Yuri Vladimirovich Andropov, general secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) and president of the Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Union, died on February 9, 1984 after a long illness.

Andropov, who was 69 years old, served as the highest leader of the Soviet party and state since November 12, 1982, when he was chosen General Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee. He also launched a series of significant and wide-ranging economic reforms aimed at improving the Soviet Union’s system of decentralized development.

VETERAN COMMUNIST
Born on June 15, 1914 in the town of Nagotukoye in the northern Caucasus region of Russia, Yuri Vladimirovich Andropov started life as a railroad worker and went to work himself at the age of 16. He was active in the Young Communist League and the local committee of the Sverdlovsk region in the 1930s, joined the CPSU in 1939 and organized partisan resistance to the Nazis during World War II.

After the war, Andropov occupied a series of increasingly important posts in the Soviet party and state. He was ap- pointed to the staff of the CPSU central committee in 1951, joined the diplomatic service in 1953 and became ambassador to Hungary in 1957. In 1957, he was chosen head of a special subcommittee of the state’s department for relations with other countries of the Socialist camp. Andropov became a member of the central committee in 1961, was appointed head of the Committee for State Security in 1967 and was the first full-time head of the CPSU political bureau in 1973.

RESOLUTE LEADER
Andropov led the Soviet Union through an extremely difficult period in international affairs. He confronted the challenge of the US-Soviet arms race, the possibility of a nuclear war among the leading nuclear powers, the significant changes in the national liberation movements moved into high gear. Ronald Reagan’s criminal invasion of Grenada in October 1983 was an unmistakable—quite deliberate—signal to the whole world that the U.S. was again prepared to use its military power to suppress revolutionary move-ments anywhere on the globe. And when it pushed ahead with the deployment of first-strike cruise and Pershing II missiles in Europe in December of last year, the U.S. made clear that gaining a nuclear edge over the Soviet Union and preparing to fight a nuclear war was an integral part of Washington’s current strategy.

Andropov led the Soviet Union in a firm and effective response to imperialism’s aggressive moves. He consistently stressed the Soviet Union’s principled policy of peaceful coexistence with all other states and made many proposals to

Viewpoint...

In the face of this, all to the point of the level of peace sentiment and antiracist symbolism that does exist as evidence that “the post-World War II period is the height of political conciliation. This can be seen most graphically in Wheeler’s contribution to an organizational one—helping to provide the already existing mass consciousness with a political vehicle through which it can express itself.

Such a conception of the challenge before the communists today is wholly inadequate. Effective opposition to the Reagan war drive is not a jink-in-the-box simply waiting for someone to open the lid and let it erupt. Rebuilding a politically meaningful antiracist consciousness cannot be based principally on the memory of U.S. body counts or the anticipation of U.S. casualties in a future war.

It will require, in the first place, a strong center of activists in a broad peace movement who are themselves united around a perspective prepared to challenge both the political objectives and the anti-Soviet and nationalist chauvinist underpinnings—not just of the war drive—but of U.S. foreign policy overall. To make such a perspective a material force in the antiwar movement, it will have to set out and become the expression of a social base in those sectors of the U.S. working class with the least illusions about their stake in the imperialist system, most particularly in Black and other minority communities. And finally, building such a movement will require a head-on polarization with those forces at the head of the trade union movement who are supporting the anti-peace, anti-ideological and political agents of imperialism in the U.S. working class.

Any underestimation of the scope of these tasks—any view which even hints that an effective “antiwar consensus” can be built without giving them central importance—is a profound political disservice to the cause of peace.

Beyond this political difference, however, there is a profound ideological component to this debate. At the root of Wheeler’s political misjudgment is the classical error of “official optimism,” the pernicious view that only an emphasis on the most positive features of any given historical moment demonstrates confidence in the work of the class. Those who have substituted official optimism for a view that ruthless opposition is central to the anti-imperialism—isolate the true front of the class and train the advanced workers on a dose of “anti-imperialism” in its official optimism “in regard to opportunism.”

Unfortunately, Wheeler and the CPSU have raised precisely this error to the level of a principle. The CPSU’s November 1983 23rd national convention was permeated by this theme, and party general secretary Gorbachev’s main political report, unabashedly proclaimed it a central feature of the CPSU’s political and strategic thinking: “The position of the working class in the line of march continues to change. For this reason, all communists are optimistic—i.e., in a broad, historical sense—about the role and revolutionary capacity of the working class. But this does not mean that the moment can only undermine communists’ ability to prepare the working class for the next historical moment. We must view all the indications from a rosy-colored partisan class perspective.”

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