

# Soviet leaders buttress the Politburo, debate economic failures and reforms

by Rachel Douglas, U.S.S.R. Editor

The first Soviet leadership shuffle since Leonid Brezhnev died and Yuri Andropov became Communist Party General Secretary occurred at a party Central Committee plenum Nov. 22 and at a session of the Supreme Soviet the following two days. While Andropov promised the plenum a drive for economic reform featuring decentralization of many responsibilities and prerogatives, the first step of the new leadership was to reinforce the Politburo and Central Committee Secretariat with a tough regional leader of KGB background and a heavy-industry specialist from the state planning committee, Gosplan.

The former KGB man is Geidar Ali Reza ogly Aliyev, 59, who headed the Soviet Republic of Azerbaijan, on the border with Iran, as its party chief for the past 13 years. At the plenum, Aliyev was elevated from non-voting to full membership in the Politburo, the 11-man executive body of the Central Committee. The next day's session of the Supreme Soviet, the nominal parliament, saw Aliyev designated First Deputy Prime Minister, putting the leader from historically Muslim Azerbaijan in line to succeed 77-year-old Nikolai Tikhonov as Prime Minister of the U.S.S.R. The other First Deputy Prime Minister, Ivan Arkhipov, is a 75-year-old member of Brezhnev's rapidly shrinking machine from the southern Ukraine, who has repeatedly been denied promotion to the Politburo.

Aliyev's security career—he became Azerbaijan KGB head in 1967, the year Andropov was named national KGB chairman—indicates long-standing ties to Andropov. But Aliyev's own speeches of the past decade mark him as an energetic, not just *pro forma*, champion of Brezhnev's foreign and domestic policies.

## Campaign against corruption

The overriding qualification, however, for his promotion to authority over the government ministries through which the Soviet economy is run, is that Aliyev carried out a ruthless

crackdown against corruption in the bureaucracy in Azerbaijan.

Scores of party and industry officials were fired during his tenure. Last year, Aliyev told the national weekly *Literaturnaya Gazeta* that not “mild words”, but “tough decisions” were needed against criminals, bribe-takers, nepotism, “private ownership mentality,” speculation, “languid, inert people . . . rogues, and rascals”.

Andropov hinted that heads would roll as economic administration is tightened up, and turned the hints into reality a few days later. Speaking at the plenum, he referred to the need to “place personnel correctly, so that in the decisive sectors we have politically mature, competent, and resourceful people, with organizing ability and a sense of the new,” and said that “help” would be offered to those unaware of how new economic mechanisms are supposed to work. Andropov singled out the transportation sector and steel for special criticism. On Nov. 29, three years and one day after Leonid Brezhnev at a Central Committee plenum berated him by name for bearing “a not insignificant share of responsibility” for “flagrant violations” of freight turnover plans, Minister of Railways I. G. Pavlovskii was removed from his position.

Andropov's speech and Aliyev's promotion touched off rumors at home and abroad that more shakeups were looming. Word spread in Moscow that retailers were hastily cleaning up their under-the-counter practices, while foreign press ran unconfirmed stories of people who had enjoyed Brezhnev's protection now being on the skids.

## Consolidation and reform

Andropov's power, however, is in but the early stages of consolidation. He either refrained in caution or was barred from taking Brezhnev's second title, Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, which post was left empty for the time being. Andropov-booster in the Hungarian news agen-

cy MTI jumped the gun, publishing a false report that he had secured that position.

The meetings also showed the strength of other parts of the leadership coalition. Andropov appeared before the Supreme Soviet flanked by Politburo members Andrei Gromyko, Foreign Minister, and Dmitrii Ustinov, Defense Minister. The defense-linked heavy industry and scientific grouping made itself visible with heavy-industry man Nikolai Ryzhkov's transfer from Gosplan to the Central Committee Secretariat and the naming of nuclear physicist Nikolai Basov to the Supreme Soviet Presidium.

Even Konstantin Chernenko, Brezhnev's Politburo ally whom Andropov outmaneuvered to become General Secretary, was made Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Commission of the Supreme Soviet, a post vacant since its previous holder, Politburo power-broker Mikhail Suslov, died last winter.

