

Chaotic power struggle in store, say University Soviet-watchers

By Michele Matassa
 Of the Emerald

As a result of Premier Leonid Brezhnev's death, Soviet party and government officials will begin a chaotic power struggle characterized by "bickering" and "jostling," say two University professors.

Ron Wixman, associate geography professor, who studied in the Soviet Union for four months, and Joseph Fizman, professor of political science, agree that the Soviet system stifles pre-planning for leadership succession.

Fizman says current leaders usually pick a man as their successor but these choices are usually "weaklings." Leaders are reluctant to pick strong successors for fear they will be overthrown before their death, Fizman says.

Wixman says the choice of a successor is also delayed because "if you don't support the right people you might be purged. It (the system) runs just like the Mafia," Wixman says.

The resulting power struggle is not as influenced by public support as it is by assessed power within the Politburo (the Communist Party) and the government, Wixman says.

The professors agree that this factor puts most of the pressure on Soviet leaders.

Reports of a possible long-term joint rule in the country have surfaced, but neither professor agrees with these projections.

Fizman says after a short period of collective rule in the Soviet Union, one leader will emerge. This man "will have to have the backing of the military," he says.

Both professors rule out the possibility of Politburo official Yuri Andropov succeeding Brezhnev because of his association with the KGB, the Soviet Union's secret police. The KGB is a competitor of the military faction.

Other than this exclusion of Andropov, both Wixman and Fizman hesitate to predict a successor. However, they each have ideas on what type of leadership the Soviet Union — and the rest of the world — is in store for.

Wixman, also associate director of the University Russian and East European studies program, expects a strictly conservative, anti-Western rule to succeed Brezhnev. This new rule will cause trouble in Poland, according to Wixman, who says "If I were the Poles, I would really worry now."

He says Brezhnev's liberalism contributed to his failure in the Polish and Afghanistan crises and the ongoing food shortage.

In spite of this expected change in attitude among the country's leadership, Wixman admits "No

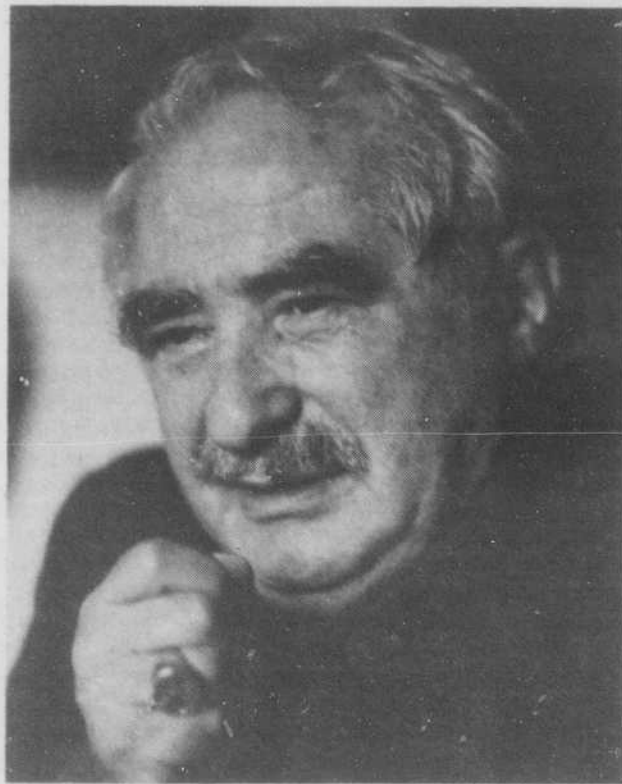


Photo by Dave Kao

Joe Fizman says the Soviets next leader will have the backing of the military.

Soviet leader, when he comes into power, begins with brilliant new ideas.

"No matter who comes into power, he must work within the party structure," he says.

Wixman says the new leader will be confronted with an "ailing, ailing economy and acute food shortages."

Fizman agrees that "Brezhnev's rule was marked by failures," but adds the 18-year leader was "conservative enough." He says relations between the United States and the Soviet Union — including the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks — will probably continue along the same path after the new leadership solidifies its position.

He expects the new administration to begin with "rhetoric that is more militant and bellicose in order to establish their legitimacy," much like Reagan had to portray himself as strongly anti-Communist in the early days of his presidency.

Both instructors agree Soviet autocracy has moderated. Wixman says "People in the West ought to stop thinking of the Soviet Union as a totally totalitarian system."

KGB chief to lead Brezhnev's funeral

From Associated Press

MOSCOW — The new Soviet leaders, faced with a transfer of Kremlin power following the death of Pres. Leonid Brezhnev, on Thursday named former KGB chief Yuri Andropov to head a committee planning a state funeral for the man who ruled the Soviet Union for 18 years.

They announced that Brezhnev would be buried Monday beside the Kremlin wall on Red Square and that a four-day period of national mourning would begin today.

The Communist Party and government, indicating Brezhnev's foreign policy would be continued, reiterated his policy to "ensure detente and disarmament" with the West, but warned it would deal a "crushing retaliatory strike" if threatened by attack.

