clear who was behind the campaign to undermine his powerful position as virtually second-in-command of the party: Shelepin, Brezhnev, or both. The first round was marked by the firing of Vitaly Titov in April 1965 as head of the key party organs departments. Titov was a former associate of Podgorny from the Kharkov party machine in the Ukraine. This was followed in August 1965 by the publication of a central committee decree reprimanding the Kharkov Oblast party committee for a lax policy on admissions to the party and for putting more stress on quantity than on quality. The decree was an obvious attack on Khrushchev's policy of mass recruitment into the party throughout the Soviet Union, but it had a special application for the Ukraine and Podgorny, as the choice of locale indicated. The Ukrainian leaders, Podgorny included, had sanctioned mass admissions in their efforts to strengthen local party cadres after the lean years under Stalin. Between 1952 and 1961 the Ukrainian party grew by 111.9 percent while the growth nationwide was only 40.6 percent. Curiously, despite the clear message of the Kharkov decree and the subsequent slowdown in the rate of admissions for the country as a whole, the Ukrainian party apparently continues to expand almost as fast as before--perhaps another successful aspect of Shelest's "Ukrainization program."

In September, another graduate of the Kharkov organization, Romyantsev, was removed as chief editor of Pravda. A champion of fairly liberal causes, like Podgorny at that time, Romyantsev's ouster marked the end of what had been a brief, but, by Soviet standards, permissive period. In late September, measures that increased the authority of plant directors were passed, but at the same time, in seeming contradiction, the centralized ministerial structure was re-established. This could hardly have been a welcome step to the Ukrainian leadership, as it meant the end of the last vestiges of the sovnarkhoz system. Sharp criticism

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by Ukrainian Gosplan chief Rozenko and some other regional leaders in May 1968 of the serious lack of regional planning under the re-established branch system is evidence of their continuing discontent.

In December 1965, Podgorny was relieved of his post on the party secretariat and named to replace Mikoyan as USSR president, a largely ceremonial post. The Ukrainians' influence in policy circles was obviously hurt by the loss of a power base of one of their members. The intellectual ferment both in Moscow and in the republics that broke out into the open from October 1964 to September 1965 certainly was the cause for Romyantsev's removal and may have been one factor in Podgorny's gradual eclipse. Furthermore, there were signs of friction between Moscow and Kiev on how to handle the outburst of nationalist unrest in early 1965. Some of the Ukrainian trials that followed may not have been completely at Shelest's initiative, but may have been aimed at discrediting his leadership in the Ukraine.

#### Nationalist Ferment in the Ukraine

In the months immediately following Khrushchev's ouster in October 1964, tension that had been building up in intellectual circles in the Ukraine over Khrushchev's Russification drive broke into the open, primarily in university circles in Kiev and Lvov. Meetings were held, bold speeches delivered, protests signed, and petitions delivered to various officials, high and low. Many of the Ukraine's most prominent intellectuals were involved. They demanded an end to discrimination against the Ukrainian language and called for strict enforcement of the constitutional rights of Soviet minorities.

At first, the authorities did not go beyond breaking up meetings and detaining the leaders, but in August 1965 widespread arrests began. By the end of September, between 100 and 150 persons had reportedly been arrested by the KGB on charges of disseminating anti-Soviet nationalistic literature. (The arrest of Moscow writers Sinyavsky and Daniel also occurred in September 1965.) In the spring of 1967, about 70 persons who were still being held were put

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on trial in a number of cities in the Ukraine. Although the trials were held in secret, word spread, large public demonstrations took place outside the court rooms, and more protests were circulated. At this point, Ukrainian authorities reportedly decided that the trials were proving counterproductive. A decision was taken to use less conspicuous methods, such as firing dissidents from their jobs, and the number of arrests dropped off. There was one notorious case--that of Chornovil, a young reporter who was sent by his Komsomol (youth organization) unit to cover one of the 1966 trials. Outraged at the summary justice meted out, he compiled all the evidence he could gather on the trials. A copy of his manuscript was smuggled out of the USSR and published in Paris. Chornovil was arrested in August 1967 and sentenced to three years in prison, a sentence later commuted to a year and a half.

