

DIMENSIONS OF THE SHADOW REFORMS OF YURI ANDROPOV'S BUREAUCRATIC MANAGEMENT: LESSONS FROM THE MYTHS OF THE TOTALITARIAN LEADERSHIP OF THE USSR

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Abstract

The article discusses the issue of bureaucratic leadership and economic reforms in the USSR during the administration of Yu. V. Andropov, the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. The article analyzes Andropov's consistent policy in the Soviet bureaucratic system and his uncompromising position in the fight against corruption. In this regard, the article emphasizes the years of his leadership, in which the reforms of the Soviet economy occupied a significant place, trying to inspire confidence in the Soviet society and citizens. However, the totalitarian regime of the USSR and the bureaucratic system simply blocked the package of measures proposed by the General Secretary.

An analysis of the works examining the personality and party and state activities of Yu. V. Andropov allows us to conditionally distinguish two periods of the formation and development of the historiography of the problem. The first, personifying the Soviet era, ended with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. The second covers the 1990s, as well as the beginning of this century. Within the framework of the first period, the activities of Yu. V. Andropov were covered in various works devoted to the problems of modern Soviet history. Against this background, the position of Western researchers turned out to be preferable. In the West, the steady growth of interest in Yu. V. Andropov on the part of Sovietologists was mainly due to his activities as Chairman of the KGB. At the same time, it cannot be denied that, as a rule, the noted works were distinguished by their tendentiousness and bore the imprint of the Cold War.

Keywords: Sovietology, Soviet society, Andropov, USSR, state power, KGB, communist party, corruption, reforms, post-Soviet Russia.

Introduction

The processes of democratization, the formation of the foundations of civil society in post-Soviet Russia, the associated radical revision of basic ideological attitudes, among

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other things, have led to a significant increase in public and scientific interest in the issues of recreating an objective picture of those political processes that took place in the recent Soviet past. At the same time, the traditionally important topic of the role of the individual in history has attracted increasingly significant attention from the scientific community. In particular, throughout the post-Soviet period, domestic and foreign researchers have constantly turned to the problems of the activities of individuals who personified the highest party and state power in the USSR, largely determining the main vectors of its development. In this context, the figure of Andropov, a prominent figure who for many years occupied key positions in the party and state apparatus of the USSR, is of undoubted interest. Having passed through the main stages of the Soviet hierarchy, in particular, holding the post of Chairman of the KGB for a long time, he ended his political career as General Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee. To a certain extent, the long path that Andropov traveled reflected not only all the contradictions, but also possible alternatives in the development of late Soviet society.

In light of the reforms of public administration being carried out at this stage of historical development and, especially, in the context of the large-scale anti-corruption campaign being carried out today, the study of the party and state activities of Andropov, whose name is associated with decisive attempts to combat violations of Soviet legality and bribery, seems relevant and meets the tasks of modernizing Soviet society.

Andropov's leadership as a new chance for the USSR

On the morning of November 10, 1982, Leonid I. Brezhnev died. Two days later, Andropov became Secretary General. Many did not expect (or did they drive away such a thought?) that the seriously ill Andropov would agree to shoulder the burden of responsibility for the country. But he did it.

Andropov ruled the country for only fifteen months. However, a close look at his life and career suggests that he was ready to begin a program of economic reform in the Soviet Union long before he assumed office as leader of the country (Burns 1983). Perhaps he would be able to implement a model of economic development similar to the Chinese one. Maybe the Soviet empire could have transformed itself into a kind of cohesive economic federation rather than descending into economic chaos. Readers should remain impartial when addressing this issue. Researchers of this period of the history of the USSR are inclined to believe that events could not have happened otherwise than the way they happened. We observe these events of the past in our time as inevitable, but we forget that at any moment history could take a different turn.

In 1967, Andropov was appointed head of the KGB (Committee for State Security). He was an intelligent and well-educated man. Andropov's intellect is evidenced by his enormous interest in literature, in particular poetry, and art. He himself made his own significant contribution to spiritual life, was fond of poetry, loved and knew how to write poetry. He believed in the system that raised him, and was determined to preserve the unity of the Soviet empire. He had little tolerance for dissidents and local nationalists, whom he saw as little more than tools used by the West to undermine the

Soviet state. In 1968 in Czechoslovakia, he was a strong supporter of repression as a way to combat the Prague Spring. He also believed that the Soviet dissident movement of the 1970s and 1980s was nothing more than an invention of the Western powers; talk of "human rights," he argued, was a coordinated plan to attack the foundations of the Soviet system. By the early 1980s, Andropov's KGB had learned to use various countermeasures (e.g., psychiatric hospitals, deportations, arrests) to suppress political dissidents. Being a supporter of reforms in the economic sphere, it should, however, be said with certainty that Andropov did not intend to change most of the foundations of the Stalin-Brezhnev totalitarian regime. By and large, he was one of the most prominent "architects" of this regime, and he lacked awareness of the main features of the regime as shortcomings of Soviet society (Olcott 1985; Brown 1984).

