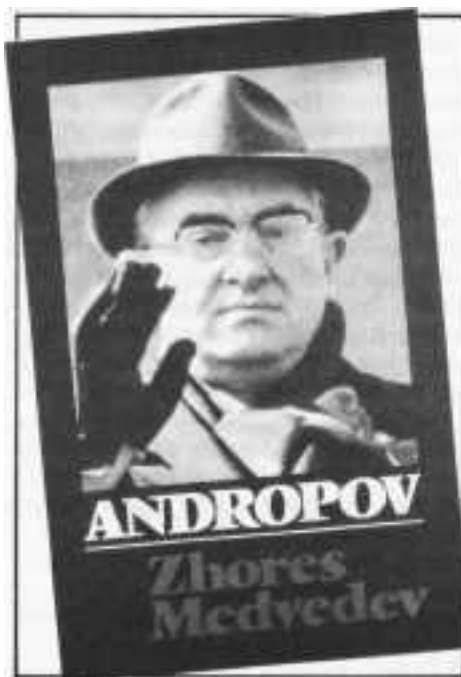


political or economic reform'. Though 'probably better constructed, better implemented, more skilfully presented', Soviet policy as yet still remains 'the same conservative policy without any sign of liberal or democratic trends'.

Like that of his brother Roy, author of the now-classic study of Stalinism, *Let History Judge*, Zhores Medvedev's analysis of Soviet developments is based on socialist principles. In this political biography, Zhores Medvedev sets out the little that is known of the career of Yuri Andropov as he progressed from Young Communist League organiser in a Volga shipyard to the post of general secretary.



Andropov was Soviet Ambassador in Budapest during the 1956 uprising. He returned to Moscow to become Central Committee secretary and head of the department dealing with relations with socialist countries. In 1967 he became a candidate member of the Politbureau and chairman of the State Security Commission — the KGB. He held the post for the next 15 years and was, in Medvedev's words, 'the most successful, the most sophisticated and the most legalistic head in the history of that organisation'. He became the only man 'who not only survived the job but also made himself more influential politically in the process'. Andropov succeeded in making security work 'an acceptable background' for a Soviet party leader.

Action against those who voiced opposition meant bad publicity abroad, but had the reverse effect in the party and government structure at home. There

Andropov came to be seen as a defender of party and state interests who nevertheless tried to preserve the norms of 'socialist legality'. He also became identified with an anti-corruption campaign which acquired new political urgency in the light of the developing crisis in Poland.

According to Medvedev, the Soviet Communist Party's Central Committee, influenced by the collapse of the Gierk government, in September 1980 passed a resolution on anti-corruption measures which was subsequently distributed as a confidential party circular. Medvedev writes: 'The kind of official corruption against which the 1980 campaign was directed was the excessively luxurious standard of living enjoyed by some high party functionaries and the flagrantly illegal activity in which other highly placed people were involved'.

The campaign had widespread public support and 'cannot be explained entirely as emanating from the top. It was also the result of great pressure from below . . . the same kind of offeree which brought Solidarity to life in Poland'. But it also encountered strong resistance: it affected 'too many influential, highly placed officials. Almost all high officials enjoy privileges and benefits which they would be most reluctant to lose'. Some of these cases involved soviet officials of ministerial and deputy ministerial level; one involved Brezhnev's daughter.

Since assuming office, Andropov's economic priorities have been increased productivity through harder work, better discipline and better management. Like his predecessor, he has called for the accelerated introduction of new technology and the reduction of loss and wastage.

He has indicated an interest in the lessons to be drawn from the Hungarian experience of economic decentralisation, with its emphasis on economic levers and an increased role for a private sector. But Medvedev declares himself 'rather sceptical' about the likelihood of Andropov introducing elements of the Hungarian model in the immediate future, before improvements have been achieved in the basic industries.

In Medvedev's view the measures that have so far been taken are unlikely to improve the general performance of the Soviet economy, and are acceptable only if they are temporary, 'designed to gain time so that the real economic reforms can be developed and tested and so that bureaucrats can be replaced by real experts'.

Abroad, Medvedev notes the acceleration of the process of the 'normalisation' of

ANDROPOV

Zhores Medvedev

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Do the changes which have followed the emergence of Yuri Andropov as General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union herald the beginning of a new era in Soviet history?

The answer, suggests Zhores Medvedev, is still unclear: 'so far there is no clear direction, and various alternatives remain open'. Medvedev sees 'a change of style, an attempt at better management, the signs of a more flexible approach to problems of foreign policy' — but 'no developments significant enough to be viewed as either

relations with China, but stresses that it cannot be very rapid. 'Mutual hostility has been cultivated for so long that a real improvement will take some time. However, this is certainly an important new trend which could have a profound effect on other aspects of Soviet foreign policy'. In the Third World Medvedev sees a search for 'more reliable partners with stable social systems' and less generosity in giving economic and military assistance to pro-Soviet but unstable and dictatorial regimes.

Andropov, like his predecessor, holds the US responsible for the deterioration in Soviet-US relations, and is in Medvedev's view unlikely to be the first to make conciliatory gestures. US policy is seen as 'inconsistent and unpredictable'. The essence of Andropov's approach is 'to compete with the United States for the hearts and minds of the West European nations, both their peoples and their governments'.

The central issue is that of nuclear and conventional arms, with 1983 seen as 'a crucial year for possible success or irreparable failure'. Medvedev sees the installation of Cruise and Pershing missiles in Western Europe as marking a qualitatively new stage in the arms race, giving the US a qualitative superiority. He spotlights the 'important psychological fact' that the new

missiles would threaten the Soviet Union from German territory. Germany, he writes, 'is a special case, for reasons which need no explanation here. If a West German government (whether conservative or social democrat) thinks that Soviet-German detente, trade and friendly political relations could survive the appearance on German soil of a new generation of American missiles, then it is indulging in

wishful thinking'.

Though the initial signs of Andropov's rule have been contradictory, 'in the realm of foreign policy he has contributed to the cause of world peace', writes Medvedev.

Zhores Medvedev's book is a valuable and timely interim assessment of Andropov's career, his rise to power and his first few months in office.

Dennis Ogden

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