The power of the science and industry people will be decisive for how the economic reform that Andropov is talking about actually materializes. Many strategists, especially in Britain, have eagerly anticipated Andropov's wholesale adoption of the "Hungarian model" of economic decentralization, which not only favored the consumer sector and admitted "profitability" as a main economic performance standard, but began to align domestic prices with international market prices, in preparation for making the Hungarian currency convertible. Under its New Economic Mechanism, begun in 1968, Hungary went deeply into debt and joined the International Monetary Fund.

Indeed, Andropov exhorted the party to study "the experience of fraternal countries." His concrete proposals for increasing the "independence" of company managers and speeding up the introduction of labor- and resource-saving technologies were, however, drawn from policies stated by Brezhnev in the last three years. The difference is Andropov's stress that now they will actually be carried out. Soviet press articles on economic reform, published in the recent period of Andropov's ascendancy, evoke not only Hungary's example, but the 1965 and 1968 reforms designed by the late Prime Minister Aleksei Kosygin. In those reforms (which were far less than fully implemented), the "market economy" features were watered down in a compromise with a defense and heavy industry lobby in which Ustinov, now a major force on the Politburo, played a prominent role.

This year's Nov. 5 Revolution Day speech by Moscow party chief Viktor Grishin, another Politburo member, stressed that "local initiative" must be "skillfully combined" with "centralized planning," so that "all tasks be resolved, first and foremost, from overall state positions."

Anthony Robinson a *Financial Times* of London writer who last spring hoped aloud for Soviet agricultural reform to hand land and political clout back to a class of independent peasants, greeted Andropov's first economics speech with praise, but also disappointment that Andropov had not yet mentioned "radical price reform" or the "underdevelopment" of the Soviet service sector relative to basic industry.

Andropov said that the first phase of reform would be a series of experiments, mostly organizational ones that are supposed to increase output without raising investment. For the short term, the 1983 economic plan presented to the Supreme Soviet by Gosplan Chairman Nikolai Baibakov foresees the lowest annual growth rates ever for the Soviet economy: 3.2 percent for industrial output, which in 10 months of 1982 was running even more slowly, at only 2.7 percent above 1981.

## Border diplomacy

The current head of the KGB, Andropov's successor Vitalii Fedorchuk, was conspicuous to an extraordinary degree at the Supreme Soviet session: he was a featured speaker, as he presented a new "Law on the U.S.S.R. State Border."

Fedorchuk's speech both boosted the prestige of the KGB as an institution—"worthily fulfilling the tasks entrusted"—and dramatized Moscow's top foreign policy goal, conveyed already before Brezhnev died, of constructing zones of security all around the perimeter of the Soviet Union. (An Italian radio commentator put a more outward-looking interpretation of Fedorchuk's comments about the KGB border troops' task of halting weapons and drug traffic across the border, finding in this a veiled offer of international cooperation in that area.)

The most demonstrative step in this periphery-focused diplomacy is the pursuit of improved relations with China, begun in Brezhnev's last months and now picking up steam. A new round of virulent Soviet propaganda attacks against Washington harbingers a major disarmament offensive toward Western Europe in 1983—with the result, harmful for the chances of genuine world peace, of feeding tension between the United States and Europe.

During Brezhnev's funeral, Andropov met the parties to the continuing Afghanistan crisis—Pakistan's General Zia and the possibly expendable Afghan ruler, Babrak Karmal. On Nov. 17, a *Pravda* diplomatic notice revealed that the Soviet Foreign Ministry desk covering Afghanistan, Iran, and Turkey, which had been vacant since May 1982, was filled by V. S. Safronchuk, whose most recent posting was Kabul. On Nov. 28, the Turkish Foreign Minister arrived in Moscow for talks with Gromyko, from which he would proceed to Baku, Azerbaijan, to see Aliyev.

Judging by his background, Aliyev will have much to say about developments on the U.S.S.R.'s southern flank.

Besides having been in charge of a border republic, Aliyev, according to some reports, spent time in Turkey, Pakistan, and Iran, as well as West Germany, in his younger days with the KGB. In Azerbaijan, he evidently followed closely the events in Iran as the Ayatollah Khomeini came to power; in December 1980, Aliyev's successor as KGB chief in Azerbaijan, Maj. Gen. Ziya Yusif-Zade, launched a campaign against people who would, "in connection with the situation in Iran and Afghanistan . . . exploit the Islamic religion as one of the means of influencing the situation in our country."