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~~Top Secret~~**USSR: Andropov's Absence**

The illness that prevented General Secretary Andropov from attending the revolution anniversary ceremonies on Saturday and the parade today is probably more serious than a cold, but his Politburo colleagues give every indication that he is still in charge. []

On Saturday, Central Committee spokesman Zamyatin expressed doubt that the General Secretary would show up for today's parade and repeated an earlier official statement that Andropov has a cold. Since Andropov's last public appearance in Moscow, on 18 August, a number of important statements and answers to journalists' questions have been issued in his name, the latest on 27 October. []

Comment: Given Andropov's age and chronic cardiovascular problems, a cold-related illness could be serious enough—if it involved bronchitis, early influenza, or pneumonia, for example—to have kept him from these important ceremonies, even the indoor one on Saturday. No General Secretary is known to have missed them since they became traditional features of the Soviet scene. []

Andropov traditionally vacations for a lengthy period in September and October and probably has been on vacation during most of his nearly three-month absence. His present illness probably began before 21 October, when some Soviet officials were expecting his return to Moscow and when he missed a meeting with an antiwar group. Andropov's absence from the current ceremonies may represent prudent medical caution rather than evidence of a totally incapacitating illness. []

Secretary Chernenko was the ranking official at the anniversary celebrations. Behind the scenes, however, Andropov is reported to have taken steps to prevent Chernenko's number-two role from becoming more than a formality. The two other senior party secretaries, Gorbachev and Romanov, as well as Defense Minister Ustinov, have been named by different sources as sharing the responsibility for acting in Andropov's absence. []

Romanov delivered the anniversary speech, reflecting his new status as senior party secretary and his transfer from Leningrad to Moscow. Gorbachev, Andropov, Ustinov, and Chernenko all have given major addresses in the past several years, and it was logical to give a turn to Romanov. []

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