

Yuri Vladimirovich Andropov, general secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) and president of the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet, died on February 9, 1984 after a long illness.

Andropov, who was 69 years old, had served as the highest leader of the Soviet party and state since November 12, 1982, when he was chosen CPSU general secretary after the death of Leonid I. Brezhnev.

During his tenure, he guided the Soviet Union's determined and resolute response to the escalating arms buildup and more bellicose war policy pursued by U.S. imperialism under Ronald Reagan. He also launched a series of significant and wide-ranging economic reforms aimed at improving the Soviet Union's system of developed socialism.

VETERAN COMMUNIST

Born on June 15, 1914 in the town of Nagutskoye in the northern Caucasus region of Russia, Andropov was the son of a railroad worker and went to work himself at the age of 16. He was active in the Young Communist League during the 1930s, joined the CPSU in 1939 and organized partisan resistance to the Nazis during World War II.

After the war, Andropov occupied a series of increasingly important posts in the Soviet party and state. He was appointed to the staff of the CPSU central committee in 1951, joined the diplomatic service in 1953 and became ambassador to Hungary in 1954. In 1957, he was chosen head of the central committee's department for relations with other countries of the socialist camp. Andropov became a member of the central committee in 1961, was appointed head of the Committee for State Security in 1967 and was made a full voting member of the CPSU political bureau in 1973.

RESOLUTE LEADER

Andropov led the Soviet Union during an extremely dangerous period in international affairs, one in which U.S. imperialism's efforts to launch a worldwide counter-offensive against the growing strength of the socialist camp and the national liberation movements moved into high gear. Ronald Reagan's criminal invasion of Grenada in October of 1983 was an unmistakable—and quite deliberate—signal to the whole world that the U.S. was again prepared to use its military power to suppress revolutionary move-

Yuri Vladimirovich Andropov



ments anywhere on the globe. And when it pushed ahead with the deployment of first-strike cruise and Pershing II missiles in Europe in December of last year, the U.S. made clear that gaining a nuclear edge over the Soviet Union and preparing to fight a nuclear war was an integral part of Washington's current strategy.

Andropov led the Soviet Union in a firm and effective response to imperialism's aggressive moves. He consistently stressed the Soviet Union's principled policy of peaceful coexistence with all other states and made many proposals to

halt and reverse the nuclear and conventional arms race. But under Andropov's leadership, as under Brezhnev's before him, the Soviet Union also made it clear that it would not allow imperialism to gain the military advantage over socialism. Andropov had no illusions that imperialism could be checked in its drive toward war by anything other than the strength and determination of the forces for peace and revolution in the world, and especially the strength of the socialist camp.

Underlying the Soviet Union's capacity to stand up to imperialism, of course, is

the strength of the Soviet socio-economic system—economically, politically and ideologically. And it was in this realm that the particular quality of Andropov's leadership made its most visible mark. His name is identified with a series of dramatic reforms designed to maximize the effectiveness of the Soviet Union's developed socialist economy. Under Andropov's leadership, the Soviet party launched a major campaign to improve labor discipline and productivity, and to crack down on bureaucratic sluggishness and corruption. A particularly noteworthy feature of this campaign was the heightened emphasis it placed on the ideological development, theoretical training and political mobilization of the Soviet masses.

STABLE COLLECTIVE LEADERSHIP

Now that Andropov is dead, the Western press is engaged in its traditional flurry of speculation about the alleged "struggle for succession" going on in Moscow, and the "sharp disputes" that supposedly exist between various Soviet leaders. Nothing could be further from the truth. To be sure, whoever is chosen to succeed Andropov will place his individual stamp on Soviet policy, just as Andropov did during the period of his leadership. But the far more significant fact is that the leadership of the Soviet party and state is a stable and highly collective body, made up of individuals with years of experience in taking major and all-sided responsibility for the development of Soviet socialism and, indeed, the international communist and workers' movement. And we dare assert that today this body is extremely unified, clear above all on the danger to the world posed by U.S. imperialism—as well as the determination and power required to hold this aggressive force at bay.