Notably, however, he opposed the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, believing that the war would be a quagmire and that no important national interests were at stake. The international position of the USSR after the deployment of troops deteriorated sharply. The United States reacted extremely aggressively to this action of the USSR. They quickly managed to consolidate the West and many Third World countries, especially Muslim ones, on an anti-Soviet basis. The United States announced sanctions on the Soviet Union. In particular, the issuance of licenses for the transfer of high technologies to the USSR was prohibited, and previous licenses were canceled (in the amount of \$150 million). On January 6, 1980, Carter announced the unilateral curtailment of scientific, cultural, trade and economic ties with the USSR (deGraffenried 2023).

In our opinion, it was precisely what is often considered a serious flaw in Andropov's biography - his fifteen-year stay at the head of the security agency - that contributed to the formation and consolidation in his character and consciousness of the desire for a comprehensive account and comparison of all factors and trends, even if they seem random and insignificant. It is obvious that in the KGB, the caution inherent in Yuri Andropov has intensified and turned into a new quality, necessary for the highest political leader, and deep calculation has become habitual when making and implementing decisions (International Institute for Strategic Studies 1983).

Being a prominent figure in the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, with an understanding of all the ins and outs of the state, Andropov understood that his main goal was to improve the economic situation of the country. He advocated for a change in attitudes towards work, for the fight against corruption and arbitrariness in trade. What measures of economic change in the country did the new Secretary General use? Labor discipline measures were tightened, to the point that raids were carried out in public places to identify truants and parasites. Andropov led an active fight against speculation and non-labor sources of income. Measures to combat corruption and trade abuses have been strengthened (Kramer 1977).

Andropov, while still chairman of the KGB, collected a huge amount of material about embezzlers, bribe-takers and extortionists. Consolidating his power, he dealt the first blow to the USSR Ministry of Internal Affairs, which rivaled the KGB, headed by N.A. Shchelokov, who covered up robbers and speculators. Evgeny Chazov, who in those years held the position of Deputy Minister of Health of the USSR, wrote in his memoirs that here it was no longer he confrontation between Yu. V. Andropov and N.

A. Shchelokov, whom Andropov called “rogue”, but rather there was a confrontation between two organizations that have the ability to control citizens and the situation in the country. And it must be said that the only one whom N.A. Shchelokov feared and hated, and also his first deputy, Brezhnev’s son-in-law Yu. M. Churbanov, was Andropov. Such was the authority and power of the KGB at that time (National Security Archive 1981). However, such “targeted strikes” against the most odious representatives of Brezhnev’s circle could not lead to radical changes in the corrupt system of nomenklatura benefits, but were purely tactical in nature (National Security Archive 1983). One of the most high-profile cases related to the fight against corruption, in our opinion, is the famous “Cotton Case.” In the book by historian Fyodor I. Razzakov, “Corruption in the Politburo: The Case of the “Red Uzbek”,” the author writes that “in fact, the “Uzbek Case” was the first link in the chain of secret operations of the “Kremlin globalists” who aimed at the elimination of socialism and the restoration of capitalism in USSR” (Razzakov 2009). In our opinion, this complex and voluminous topic deserves a special approach and a more detailed study in a separate article. Andropov also continued to insist on increasing the economic influence of domestic products and the complete elimination of foreign goods.

An efficient economy under an unstable totalitarian political regime

The Secretary General’s peculiar policy in the economic sector was effective. In particular, already in 1983, an increase in national economic production volumes of 6% was achieved. However, the measures introduced by Andropov were temporary, and they were unlikely to provide long-term economic growth. If Andropov or his successor had listened only to the advice of Western economists, for example, they would undoubtedly have embarked on a program of significant economic decentralization. And he would probably be kicked out before the ink was dry on his program. But despite the likely opposition from party and government bureaucracies to any reduction in their power and status, a leader seeking decentralization can make a compelling case for his policies. After all, it was Vladimir Lenin who introduced the New Economic Policy in 1921. But by granting concessions to private enterprise, Lenin was careful to maintain party control over vital economic and political sectors (Sullivan 2022; Herman 1983).

Andropov’s reforms directly affected the structure of the state apparatus. In particular, after coming to power at the end of 1982, Andropov noticeably reduced the number of staff of the Secretary of State. In a speech at the November (1982) Plenum of the CPSU Central Committee, the first plenum, which he held as General Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee, Andropov drew special attention to the fact that in order to implement the 1983 plan, it is necessary to make it the conscious undertaking of everyone employee. “Now it is especially important and necessary for every worker to understand that the implementation of the plan also depends on his labor contribution, so that everyone understands well the simple truth that the better we work, the better we will live,” said the General Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee (Marxists Internet Archive 1982; Marxists Internet Archive 1983b).

