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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Who's Next?

Is the KGB's Yuri Andropov really Mother Teresa in disguise?

That's how Jerry F. Hough would have it ["Who is Yuri Andropov?" op-ed, May 27].

Even if we accept Mr. Andropov's résumé as written by Prof. Hough:

- He surely wasn't demoted for "reformist inclinations" after serving as ambassador to Hungary. He helped, after all, to crush Hungary's popular revolt in 1956.
- He was an aide to Otto Kuusinen in the conquered Finnish province of Karelia after World War II—during a Russian military occupation so brutal Finns say even the animals stampeded west to escape.
- Mr. Andropov favored de-Stalinization in the late 1950s—along with everyone else who treasured his scalp.
- And then there's the labored conclusion that Mr. Andropov must be in charge "only" of the KGB's foreign policy apparatus, not its secret police arms. That's a distinction without a difference: half of Soviet diplomats are KGB operatives, for example; and the "how and when" of putting pressure on dissidents is no small foreign policy matter.

Despite such novel projects as rain spiked with yellow and shipping 1 to 2 million Vietnamese to forced labor in Siberia, Prof. Hough is right: Mr. Andropov's climb to heir apparenacy is a "favorable development." In the U.S.S.R., heirs apparent tend to remain just that.

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As the Brezhnev era of aimless drift draws to a close, Russia is ripe for new direction. But what direction? Surely there must be recognition—perhaps unspoken—of the bankruptcy of Marxist theory, which even today appears to have little more effect on Kremlin policy than the Sermon on the Mount had on the policies of Cardinal Richelieu. And there's urgent need for pragmatic solutions to mounting problems of agricultural and administrative chaos and burdensome foreign involvements.

In such circumstances, indications that Yuri Andropov is a leading contender for power assume special significance. His background and liberal associations have been noted by Western commentators. But his most interesting attribute is his KGB connection.

As one who has tried to follow Soviet intelligence activities for the past 40 years, I am impressed by the improved skill and sophistication of the KGB under Mr. Andropov's direction—they have come a long way from the clumsy and self-conscious little men in ill-fitting blue suits with whom we used to play hide-and-seek.

Mr. Andropov has been described as a suave and slippery fellow, to which his present position in the ruthlessly competitive Soviet establishment is testimony. But with a man such as Mr. Andropov directing Soviet affairs we may be able to breathe a bit more freely and negotiate our differences a bit more fruitfully.

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The writer was a Soviet specialist in the CIA and a former assistant secretary of defense.

Like much Kremlinology, Charles Fenyvesi's article on Yuri Andropov ["Westernized, Savvy, and Maybe Russia's New Leader," Outlook, May 30] is thin on facts but thick on speculation.

Since Mikhail Suslov's death in January, there are 13 full members on the Politburo, not 14. Their average age is 69, not 67. Five of them, rather than four, concurrently hold the title of Central Committee secretaries. They are: Leonid Brezhnev, Yuri Andropov, Konstantin Chernenko, Mikhail Gorbachev and Andrei Kirilenko.

Mr. Fenyvesi states as a fact that Mr. Andropov has succeeded Mr. Suslov as "the party's chief theoretician." Actually, this is merely an assumption on his part. The official Soviet announcement made no mention of Mr. Andropov's new duties. And, since the same announcement disclosed an unusually early promotion of another secretary, Vladimir Dolgikh, to the alternate membership on the Politburo, it is at least possible that Mr. Suslov's job did not pass to Mr. Andropov. This would be more consistent with Mr. Fenyvesi's main—and quite plausible—speculation that Mr. Andropov is a likely candidate to succeed Mr. Brezhnev.

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