Although the shift to more subtle tactics against dissenting intellectuals apparently has been nationwide, nowhere was it more evident than in the Ukraine. Several of the more talented young Ukrainian writers and literary critics who were apprehended in the summer of 1965 were soon released, reportedly because they were well known in the West and it was thought any move against them might stir up an international fuss. Another was released allegedly because of poor health. There is an unconfirmed report that in early 1968 the Ukrainian KGB chief refused to carry out an order from headquarters in Moscow to arrest one Ukrainian writer and petition signer on the grounds that his arrest would only cause more dissension.

Furthermore, the sentences given the defendants in the mass trials of early 1966--three to six years--were slightly more lenient than those given on the national level for comparable offenses (Sinyavsky and Daniel were given 7 and 5 years, respectively). As in the case of Chornovil, many of the sentences were later reduced, and a number of those who were imprisoned now seem to be back in Kiev signing protests and again being harassed by the authorities.

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Sources in the Ukraine maintain that the leader of the opposition to Shelest in the Ukraine and the chief proponent of severe measures against Ukrainian nationalists was the Ukrainian party secretary in charge of culture and propaganda, Andrey Skaba. Hints of differences between these two on the nationality question abound. A delegation of Canadian Communists of Ukrainian descent who spent a month in the Ukraine in early 1967 was struck by the differing views expressed on the issue of language discrimination by various officials. They noted that Skaba and the minister of education insisted that the language and nationality problem in the republic had been solved and that, in any case, fulfillment of national aspirations does not depend on language, but on technical progress. On the other hand, Shelest and certain others were willing to acknowledge that there was a problem.

The delegation noted wide diversity in the official use of the Ukrainian language. In party meetings and in many of the ministries of republic subordination, Ukrainian was used. In ministries of all-union subordination, Russian was more likely to be used. The delegation was particularly impressed, however, by the Ukrainian planning chief, Rozenko, who said that he firmly believed that Ukrainian should be spoken in the Ukraine and took issue with the allegations put forward by Russophiles that Ukrainian lacks an adequate vocabulary for scientific-technical usage.

During the Canadians' visit, the subject of the Ukrainian Writers Congress in November 1966 kept cropping up. By all accounts, it was a stormy session. The problem of the Ukrainian language and its declining status in the republic seems to have dominated the proceedings. The published excerpts of Shelest's speech to the congress quote him as speaking about the necessity of "cherishing...our beautiful Ukrainian language"--an indication that he took a conciliatory approach, at least in public. The bitter complaints of the Ukrainian intellectuals on the language issue may have had some effect. There are reports, for instance, that all courses are now being

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taught in Ukrainian in Lvov University, and a new Ukrainian-language publishing house has just been established.

In the fall of 1967, according to sources in the Ukraine, Skaba accused Shelest of nationalist leanings, and the Ukrainian source presumed that one or the other would have to go. In December there began to be rumors that Skaba was in difficulty and he was removed from the secretariat at the end of March. At about that time, a controversy arose over the publication of a novel by the venerable chairman of the Ukrainian Writers Union, Oles Honchar. The novel, entitled Sobor (The Cathedral), laments the destruction of the traditional Ukrainian rural way of life under the onslaught of urbanization with its bureaucratic and, by implication, Russian culture. When the book first appeared in January 1968, it received favorable reviews. But by May, as tension between Moscow and Prague mounted, the official assessment changed, and a campaign against it was launched in the Ukrainian press. Honchar was accused of "negativism" and an "unhealthy" preoccupation with the past and with Ukrainian traditions. Again Shelest seems to have played an ambivalent role. He met with Honchar and other members of the writers union for a "friendly" talk on 31 May, and a subsequent report from a Soviet source stated that he had strongly backed Honchar. The latter still holds his post on the Writers Union, and the attacks against him seem now to have ceased.

