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MY TELNO 1467: CENTRAL COMMITTEE PLENUM

1. ANDROPOV DID NOT ATTEND THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE PLENUM WHICH
BEGAN ON 26 DECEMBER. IN A SPEECH ON THE ECONOMY (SUMMARY
IN MIFT) PUBLISHED IN 'PRAVDA' TODAY 27 DECEMBER AND WHICH,
ACCORDING TO TASS WAS READ OUT AT THE MEETING HE EXPRESSED
HIS PROFOUND REGRET THAT "FOR TEMPORARY REASONS" HE WAS UNABLE
TO BE PRESENT.

2. IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE USUAL PROCEDURES THE PLENUM ALSO HEARD
REPORTS BY THE CHAIRMAN OF GOSPLAN BAIBAKOV AND THE MINISTER
OF FINANCE GARBUZOV AND DEBATED THE SPEECHES. THE FOLLOWING
LEADERSHIP CHANGES HAVE BEEN ANNOUNCED:

(A) V I VOROTNIKOV (57) (WHO REPLACED SOLOMONTSEV AS CHAIRMAN
OF THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS OF THE RSFSR IN JUNE), PROMOTED
FROM CANDIDATE TO FULL MEMBER OF THE POLITBURO:

(B) M S SOLOMONTSEV (70) (WHO BECAME CHAIRMAN OF THE PARTY
CONTROL COMMITTEE IN JUNE), PROMOTED FROM CANDIDATE TO FULL
MEMBER OF THE POLITBURO:

(C) V M CHEBRIKOV (60) (HEAD OF THE KGB SINCE DECEMBER 1982)
ELECTED CANDIDATE MEMBER OF THE POLITBURO:

(D) E K LIGACHEV (63) (HEAD OF THE ORGANISATIONAL-PARTY WORK
DEPARTMENT) ELECTED SECRETARY OF THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE.

IT IS UNUSUAL FOR ORGANISATIONAL CHANGES TO BE ANNOUNCED BEFORE
THE CONCLUSION OF A PLENUM.

3. THE PLENUM WILL CONTINUE TODAY WHEN IT WILL PRESUMABLY APPROVE
THE PLAN AND BUDGET AND ADOPT A RESOLUTION ENDORSING ANDROPOV'S
SPEECH. SINCE ANDROPOV'S TEXT CONTAINED NOTHING ON INTERNATIONAL
AFFAIRS IT IS POSSIBLE THAT IT WILL ALSO DEAL WITH FOREIGN POLICY
ISSUES.

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Prime Minister

The BBC carried a story at
lunch time to the effect
that Andropov was "in
hospital for treatment."

Davis
28/12

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4. THE CHANGES IN THE POLITBURO AND SECRETARIAT APPEAR TO REFLECT ANDROPOV'S CONTINUING STRONG INFLUENCE. THE REMARKABLE SPEED OF VOROTNIKOV'S RISE FROM AMBASSADOR IN HAVANA TO FULL POLITBURO MEMBER IN 18 MONTHS SUGGESTS THAT HE IS AN ANDROPOV PROTEGE. CHEBRIKOV SERVED AS ANDROPOV'S DEPUTY IN THE KGB FOR 14 YEARS, AND WAS MADE HEAD OF THE KGB SOON AFTER ANDROPOV BECAME PARTY LEADER. HIS PROMOTION ALSO REFLECTS THE CONTINUING INFLUENCE AND PRESTIGE OF THE KGB AS AN INSTITUTION. LIGACHEV WAS MOVED TO HIS KEY CENTRAL COMMITTEE DEPARTMENT IN MARCH, AND WILL NOW PROBABLY HAVE FULL RESPONSIBILITY FOR CADRES IN THE SECRETARIAT WITH KAPITONOV RELINQUISHING HIS SUPERVISORY ROLE. SOLOMENTSEV HAS NO SPECIAL TIES WITH ANDROPOV BUT THE LATTER EVIDENTLY APPROVED HIS APPOINTMENT IN JUNE TO HIS POST IN WHICH HE HAS SUPERVISORY RESPONSIBILITIES FOR PARTY DISCIPLINE AND MORALS.

5. THESE LEADERSHIP CHANGES AND THE FACT THAT ANDROPOV HAS BEEN PRESENTED AS THE CENTRAL FIGURE AT THE FIRST DAY OF THE PLENUM DESPITE HIS ABSENCE, SUGGEST THAT HE IS STILL IN CONTROL. BUT FAILURE OF THE PARTY LEADER TO APPEAR AT A CENTRAL COMMITTEE PLENUM IS PROBABLY UNPRECEDENTED SINCE STALIN. (BREZHNEV DID NOT ATTEND THE SUPREME SOVIET SESSION IN 1977 AND THERE WAS SOME DOUBT ABOUT WHETHER HE WAS REALLY PRESENT AS REPORTED AT THE PLENUM WHICH PRECEDED IT.) ANDROPOV HAS BEEN ABSENT FROM THE PUBLIC SCENE FOR OVER FOUR MONTHS OR A THIRD OF HIS TENURE AS GENERAL SECRETARY. THERE MUST BY NOW BE GRAVE CONCERN AMONG THE SIZEABLE PROPORTION OF ITS MEMBERS ABOUT THE SITUATION IN THE LEADERSHIP AND DOUBTS ABOUT HOW LONG THE PRESENT UNCERTAINTY SHOULD CONTINUE.

IT IS POSSIBLE THAT A REPORT ON ANDROPOV'S HEALTH HAS BEEN OR WILL BE GIVEN TO THE PLENUM IN AN ATTEMPT TO ALLAY SUCH MISGIVINGS.

6. THE EVENTUAL SUCCESSION HAS BECOME A LITTLE MORE OPEN AS A RESULT OF THE TWO PROMOTIONS TO THE POLITBURO WHICH INCREASE THE MEMBERSHIP TO 13. SOLOMENTSEV AND VOROTNIKOV ARE BOTH RUSSIANS WITH FAIRLY WIDE-RANGING CAREERS IN THE PARTY. SOLOMENTSEV IS A POSSIBLE COMPROMISE CANDIDATE IN THE SHORT TO MEDIUM TERM. VOROTNIKOV MAY IN DUE COURSE PROVE TO BE A RIVAL TO ROMANOV AND GORBACHEV AMONG THE YOUNGER CANDIDATES FOR THE PARTY LEADERSHIP.

FCO PLEASE PASS TO ULAN BATOR

(REPEATED AS REQUESTED)

SUTHERLAND

FCO/WH
SOVD

Repetition to ULAN BATOR
referred for departmental decision,
repeated as requested to other posts.

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