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PROGRAM All Things Considered STATION WETA Radio NPR Network

DATE November 13, 1982 5:00 P.M. CITY Washington, D.C.

SUBJECT Yuri Andropov

LEE THORNTON: Yesterday, just as it was announced that Lech Walesa would go free, the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist party selected a new General Secretary. He is Yuri Andropov, former head of the KGB, the Soviet secret police.

British journalist Margaret Jay has been working for six months on a documentary about Andropov. Even so, she says, it's difficult to predict what kind of leader he will be.

MARGARET JAY: I think we can only hazard a guess. I think it is fairly clear that there's been a fairly systematic effort by people to, as it were, launder his reputation, to make sure that people in America, in Western Europe don't think of this person as just another kind of terror chief, another ex-head of the KGB, perhaps with blood on his hands, who's suddenly become a political ruler.

THORNTON: Andropov has never set foot in the West. I find that interesting, for all of the picture being built of a sophisticate and clever politician.

JAY: Well, I think you must remember that compared with many of the Soviet leaders, he has had pretty much a lot of experience in Eastern Europe. He was Ambassador to Hungary during that rather notorious period when the Budapest rioting took place. He has had responsibilities for the Eastern European bloc countries, the Poles and so on, for a ten-year period when he was head of that section of the Communist Party Central Committee. So that in that sense, he has had more experience of being abroad, althought it's, as it were, within the closed system of the Soviet society.

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THORNTON: What more might you say about his role in Czechoslovakia and in Poland?

JAY: In Czechoslovakia, we know that at that stage he was head of the KGB, that he was involved in some of the rather crucial discussions which went on before the uprising was suppressed. We know much more about his role in the Hungarian revolution. Many of the Hungarian emigres who've survived that period, and some of them are now in the West, speak very bitterly of his role in what they thought was a trickery by the Soviet authorities in leading them to suppose that the Soviet Union would not impose armed force on the Hungarians. And indeed one of them said to me yesterday, a general who now lives in this country, that Yuri Andropov would have the blood of the Hungarian people who died in the Budapest rising on his hands forever.

And, of course, this is very much in contrast with the sophisticated liberal idea which has come out in the last few months.

THORNTON: What's been the thrust of the KGB over the past 15 years? Has it been more spycraft outside the Soviet Union or repression inside? And what does any of that tell us about Andropov?

JAY: Well, there are two areas, I think, which you have to look at. One is the development of the whole idea of dealing with the internal dissident problem, the people like Solzhenitsyn, Bukovsky, and so on, in a slightly different way; the attempt, as it were, to muzzle them by getting them out of the Soviet Union, not by sending them to gulags, not by sending them to mental hospitals. That is often associated with Andropov. It's thought to be typical, as it were, of his slightly more subtle approach to a security problem than some of the previous KGB heads, who would have just shot these people.

On the international scene, his reign in the KGB was coincidental with the whole development of the KGB role in international terrorism. But again, it's not entirely clear when one talks to experts on the Soviet structure of government whether that's something which he would have had personal responsibility for or whether it would have been something which was more likely to have been a general decision of the Politburo, of the ruling party people, which he then very effectively carried out.

THORNTON: I would like to have your evaluation of his speech yesterday. Some are calling it almost militant. Was that your feeling?

JAY: I think Andropov is probably very aware that, in a

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sense, although he has inherited the General Secretaryship of the party, that doesn't give him automatically the strength and authority which Brezhnev had just by having held this office for 18 years. He's still very much, himself, on trial. He still needs to be militant, to put the tough line, to rally the forces within the Soviet Union, and to make it quite clear that he intends to be a strong leader. Although, as I said, at the moment he can't yet claim to have that full authority that Brezhnev had.

THORNTON: Margaret Jay of the BBC is at work on a study of the new Soviet leader, Yuri Andropov.

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