Brezhnev, 75, died Wednesday of an apparent heart attack. The announcement was withheld for 26½ hours but when it was made, black-trimmed flags quickly were raised around Moscow. Public reaction to Brezhnev's death was surprisingly subdued.

Pres. Ronald Reagan, in a condolence letter, called Brezhnev "one of the world's most important figures for nearly two decades," and said he looked forward to working with the new Kremlin leadership "toward an improved relationship with the Soviet Union."

Most Western and East European observers in Moscow agree that a collective leadership of at least four men is likely to dominate the Soviet regime in the initial period after the death of Brezhnev.

But the leading contenders for the two top jobs Brezhnev held are believed to be Yuri Andropov, 68, the former head of the KGB, the secret police, and Konstantin Chernenko, 71, a longtime Brezhnev aide.

They are thought to be the most likely candidates to succeed Brezhnev as general secretary of the Communist Party, the most powerful position in the Soviet hierarchy.

Chernenko, veteran Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko, 73, and Premier Nikolai Tikhonov, 76, are considered probable choices for the other top job Brezhnev held, president of the Soviet Union.

Andropov was named chairman of the high-powered funeral commission, a position from which he may be able to orchestrate the immediate succession period.

Chernenko also is on the commission, along with Tikhonov, Gromyko and two other senior members of the Politburo, Defense Minister Dmitri Ustinov, 74, and Moscow party chief Viktor Grishin, 68.

Calm prevailed in the Soviet capital Thursday as authorities projected an image of unity and order. The official announcement of Brezhnev's death referred three times to the party's "collective" will and guidance and once to the "unshakable unity of the party."

Some Kremlin watchers expect the party Central Committee to convene as early as Friday or Saturday to name a new party chief.

Reagan assures Soviets of U.S. peace goal

WASHINGTON (AP) — Pres. Ronald Reagan assured the Soviet Union Thursday night that he hopes for a better superpower relationship "in a dangerous time" following the death of Pres. Leonid Brezhnev.

In a nationally broadcast news conference, Reagan declared "our goal is and will remain a search for peace."

The president said he intends to keep pushing for a treaty to reduce strategic nuclear weapons. But "We should not delude ourselves," he said. "Peace is a product of strength, not weakness."

Reagan indicated that Vice Pres. George Bush probably would head the U.S. delegation to Brezhnev's funeral. As for why he wouldn't do so himself, Reagan said "it was a plain case of looking at the schedule. It was felt it would be better for George to head that delegation."

Mixing an attitude of conciliation with one of resolve, the president told the emerging Soviet leadership that the

United States faces the future with confidence. And, he said, "we as a free people must always be prepared for change so when it comes we are ready to meet new opportunities and challenges."

Asked whether he plans any new initiative to lessen tensions, the president sighed slightly and said "we have been trying to do that in the area of quiet diplomacy." But, he said, "it is going to require actions and not words."

Calling on the Soviet Union for peaceful moves, Reagan said with a smile: "It takes two to tango."

On the domestic front, Reagan acknowledged there is "under discussion" a Cabinet proposal to boost gasoline taxes by five cents per gallon in order to rebuild the nation's decaying bridges and highways and create jobs in the face of 10.4 percent unemployment. But no decision has been made, he said.

In an obvious reference to Democratic calls for a multibillion-dollar public works

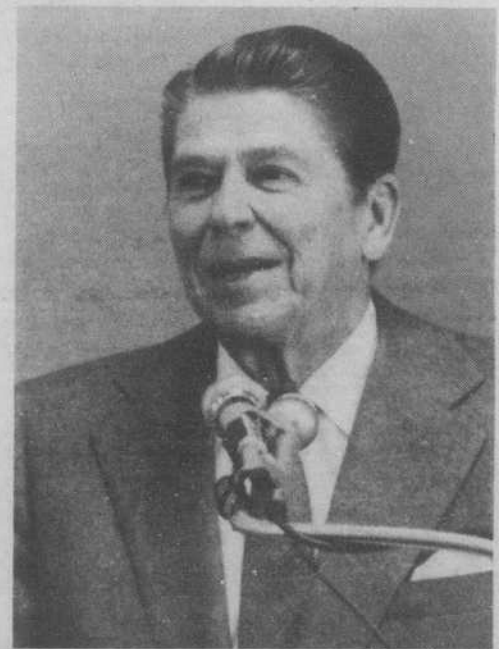
program, Reagan declared "We are doing those things that we think are proper. We are not going to go down the dead-end street that just leaves us set for another recession."

He hinted that he might trim defense spending, but said "you've got to remember the great share of the defense budget is for humanity, for the men and women of the armed forces" in the form of higher pay.

Reagan said "we are looking at everything" but was determined to close "the window of vulnerability."

At one point, Reagan lectured Democrats and others who had "frightened to death" older Americans by suggestions that he would cut Social Security benefits.

Over five of the next eight years, Reagan said, taxes for Social Security will be increased under legislation already on the books. He said he did not think "there is very much more room" for higher taxes.



Emerald photo

Pres. Ronald Reagan