

# CURRENT BOOKS

## SCHOLARS' CHOICE

*Recent titles selected and reviewed by Fellows and staff of the Wilson Center*

**SHADOWS AND WHISPERS: Power Politics Inside the Kremlin from Brezhnev to Gorbachev**  
by Dusko Doder  
Random, 1986  
339 pp. \$19.95

**COMRADE CHAIRMAN: Soviet Succession and the Rise of Gorbachev**  
by Richard Owen  
Arbor, 1987  
253 pp. \$17.95

For better or worse, Western newspaper correspondents have long been our chief source of news on current affairs in Moscow. Yet reporting from the Soviet capital involves unusual constraints, at best requiring special caution and at worst self-censorship. Understandably, many journalists, upon finishing their tour of duty in the USSR, have been eager to set down the full story and to draw the broader conclusions from their experiences. Dusko Doder and Richard Owen, reporters for the *Washington Post* and the *Times* of London, respectively, have made worthy contributions to this genre.

Both men observed at close hand the four-year (1982–86) succession crisis that led from Brezhnev to Gorbachev. Both are seasoned professionals who write with intelligence and balance. Doder, with his strong grounding in the Russian language and with perspective gained from earlier service in Moscow, has more insight. Indeed, in his first-name acquaintance with Soviet politicians, his relentless pursuit of their staffers and their friends' friends, and his nose for news, Doder has had no real equal for several generations. Yet if Owen cannot match Doder's several spectacular scoops, he is also a keen observer, as he proved in his earlier *Letters from Moscow* (1985).

The subtitle of Owen's volume indicates his emphasis on continuity. He sees the 1982 Andropov succession "coup" as being akin to Khrushchev's coup against his co-leaders in 1956, and the Chernenko accession in February 1984 as a conservative step taken with the backing of party *apparatchiki* in the pattern of Stalin and Brezhnev. Doder, less prone to such generalizations, takes the more optimistic view that the four-year process was something new, an inexorable move toward a break with the entire post-Stalin legacy of rule.

Owen develops his thesis by recounting the by-now-familiar histories of earlier transitions in Communist Party leadership from Stalin to Khrushchev (1953), to Brezhnev (1964), to Andropov (1982), to Chernenko (1984), to Gorbachev (1985). He traces the obvious points of similarity among the various episodes (the role of party bureaucrats, the attempts by the military and KGB to exert influence) to the inflexible nature of the Soviet system and to its leaders' intellectual formation in Marxism-Leninism. Transitions do not really bring change and, in Owen's judgment, the Gorbachev generation "... is the Brezhnev generation with smarter suits, more up-to-date technology and smoother public relations."

Doder, by contrast, detects fundamentally new currents beginning in

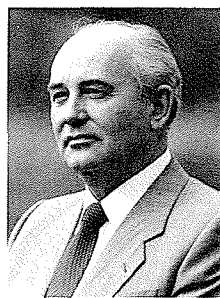
Brezhnev's last years. When the late Nikolai Inozemtsev, then head of the Institute of International Economic Relations, spoke in 1981 of the need to "restructure" the economy, he revealed to Doder a yearning for change that went beyond the desire of a new faction to discredit its predecessors. Once the subject was broached, it was but a short step to Gorbachev's claim that reform is inevitable.

The difference between Doder and Owen is especially pronounced in their treatment of the brief but important reign of Yuri Andropov (November 1982-February 1984). Owen considers Andropov to have been indebted to the military and the KGB, over which he long presided. Accordingly, Owen stresses Andropov's law-and-order campaign and his repression of New Left Soviet intellectuals, including those responsible for the journal, *Socialism and the Future*. Doder denies this, seeing Andropov's deference to the military simply as evidence of his sense of urgency about reform. In contrast to Owen, Doder underscores the unprecedented candor with which Andropov spoke of the nation's problems, and his relentless drive to replace Brezhnevite personnel with reformers. Needless to say, Owen goes on to interpret the brief Chernenko interlude as a reversion to Old Guard rule, while Doder, who gained a rare personal interview with Chernenko, stresses the many areas in which Chernenko continued Andropov's policies, albeit without Andropov's sense of urgency.

The crucial point on which the two authors agree concerns the level of opposition to Gorbachev's programs. As an associate of Andropov told Doder, the real problem is not the hostility of the bureaucracy but the fact that most ordinary people in the USSR stand opposed to the changes being contemplated. Owen sees the opposition as being centered more narrowly in the bureaucracy, but concurs in the view that the mentality of the general populace, shaped by years of Stalinist rhetoric, will not easily adjust to the "new thinking" promoted by the Kremlin today. However inevitable the campaign for change, these two able observers remind us that its success is by no means assured.



Top: Brezhnev and Chernenko. Lower left: Andropov. Lower right: Gorbachev.



—S. Frederick Starr  
Secretary, Kennan Institute, 1974-79