What exactly is going on in the Soviet Union? Westerners, rudely awakened by the demise of Mr. Brezhnev, have been bombarded by their media with a veritable avalanche of contradictory information. For some journalists Mr. Andropov is a liberal politician, others would have their public believe that the Russians are in for a second dose of Stalinism. Mention is made of the supposed desire for reform and, at the same time, one reads increasingly of his crusade to tighten up on law and order. Week in, week out, newspaper pages swarm with tales of ministers, police chiefs, and other highly placed officials, fired for corruption and malpractice.

So what is he up to? Anyone wishing to answer this question, must begin by realizing that when he became Secretary-General of the Communist Party in November 1982, Iuri Andropov was 68 years old. Never before has anyone achieved this office at such an advanced age. When Lenin died in 1924, Stalin was a mere 44, and had already been Secretary-General for two years. Khrushchev was 58 when Stalin died and Brezhnev was still younger when Mr. Khrushchev was supplanted. Andropov is a full ten years older.

When his predecessor died, he only had been back in the Party Secretariat for a matter of months. Now, as a leader of that Secretariat, he must consolidate his power base at the double, by placing "clients" in key positions.

Andropov’s manoeuvrings have been characterized by an anti-corruption, anti-inefficiency, anti-malpractice policy. A highly appropriate policy for a number of reasons. Corruption and administration are virtually synonymous in the Soviet Union, and victims are thick on the ground. Moreover such a policy gives the impression that he is tackling the problem of the senior officials themselves – with the aim of producing a sound (and honest) leadership, at the same time as conducting limited reforms. But a new policy alone is not enough; the key to the situation is power, and the instrument of power that Party leaders use to purge the cadres is that old favorite, the long established nomenklatura system. This is the very cornerstone of the Party’s cadre policy, the means by which it maintains its grip on state and society. Via the nomenklatura the Party has control of all appointments and elections, both within, and outside its own organization. Now that Mr. Andropov is busy re-
moving undesirables from its ranks, the nomenklatura is very much in the spotlight.

Not long ago, alarmed by threatening developments within a fraternal party, Politbureau member Shcherbitskii recalled Lenin's dictum that it would be unacceptable for the leading party not to control nominations for the most important positions in the state. According to Shcherbitskii, opponents of socialism attack the placing of communist cadres in key positions because they wish to deprive the Party of a potent weapon in the realization of its ideology. Shcherbitskii goes on to use another Lenin dictum — that to allow unions to choose their own leaders, while giving an impression of democracy, would, at the same time, mean the end of the dictatorship of the proletariat — as evidence that the nomenklatura system is as essential as ever. Recent events in Poland would seem to back him up.

For the purpose of this article, nomenklatura means that of the Communist Party and not of state bodies or social organizations. It is a property exclusive to the Party nomenklatura, that it embraces positions both within and outside its own organization. The other bodies and organizations in which the Party nomenklatura controls key positions also have their nomenklatura's: these, however, only have jurisdiction over internal transfers. Nomenklatura used in this sense is nothing more than a long word for a system of internal rules of bureaucracy, such as exist the world over.

Nomenklatura means "word list" in Russian — nomenclature. Just as there is a medical nomenclature and a chemical nomenclature, the Soviet Union boasts a political nomenclature: the Nomenklatura. The secretaries of each of the 4,571 Party bureaux, from the Central Committee in Moscow to the smallest local committee in the farthest Far East of the USSR, have their own list. These lists include all those jobs and positions which need Party ratification for appointments, transfers, and dismissals. As has already been said, these positions may be in or outside the Party proper, they may be filled by appointment or via the ballot box. In practice, the nomenklatura jurisdiction of the committees is exercised by their various bureaux, secretariats, and departments. The higher the position, the higher the Party committee in whose nomenklatura it appears. When a position outside the Party is involved, the committee formally confines itself to ratifying whatever decision is made. In fact, such an operation can evolve in various ways. Nomination and ratification may be in the same hands, though this is by no means always the case. In principle, nominations can be made to a Party committee for ratification by either a state or social organization or a lower level Party committee. Similarly, transfers and dismissals can involve a variety of procedures: dismissal needs to be ratified by the Party committee which is responsible for the nomenklatura, or can occur purely on the recommendation of that committee, or indeed in consultation with that committee. In practice, it appears that it is very often the secretariat of the Party committee which itself takes the initiative, subsequently agreeing to its own decision.

The committee will usually provide a new "more suitable" job for the func-