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THE DEATH OF PRESIDENT BREZHNEV: THE SOVIET LEADERSHIP

1. IT WILL BE IMPORTANT TO THE SOVIET LEADERSHIP THAT BY THE TIME THE CELEBRATIONS OF THE 60TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE FORMATION OF THE SOVIET UNION BEGIN ON 20 DECEMBER, THEY WILL BE ABLE TO PRESENT A UNITED AND AUTHORITATIVE FRONT. AFTER BREZHNEV'S DEATH, THEY WILL WISH AS SOON AS POSSIBLE TO CONVEY AN IMPRESSION OF NORMALITY AND CONTINUITY. THIS IS ONE OF THE MAIN MESSAGES FROM THE PARTY'S ADDRESS TO THE SOVIET PEOPLE, PUBLISHED TODAY, AND REPORTED IN M.I.F.T. THEY WILL THEREFORE NEED TO TAKE DECISIONS SOON ON WHO SHOULD REPLACE BREZHNEV AS PRESIDENT (CHAIRMAN OF THE PRESIDUM OF THE SUREME SOVIET) AND AS GENERAL SECRETARY OF THE PARTY. THESE DECISIONS WILL BE TAKEN AT MEETINGS OF THE SUPREME SOVIET AND CENTRAL COMMITTEE RESPECTIVELY.
2. THE PRESIDENT IS FORMALLY ELECTED BY THE FORTY OR SO MEMBERS OF THE PRESIDUM OF THE SUPREME SOVIET. THIS BODY IS LITTLE MORE THAN A CIPHER AND IT CAN BE ASSUMED THAT THE DECISION WILL HAVE BEEN TAKEN BEFOREHAND IN THE POLITBURO AND , TO THE EXTEND NECESSARY, IN THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE. THERE IS NO RELEVANT PRECEDENT OR ESTABLISHED MECHANISM FOR CHOOSING A NEW GENERAL SECRETARY WHO IS FORMALLY ELECTED BY THE 319 MEMBERS OF THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE. BUT IT IS LIKELY THAT THE SURVIVING MEMBERS OF THE POLITBURO WILL HAVE ALREADY AGREED AMONG THEMSELVES WHO SHALL HAVE THE JOB AND THAT THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE WILL NOT CHALLENGE THEIR DECISION.
3. BEFORE BREZHNEV'S DEATH A ROUTINE MEETING OF THE SUPREME SOVIET HAD BEEN ANNOUNCED FOR 16 NOVEMBER. THOUGH NOT PUBLICLY ANNOUNCED A CENTRAL COMMITTEE MEETING WOULD HAVE TAKNE PLACE IMMEDIATELY BEFORE ON 15 NOVEMBER , REPORTEDLY TO DISCUSS AMONG OTHER THINGS PERSONNEL CHANGES AT SENIOR PARTY LEVELS. THE POSTPONEMENT OF THE SUPREME SOVIER UNTIL 23 NOVEMBER HAS BEEN PUBLICLY ANNOUNCED IN THE PRESS TODAY. AS USUAL THERE HAS BEEN NO PUBLIC STATEMENT OF A NEW TIMING FOR THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE MEETING BUT IT IS REASONABLE TO ASSUME THAT THIS WILL TAKE PLACE BETWEEN THE END OF THE PERIOD OF MOURNING ON 15 NOVEMBER AND THE MEETING OF THE SUPREME SOVIET ON 23 NOVEMBER.