Subsequently, 19 ministers lost their jobs, and new members of the Communist Party were re-elected to the most responsible positions. Andropov, like his

predecessors, is trying to form around himself a certain group of associates who are ready to support all his reforms. The Secretary General also attracts prominent scientists and doctors of economic sciences to government activities. During the same period, there was a relaxation in terms of state pressure on the intelligentsia. In the future, the activities of the leaders of the Communist Party will be aimed precisely at reducing the number of persons involved in public administration and at improving relations with the intelligentsia.

Reform actions regarding foreign policy Andropov adhered to a more open model of foreign policy than his predecessors. However, relations with the United States were still extremely tense. During Andropov's short period in power, several key events occurred that influenced the development of the USSR's foreign policy strategy. On March 8, 1983 Ronald Reagan calls the USSR an "evil empire." It should be noted that some sources claim that the author of the expression was the President's speechwriter, Anthony R. Dolan (Free Frank Warner 2003). On March 23, 1983, a Soviet fighter shot down a passenger plane with 283 passengers on board, which is why moments of pressure on the Soviet government began to slip through the international press. Improving relations with China. US deployment of nuclear missiles in Great Britain, Germany and Belgium. Despite the fact that Andropov tried to achieve detente in international relations, his reforms only led to deterioration in the position of the USSR on the world stage. As a result, we can say that Andropov's reforms were logical and integral; they were aimed at improving the economic and social situation in the country. However, the General Secretary himself did not have time to implement all his ideas, since in the autumn of 1983 Andropov's health sharply deteriorated (Bennett 2022). The country needed a young and courageous ruler capable of guiding the USSR along a completely new path of development. However, the country had to wait several more years for global changes (Sullivan 2022).

Soviet citizens did not believe in a changing present and bright future

Andropov's reforms were carried out in the early 1980s, between the "heyday of the era of stagnation" and Gorbachev's Perestroika. Soviet citizens simply did not believe in a "bright future", they did not believe in the present either - they lost interest in study, work, and creativity. What Andropov would call "sloppiness" and "parasitism" triumphed. It was these that the new Secretary General intended to eradicate first, without going into the reasons that gave rise to these phenomena. And, in fact, many citizens of the USSR associated Yuri Andropov's rise to power with restoring order in the country. People expected tough measures against rampant crime and the mafia, the eradication of corruption and strengthening of loose labor discipline (Olcott 1985). The stern Andropov becomes popular, hopes are associated with him for the renewal of society, a "return to Leninist norms" in the party, he is perceived by people as a fighter against privileges, corruption and permissiveness (Marxists Internet Archive 1983b, 1983c).

These reforms were not minor. If implemented, they could well lead to additional steps to revive the economy. Of course, not everyone shares this opinion. Some believe that the evidence for Andropov as a genuine reformer is too speculative and that he

died too early for us to predict what might have been (Lomagin, Mironova, Titov and Oshchepkov 2023). Some also doubt that Andropov was the progressive figure to implement genuine reform. Regarding the above, firstly, there is no contradiction in history with an authoritarian leader who is also a reformer. In fact, from the point of view of Russian history, only an authoritarian leader is able to carry out reforms (Rothacher 2021). A man cannot be progressive unless he is first and foremost a man of order and discipline. Changing any entrenched system requires a steady hand and determined navigation. Otherwise it cannot be.

Andropov saw the campaign to improve labor discipline as a large-scale operation. On August 7, 1983, a resolution was adopted by the Central Committee of the CPSU and the Council of Ministers of the USSR “On strengthening socialist labor discipline,” which provided for penalties for defected products, absenteeism and lateness to work, and drunkenness in the workplace. However, at first it was not possible to adequately implement this operation. In some cities, police raids were carried out in cinemas, large stores and other public places, aimed at detaining truants; however, often the struggle to strengthen labor discipline boiled down to bosses “scolding” employees who allegedly “wandered around the shops” during working hours (O’Riordan 2023).

In this context, it is also necessary to mention the following transformations that took place during the reign of Andropov:

- a high-profile fight against corruption, which led to the arrest of a number of high-ranking leaders;
- law on labor collectives: from now on, members of labor collectives had the right to discuss plans, contracts, and wage structures. However, the law remained unfinished; as a result, meetings of labor collectives were either not organized at all or were of a formal nature.
- a law that expanded the rights of enterprise managers to spend funds. He, in particular, established the dependence of wages on the volume of output.

At a meeting with party veterans held on August 15, 1983 - the last public event with his participation - Andropov said that ideological work, and therefore the education of a civilized person capable of taking responsibility, is devalued by all kinds of disorder, mismanagement, violations of laws, money-grubbing, bribery. Without social security for ideological work, which includes the eradication of the above-mentioned vices, the success of ideological work, according to Andropov, is impossible (Marxists Internet Archive 1983a, 1983c).