An additional reason for Honchar's difficulties was his sympathetic attitude toward some 150 other Ukrainian writers who signed a letter earlier in the year protesting the trials of Chornovil and of Ginsberg and Galenskov in Moscow. There was much consternation in official Ukrainian circles over this letter, and stringent efforts were employed to force the signers to apologize publicly. As a result, a number of signers were dropped from their teaching jobs and from the Ukrainian Writers' Union.

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To what extent these difficulties within the Ukrainian intelligentsia affected the Ukrainian leaders' attitude on Czechoslovakia is not known, but the Ukrainians were clearly worried. They introduced intensive measures to inoculate the Ukrainian public against the Prague infection, and, at the same time, placed pressure on Moscow to cope with Dubcek. Information as to the actual reaction in the Ukraine, particularly in the western areas, to the Czechoslovak reforms and to the Czech-Slovak federation scheme is fragmentary. Certainly the impact was potentially profound. But events moved fast and, as a result of Moscow's mounting attacks on the dangers of the Czechoslovak deviations and its stepped-up campaign to tighten ideological controls at home, the dominant mood in the Ukraine changed from hopeful anticipation to fear and consternation that a period of domestic repression was in the offing.

Ukrainians Lobby for Action Against Dubcek

In addition to loosing a storm of propaganda in the Ukraine against the dangers of bourgeois ideology, the Ukrainian leaders became active in Moscow. At the July plenum, which was called to hear a report by Brezhnev on the Czechoslovak situation, no fewer than three Ukrainians spoke in the debate--a disproportionate number of the total speakers. Shelest spoke, as is customary; the plenum was also addressed by a secretary from Dnepropetrovsk and by the party boss of the Transcarpathian Oblast on Czechoslovakia's eastern border. The latter official is not even a member of the central committee and would not normally have attended the plenum. The speeches were never published, but it appears highly unlikely that these men got up to argue for moderation in dealing with Dubcek.

Reports since the invasion of 20 August all agree that Shelest and Podgorny pushed for intervention. Czechoslovak sources contend that at the key summit meeting in Cierna before the invasion, Shelest was the most violent of all the Soviet leaders in his attacks on Czechoslovak policies. Moreover, in a postinvasion television address, Shelest was particularly harsh toward Czechoslovakia, and his speech was toned down for publication in the Soviet press.

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The Ukrainian faction has strongly supported Brezhnev on the Czechoslovak issue. Shelest, in addition to his concern with the potential problems in the Ukraine, had his own position on the politburo to protect. His strategy appears to have worked thus far. He has been fairly prominent since the invasion. He accompanied Brezhnev to the Polish party congress in mid-November and hosted the Soviet-Czechoslovak talks in Kiev in early December. He has thus far been able to avoid a major crackdown on dissenters in the Ukraine--a development which would probably hurt his standing as much as it would the Ukrainians.

### Conclusion

At the October revolutionary celebration in Kiev on 7 November, embassy observers felt that there were far more large Ukrainian flags and national emblems in proportion to pictures of Lenin than one would expect to see in Moscow. One observer was prompted to comment that the Ukrainians seemed to be missing the "religious" significance of the occasion and that the Ukrainians should give some thought to putting Lenin back into the October anniversary lest some day they be accused of nationalist deviation.

These are only small ripples and there is no sign of a building tide. Nevertheless, as long as the Ukrainians retain their sense of national identity--and the evidence suggests that national consciousness is growing among the Ukrainian people even while they are being increasingly molded into the Soviet political and economic structure--it will find some expression in Ukrainian politics. The Ukrainian leaders for their part can be expected to push uniquely Ukrainian programs and to be on the alert for opportunities to gain a greater measure of authority in their own affairs. In doing this, they will be tempted to make use of nationalistic sentiment, but will need to take care lest this instrument be turned against them.

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