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To : The Secretary
Through: S/S
From : INR - Thomas L. Hughes
Subject: Czech Developments Have Repercussions in the Soviet Ukraine
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The infectious example that liberalizing trends in Czechoslovakia threaten for the conservative, slowly obsolescing system in the Soviet Union has apparently already had significant impact in the neighboring Ukrainian Republic. A July 13 Pravda article by Kiev City Party leader A. P. Botvin expressing concern over Czech influence in the Ukraine is the latest of several developments since the beginning of the year underscoring this trend.

Ukrainian Regime Worried. Botvin's article was devoted largely to problems being encountered with the intelligentsia and youth in his bailiwick. Although he did not specifically refer to Czechoslovakia, it seemed clear he had the latter in mind when he reiterated concern voiced earlier by Ukrainian Party leader Shelest that the "putrid theories...of a 'democratization' and a 'liberalization'" of communism were having a baneful effect on these dissident elements in Soviet society today.

Ukrainian Communist Party leader Shelest has voiced more than usual concern over alien influence on latent Ukrainian nationalist sentiment in two major speeches this year: one last February and a second on July 5, the 50th anniversary of the Ukrainian Communist Party. On this latter occasion, Shelest came close to ^{naming} the Czechs as the current source of subversive

foreign influence when he asserted that it was "painful to see one of the individual fraternal parties fall for the bait of opportunists of various colors" and "sorry theoreticians" who propagandize "abstract humanism, and ideas of so-called democratization and liberalization of socialism." The Ukraine's special interest in Czechoslovak developments has also been dramatized by the participation of Shelest (who normally plays no prominent role in Moscow's relations with communists abroad) along with the top Soviet leaders in two recent critical communist conferences on the Czechoslovak situation: the Dresden conference last March and the just concluded Warsaw meeting of 5 communist country leaderships.

On the Border. Sensitivity over the potential impact of Czech developments is apparently much higher, and language identifying the culprit less elliptical, in the bordering Transcarpathian Oblast, which belonged to Czechoslovakia from the post World War I peace settlement until it was seized by the Russians in 1944. Oblast Party leader Yu. Ilnitsky, in a polemic almost identical with those now frequently found against Romania in the Soviet Moldavian Republic, devoted an article in the June 29 Pravda Ukrainy to attacking alleged Czech misrule in Transcarpathia and the current nostalgia of "somebody in the West" over the "pseudo-democracy of both Masaryk and Benes," who were described scornfully as creations of the US. Ilnitsky's article left the strong impression that his subjects were wistfully recalling their former association with the country just across the border.

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Support in Moscow? The energies the Soviet regime is now exerting on a nationwide scale to combat any spread of the Czech contagion to the USSR illustrate that the Ukraine is by no means the only vulnerable area. Recent press reports of a treatise now circulating in Moscow by prominent Soviet physicist Andrei Sakharov demanding greater freedom in the USSR, and with specific approving reference to the democratization under way in Czechoslovakia, provide ample evidence that Czechoslovak developments are having a wide impact in the Soviet Union. In fact, it seems likely that the Soviet leadership's current manifestations of alarm over trends in Czechoslovakia is motivated as much by what they consider its erosive potential on their own regime at home as by concern for the possible outcome in Czechoslovakia itself.

Ukraine Especially Vulnerable. It nevertheless seems likely that the Ukraine is particularly susceptible to contagion of Czech developments because of domestic problems that offer a fertile soil* and because of the Ukraine's special position vis-a-vis Czechoslovakia manifested in their common border, historical/cultural ties, and overlapping ethnic groups. In particular, the progress of Slovakia toward achieving greater autonomy in a Czechoslovak federation must be followed with keen interest by nationalist, independent-minded elements in the Ukraine. Romania's assertion of independence from Moscow seems to have contributed significantly to the enlivenment of nationalist, anti-Soviet sentiment in the neighboring Soviet Moldavian Republic, and the Czech experiment, if successful, would appear designed to exert at a minimum the same pull in the Soviet Ukraine.