At the already mentioned meeting with veterans, Andropov described this principle as follows: in an economy of such scale, such complexity as ours, one must be extremely careful. Here, as nowhere else, the proverb is true: measure seven times, cut once. That is why, when preparing major decisions, we try to scrutinize every issue, we undertake large-scale experiments in order to calmly, without haste, study how the proposed innovations work, how they affect planning and labor discipline, labor productivity, and the efficiency of social production in as a whole (Krausz 2023; Galushko 2021).

The fact that before radical reforms were carried out, corruption and its accompanying crimes were not burned out in the USSR to such an extent that no one would think about anything like that, seriously interferes with the implementation of

reforms, undermines and compromises them. For many civil servants, heads of enterprises and institutions, reforms have become only a way of personal enrichment, not at the expense of their own labor, but through the appropriation of what was created by others, including previous generations. This, in turn, has a corrupting effect on all social strata, and also gives ignorant people the feeling that any reforms, not just the current ones, are just a method of theft. We think it is no coincidence that the deep market transformations currently underway in China are accompanied by measures, sometimes quite harsh, aimed at eradicating crime, including corruption.

Conclusion and discussion

Andropov died in 1984 from kidney failure at the age of sixty-nine. His plans for reform went with him to the grave. His successors were unable to cope with the task of reforming and modernizing the Soviet system. What would modern Europe be like if the Soviet Union gradually reformed, got rid of its economic encumbrances and became a new kind of confederation? We do not know. While more research into Andropov's life and politics is needed, it is clear that he represents one of those great "might have beens" in modern European history. At the very least, he deserves his own full biography, written by scholars who have access to the latest sources and materials.

According to a statement by the All-Russian Center for the Study of Public Opinion, in 1991, 27% of respondents to the question "Which state, public and cultural figure of Russia and the USSR will people remember in decades to come?" named Yuri Andropov. Next in the poll rating were Lenin and Gorbachev, who were more than twice as far behind Andropov.

Andropov planned a large-scale modernization of production, transport, construction, and the scientific and technical sphere. However, his Acceleration strategy was not fully implemented. In general, it can be stated that the reforms were mostly of an economic and disciplinary nature, but with regard to everything else, Andropov remained a great conservative. To be fair, it should be noted that the establishment of discipline and order in the country and in the production sector made it possible to stop some negative processes in the economy and even achieve a slight increase in labor productivity.

The concept put forward by Andropov deserves special attention: Andropov's concept of the level of education of the people is especially noteworthy. In the post-Soviet era, the state's interest in elements of social progress, education, health, culture and science, sharply declined with the establishment of what Andropov calls an exemplary social order. On the other hand, as noted by prominent figures of science and culture, it is the state of these areas that largely determines not only the current state of the country, but also its future development. While shortages of funds are often cited as the reason for the deplorable state of these areas, this is less convincing when one considers the huge sums being transferred abroad, and especially the almost complete lack of proper taxation of windfall profits from capital and real estate.

The tragedy of Andropov as a thinking statesman was that he came to power while already a sick man. His idea was fresh, it worked in the right direction, but it died out

too early. His tragedy turned into a tragedy for the country, and the “promoters” did not develop the work that he had only outlined, but which he could not give momentum to.

The brief history of Andropov as the country’s leader is truly a tragedy for him as a person, which became one of the reasons for subsequent trials for the people of Russia and the peoples of the republics of the ex-USSR. Andropov is a talented reformer who came to power too late. However, this does not mean that his theoretical and political legacy has lost its relevance. It is not an archive, but an arsenal of socio-economic reforms.

The positive result of Andropov’s rule is, of course, an attempt to eradicate corruption using tough methods. However, this is where the advantages of the Andropov era of rule end: many experts are sure that the rule of this leader did not bring anything good or bad to the country, it only kept the shaky country from complete collapse. In addition, it was not possible to completely eradicate corruption - its positions remained strong in various fields of activity.

Andropov passed away on February 9, 1984. The Politburo nominated Konstantin U. Chernenko, but his health did not give him any real chance of long rule. He suffered from cardiopulmonary failure. He was a transitional figure, necessary for those who aspired to become the country’s highest official in order to gain time to strengthen their positions. The period of party and state rule by K. Chernenko was the shortest in the entire history of the Soviet Union - only 13 months.

Supplementary material

The supplementary material for this article can be found at <https://doi.org/10.46991/JOPS/2024.3.7.101>

Acknowledgments

The author would like to thank the anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments and critiques.

Conflict of interests

The author declares no ethical issues or conflicts of interest in this research.

Ethical standards

The author affirms this research did not involve human subjects.

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