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4. HOW THE OFFICES VACATED BY BREZHNEV WILL BE FILLED IS A MATTER OF SPECULATION. BUT AGAINST A BACKGROUND OF WHAT MUST BE IN MY VIEW, AT LEAST FOR A WHILE, A COLLECTIVE LEADERSHIP, I WOULD NOT EXPECT THE POSTS OF PRESIDENT AND GENERAL SECRETARY TO CONTINUE TO BE UNITED IN ONE MAN. THE FAVOURITE FOR GENERAL SECRETARY IS CHERNENKO. ANDROPOV IS HIS MAIN RIVAL. BUT AS I OBSERVED AT LAST SUNDAY'S KREMLIN RECEPTION HE LOOKS IN BAD PHYSICAL SHAPE. SOME PEOPLE HAVE ATTACHED IMPORTANCE TO HIS NOMINATION AS CHAIRMAN OF THE FUNERAL COMMISSION, BUT THIS COULD BE NO MORE THAN A QUESTION OF ALPHABETICAL ORDER IN THE POLITBURO. (KRUSHCHEV CHAIRED THE EQUIVALENT COMMISSION FOR STALIN'S FUNERAL IN 1953 BUT DID NOT OF COURSE SUCCEED TO THE LEADERSHIP OF THE PARTY UNTIL 1954). THERE ARE PERSISTENT RUMOURS THAT GROMYKO WILL BE APPOINTED THE LESS POLITICALLY IMPORTANT JOB OF PRESIDENT, WITH DOBRYNIN, AT PRESENT SOVIET AMBASSADOR TO WASHINGTON AND A RECIPIENT LAST WEEK OF THE ORDER OF LENIN, REPLACING HIM AT THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS. IN THE RECONSTITUTED POLITBURO WE CAN EXPECT FOR THE INTERIM THAT IN ADDITION TO THOSE ALREADY MENTIONED, USTINOV, MINISTER OF DEFENCE, TIKHONOV, PRIME MINISTER AND GORBACHEV, WILL CARRY THE MOST WEIGHT.

5. A FURTHER COMPLICATION IS A REPLACEMENT FOR KIRILENKO (PARAGRAPH 2 OF MY TEL NO 670) WHO WE HAVE HEARD FROM SOVIET SOURCES HAS ALSO DIED RECENTLY SEMICOLON AND, POSSIBLY, FOR PELSHE, WHO IS 83 AND SAID TO BE SERIOUSLY ILL. BUT I WOULD EXPECT THAT AT A TIME WHEN THE LEADERSHIP WILL PUT A PREMIUM ON STABILITY, THERE WILL BE RESISTANCE TO INTRODUCING TOO MUCH NEW BLOOD TOO QUICKLY INTO THE POLITBURO AND IT IS CONCEIVABLE THAT THERE WILL BE NO REPLACEMENTS FOR THE TIME BEING. DOLGIKH, PRESENTLY A CANDIDATE MEMBER OF THE POLITBURO WITH RESPONSIBILITY FOR HEAVY INDUSTRY, LOOKS THE FAVOURITE FOR ANY PROMOTION TO FULL MEMBERSHIP.

6. SO FAR THE MOSCOW PUBLIC HAS REACTED IMPASSIVELY AND WITH APPARENT INDIFFERENCE TO BREZHNEV'S DEATH. THIS NO DOUBT OWES A GOOD DEAL TO A PUBLIC WHICH MUST HAVE EXPECTED IT OVER MONTHS, IF NOT YEARS. SOME CONTACTS HAVE EXPRESSED GRIEF AT THE PASSING OF A LEADER WHO WAS REGARDED WITH GENUINE IF NOT EXUBERANT AFFECTION. THE QUEUES TO VIEW HIS BODY NOW LYING IN STATE AT THE DOM SOYUZOV ARE CAREFULLY MARSHALLED AND ORDERLY. AFTER THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF HIS DEATH, LIFE CARRIED ON NORMALLY AND THERE HAS AS YET BEEN NO DISCERNIBLY UNUSUAL POLICE OR MILITARY PRESENCE IN THE STREETS. ALL THIS IS IN MARKED CONTRAST TO THE IMMEDIATE EMOTIONAL REACTION TO STALIN'S DEATH WHICH I MYSELF WITNESSED 29 YEARS AGO.

7. F C O PASS SAVING ADDRESSEES.

(REPEATED AS REQUESTED)

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