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7ARTICLE APPEARED  
ON PAGE 30THE WALL STREET JOURNAL  
27 April 1982**REVIEW & OUTLOOK****The Brezhnev Succession**

Leonid Brezhnev ended his 27-day disappearance last week, climbing to the speaker's stand in the Palace of Congresses for a ceremony celebrating Lenin's 112th birthday. The old man, 75, was not dead after all, as some had speculated, but he was paler and thinner than when last seen. Clearly, as a page one Journal article said yesterday, there are good reasons to start asking ourselves who the Soviet leader's successor is likely to be.

We do not have any great confidence in our ability to guess the likely heir, and we know of no one else who would take such a leap. But something about the Lenin celebration aroused our interest. While the frail president and party chairman sat silently on the podium, the principal address was delivered by Yuri Andropov, head of the state security forces, better known as the KGB.

We've tried out the idea of Andropov as supreme leader on one or two of our Soviet acquaintances and it seems that they don't find the idea in any way impossible. They discount the fact that the last KGB chief who wanted to be boss, Lavrenti Beria, paid with his life for that ambition. His colleagues on the Politburo, mainly Khrushchev, Malenkov and Molotov, ganged up and executed him for treason shortly after the death of his protector, Stalin, in 1953. It was not until 1973, when Mr. Andropov became a full member of the Politburo, that another KGB head was admitted to that select little ruling body. Today, nine years later, he clearly is one of the group's strongest men.

When one scans the credentials of the 12 men who sit with Brezhnev on the Politburo it is easy enough to see why someone of Andropov's skills has to be taken seriously. There are other strong contenders, like Andrei P. Kirilenko and Konstantin Chernenko. But Kirilenko is even older than Brezhnev and also ailing, and Chernenko is often described as not having a sufficient political base to seize power. Age also is a mark against Nikolai Tikhonov, 76, who functions as prime minister. Others on the list also have disabilities, age or non-Russian nationality, for example. One of the two relatively

broken, creating a scandal in the party.

This kind of analysis tells us very little about who might ultimately emerge as leader. All we know is that Mr. Andropov, who first made a name for himself suppressing the Hungarian rebellion in 1956, is a strong contender, experienced and, at 67, relatively young. He has received a great deal of deference from his colleagues over the last year, winning special—indeed rather obsequious—praise from the chairman himself at last year's party congress.

This alone, aside from the question of succession, tells us a great deal about the nature of Soviet leadership today. Mr. Andropov is so powerful in the Politburo without doubt because he runs the two activities that are most important for preserving the ruling Communist Party's power. He protects the party internally through his management of a large army of secret police and border guards. He projects the party's power outside Russia through a world-wide network of agents, who on any given day might be guiding Castro's conquest of Central America, manipulating turmoil in Iran or organizing a "peace" march in Denmark.

Further, it tells us, or should tell us, something important about the broader Soviet system. Mr. Andropov may not yet have the country entirely in his grip—for one thing, the military has always been suspicious of the KGB. But the power that flows to him through the apparatus he controls reminds us that the Soviet Union is not evolving away from its police state past; to the contrary, a police chief now is obviously respectable enough to lead a major party convocation.

Mr. Andropov carried out this duty in traditional style, excoriating the U.S. and proclaiming the Soviet desire for peace. This tells us nothing about the politics he would follow if he became chairman, but his prominence at that meeting is testimony to his skill in manipulating people and events. It should warn us against developing fond hopes about the future of U.S.-Soviet relations merely from the spectacle of a feeble Leonid Brezhnev climbing to the Palace of Con-