

February 28, 1968

Note from P. Shelest to CPSU Central Committee

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Summary:

A note from P. Shelest to the CC CPSU regarding a suspicious incident relating to Czechoslovak unrest.

Original Language:

Russian

Contents:

Translation - English

Top Secret
C P S U C C

The CC of the Ukrainian CP believes it necessary to inform the CPSU Central Committee of the following.

On 18 February at 7:40 p.m., two Soviet train conductors on the Moscow-to-Prague line, Cdes. Muravin and Ryabov, were approached by an unknown person who described himself as a diplomat from the consulate in Kyiv and who, being in a drunken state, struck up a conversation with them about the Soviet hockey team, which recently took part in the winter Olympic games in Grenoble.[1] He asserted that Soviet hockey players do not know how to play and will lose again next year, all things being equal. He added that in his estimation he would put our team in around tenth place.

Then, shifting the conversation to political matters, he declared: "You removed Stalin and Khrushchev, and tomorrow you'll get rid of Brezhnev. The Czechs would be better off doing business with the West than with the Soviet Union. The Soviet people have us by the neck. It would be better if the Germans had destroyed half of Prague than for you to come with your tanks into the capital of Czechoslovakia. You Communists are worse than the imperialists."

During the check of documents at the border crossing, it was established that this individual was the CSSR Consul-General in Kyiv, Josef Gorak, who was traveling from the Soviet Union to the CSSR on diplomatic passport No. 004842.[2]

CC SECRETARY, CP OF UKRAINE
P. SHELEST

28 February 1968

No. 1/21

[1] TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: The winter Olympic games in Grenoble, France, on 6-18 February 1968, had ended on the very day of this incident. Since the mid-1950s, the Soviet ice hockey team had dominated the Olympic ice hockey competitions, and the Czechoslovak team also had been a perennial medal winner. (Suspensions had long abounded that one of the reasons Soviet and Czechoslovak ice hockey teams had done so well is that their players were secretly being paid, in contravention of Olympic rules at that time. Revelations in the early 1980s bore out those suspicions and led to changes in Olympic procedures.) At the Grenoble games, the Soviet ice hockey team won the gold medal and Czechoslovakia took the silver. During an early round of the tournament, the Czechoslovak team had beaten the Soviet team, giving rise to exuberant celebrations in Czechoslovakia. Although Czechoslovakia's chances for a gold medal were dashed after a loss to Canada (which took the bronze medal), the performance of the Czechoslovak team was good enough to give hope that it might win a gold medal at the next Olympics, due to be held in 1972. This was not the first - or the last - time that ice hockey rivalries affected Soviet-Czechoslovak relations in the late 1960s. On 1 April 1967 the Soviet ambassador in Czechoslovakia, Stepan Chervonenko, sent a top-secret cable to Moscow warning that the final Soviet-Czechoslovak game at the World Ice Hockey Championships in Vienna a few days earlier had brought "a wave of anti-Soviet sentiments" to the surface in Czechoslovakia. Chervonenko noted that "recent encounters between Soviet and Czechoslovak athletes have begun to go beyond questions purely of sports prestige and national pride and have acquired a political character, which might have a detrimental effect on Soviet-Czechoslovak relations." He recommended serious consideration of "the option of temporarily halting matches on Czechoslovak territory

between Soviet and Czechoslovak athletes” and “the option of refusing to send Soviet referees to international competitions in which Czechoslovak athletes are taking part.” See “Otdel TsK KPSS: tov. K. V. Rusakovu,” Cable No. 355 (Top Secret), 1 April 1967, in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 60, D. 300, Ll. 44-54, transmitting a report “Informatsiya o reaktsii v ChSSR na match sbornnykh hokkeinykh komand SSSR i ChSSR na chempionate mira v Vene.” Some two years later, in March 1969, another Soviet-Czechoslovak ice hockey game, which was followed by boisterous celebrations in Czechoslovakia of the national team's victory over the Soviet Union, served as a pretext for the final Soviet crackdown against Dubcek, who was forced to relinquish his post as First Secretary at a KSC Central Committee plenum the following month.

[2] TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: Gorak was a frequent target of Shelest's criticism in 1968, as is evident in several other documents (see, for example, the [23 April conversation](#) and [14 May report](#).)