

Kremlin Demotes Shelest, Hard-Liner Toward West

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MOSCOW, May 21—The Soviet leadership announced today the demotion of a member of the ruling Politburo who is known as an opponent of the Kremlin's policy of accommodation with the Western powers.

Pravda, the Communist party newspaper, carried a short notice this morning that Pyotr Y. Shelest, the First Secretary of the Ukrainian Communist party, had been named a Deputy Premier of the Soviet Union. As is normal here, no public explanation was given for the move.

Pravda did not specify that Mr. Shelest, who is 64 years old, had lost the Ukrainian party post, one of the top positions in the country, which

carries virtually automatic Politburo membership.

But it followed the procedure used in previous demotions by announcing his appointment to the less important position of Deputy Premier. There are nine Deputy Premiers, none of them members of the Politburo. Moreover, diplomatic specialists noted that it would be awkward for Mr. Shelest to continue to hold a job in Kiev, the Ukrainian capital, and another post that required him to be in Moscow, the seat of the central Government.

In a major editorial, reflecting the policy line approved by the full Central Committee Friday, Pravda asserted forcefully that the forthcoming talks

Continued on Page 21, Column 1

SOVIET DEMOTES HARD-LINE LEADER

Continued From Page 1, Col. 7

here with President Nixon "respond to the interests of world socialism and the strengthening of world peace."

Pledging not to sacrifice the interests of the Soviet Union's allies, Moscow also reaffirmed support for the Vietnamese Communist struggle against "imperialism" and called for the withdrawal of "interventionists," but Pravda did not mention the United States by name in this connection.

For the Kremlin to disclose a demotion such as that of Mr. Shelest on the eve of President Nixon's scheduled arrival, when Moscow would normally want to present a solid front, was interpreted by diplomats and other specialists as an indication of sharp disagreements within the leadership.

Usually reliable sources reported a week ago that there were elements in the 15-man Politburo that had favored trying to break the American blockade of North Vietnamese ports with a convoy of ships, or at least canceling Mr. Nixon's visit to protest the mining of Haiphong Harbor. Mr. Shelest was mentioned speculatively as the most likely advocate of a hard-line response to Washington.

Czechoslovak documents reportedly showed Mr. Shelest to have been one of the most ardent advocates of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. He has also gained a reputation as a critic of the Kremlin's policy of improving relations with West Germany.