It is to the everlasting credit of Yuri Vladimirovich Andropov that he led the CPSU and the entire Soviet people during a key period of strengthening that determination and building up that power. The CPSU itself summed up this truth quite succinctly in its official announcement of Andropov's death:

"The name of Yuri Vladimirovich Andropov, an outstanding leader of the Communist Party and the Soviet state, a staunch fighter for the ideals of Communism and for peace, will always remain in the hearts of the Soviet people, of the whole progressive humanity." □

Viewpoint...

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In the face of all this, to point to the level of peace sentiment and antiwar activity that does exist as evidence that "the post-Vietnam antiwar consensus is still intact" is the height of political complacency. This can be seen most graphically in Wheeler's conclusion, which reduces the principal task before the communists to an

organizational one—helping to provide the already existing mass consciousness with a political vehicle through which it can express itself.

Such a conception of the challenge before the communists today is wholly inadequate. Effective opposition to the Reagan war drive is not a jack-in-the-box simply waiting for someone to open the lid and let it erupt. Rebuilding a politically meaningful antiwar consensus cannot be

based principally on the memory of U.S. body counts past or the anticipation of U.S. casualties in a future war.

It will require, in the first place, a sizeable corps of activists in a broader peace movement who are themselves united around a perspective prepared to challenge both the political objectives and the anti-Soviet and national chauvinist underpinnings—not just of the war drive—but of U.S. foreign policy overall. To make such a perspective a material force in the antiwar movement, it will have to rest on and become the expression of a social base in those sectors of the U.S. working class with the least illusions about their stake in the imperialist system, most particularly in Black and other minority communities. And finally, building such a movement will require a head-on polarization with those forces at the head of the trade union movement who are themselves the active ideological and political agents of imperialism in the U.S. working class.

Any underestimation of the scope of these tasks—any view which even hints that an effective "antiwar consensus" can be built without giving them central importance—is a profound political disservice to the cause of peace.

Beyond this political difference, however, there is a profound ideological component to this debate. At the root of Wheeler's political misassessment is the classical error of "official optimism," the pernicious view that only an emphasis on the most positive features of any given historical moment demonstrates confi-

dence in the working class. Those who have substituted official optimism for Lenin's view that ruthless objectivity is the hallmark of communists have done immeasurable damage to the communist movement—instilling in the communists the most debilitating complacency and training the advanced workers on a dose of illusions. (Lenin himself called official optimism "optimism in regard to opportunism.")

Unfortunately, Wheeler and the CPUSA have raised precisely this error to the level of a principle. The CPUSA's November 1983 23rd national convention was permeated by this theme, and party general secretary Gus Hall, in his main political report, unabashedly proclaimed it a central feature of the CPUSA's outlook and strategic thinking:

"The position of the working class in the line of march continues to change. There have been significant advances since our last convention. Our class has moved closer to the front of the line. . . . We must view all these developments from a rose-colored partisan class perspective."

To be sure, all communists are optimistic—in a broad, historical sense—about the role and revolutionary capacity of the working class. But to confuse this fundamental principle of class partisanship with a concrete assessment of the strength of the workers' movement at any given moment can only undermine communists' ability to prepare the working class for the tasks history has placed before it. □

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P.O. Box 2729, Oakland, CA 94602

Phones: Editorial Dept. (415) 535-0145, Business Dept. (415) 535-0114

Editors: Max Elbaum and Irwin Silber
Managing Editor: Ellen Kaiser

Staff: Rose Appleman, Tom Angotti, Frances M. Beal, Phyllis Bennis, Donald Black, Catherine Candee, Neal Casey, Suellen Drabowski, John Jackson, Anne Marks, Sharlita Marm, Shirley Nagai, Tim Patterson, Mickey Quinn, Bruce Rice, Judith Tyler, Victor Uno, Morris Wright, Ethan Young.

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Overall political and organizational responsibility for Frontline rests with the Editorial Board of the Marxist-Leninist journal *Line of March*. The members of this board are Dale Borgeson, Linda Burnham, Max Elbaum, Bruce Oceña, Melinda Paras, Irwin Silber and Bob Wing.

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