CHAPTER IV

FROM ANXIETY TO CAUTIOUS OPTIMISM (1965-1972)
As already noted in the previous chapter the Soviet Union had become concerned about the course of developments in India in both domestic as well as foreign policy during the 1962-64 period. Nehru's prestige was on the wane, particularly after the 1962 border conflict with China. In the face of mounting challenge to the policy of non-alignment, detention of Indian Communists and the joint Anglo-American air manoeuvres in India, the Soviet press carried articles urging all "progressive forces" to "checkmate the right-wing advances". 1 Soviet anxiety about the developments in India particularly increased in the period following the death of Nehru.

Writing about All India Congress Committee session at Bangalore in July 1965, a Soviet commentator noted that "a good deal has changed" since Nehru's death. 2 He also observed that since Nehru's death "the reactionaries have grown more active than ever", and that "centrifugal trends have increased" in the Congress party. Mentioning that dissensions and rivalries impairing the prestige and hampering the work of many Congress organizations were deplored by Prime Minister Shastri at the Bangalore session, the Soviet observer commented that the rivalries

in the Congress Party were not between individuals but between large groups, notably the "ministerial leaders" and the "party bosses". The amendment of the Congress constitution at Bangalore to enable Kamraj to have a second term as party president in the face of opposition by Morarji Desai was noted by the Soviet journalist who in his article speculated as to "how long the Congress will be able to maintain its influence unless tangible steps are taken to realise the promises of earlier years."

The Soviets seemed to be particularly worried about the prospect of Morarji Desai (whom they identified as a "representative of big business") succeeding Lal Bahadur Shastri as the Prime Minister. The Radio Peace and Progress beamed harsh propaganda against right-wing parties like the Jan Sangh and Swatantra and certain Congress leaders. The Soviets insisted that Radio Peace and Progress was a "private independent" body over which the government had little control. The Soviet press had already started giving prominence to Mrs. Indira Gandhi even during the period when Lal Bahadur Shastri was Prime Minister. Thus the New Times carried her interview under the title "India Looks Ahead". Mrs. Indira Gandhi told was reported to have the New Times correspondent: "Unfortunately we are not moving towards our goal (Mrs. Gandhi

was referring to the goal of building a society of the socialist kind) as fast as my father wished. And not only because of objective difficulties and obstacles; there is also the resistance of certain political and economic groups."

Soviet worries about the post-Nehru alignment of forces both within the Congress and outside it did not abate even after the installation of Mrs. Gandhi as Prime Minister after the death of Lal Bahadur Shastri. The Soviet press made critical reference to such developments as the opening up of industries marked for public sector to foreign capital and the rupee devaluation in 1966 under the pressure of the World Bank. These developments were seen as a shift in the country's domestic policy towards the Right. The Pravda correspondent in Delhi filed a critical despatch on the government's decision permitting Western capital to penetrate the fertilizer industry.⁴

The composition of the new cabinet formed by Mrs. Gandhi in which Morarji Desai was inducted as Deputy Prime Minister continued to cause anxiety to the Soviets. The Soviet press reproduced the left parties' criticism of the composition of Mrs. Gandhi's Cabinet formed after the severe battering which the Congress Party received at the polls in 1967 as "a coalition of the ruling party's

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Centrist and Rightist elements which could hardly be expected to improve the situation in the country.\textsuperscript{5}

Soviet perceptions of the Congress regime headed by Mrs. Gandhi remained negative both before and after the 1967 general elections. It was only between 1969 and 1971 that they became highly positive in the wake of the 1969 Congress split. Two articles in \textit{Pravda} by R.A. Ulyanovsky carried a highly critical assessment. Ulyanovsky wrote in his \textit{Pravda} article of 15 April 1966 that in countries where the national bourgeoisie was in power, e.g., India, the upper strata of the bourgeoisie was openly collaborating with the reactionaries and sabotaging general democratic transformations such as the state sector and agrarian reforms. In his subsequent article published in the \textit{Pravda} of January 3, 1968, the Soviet scholar observed that the experience of past 15-16 years had shown that the national bourgeoisie was inclined to resolve its economic contradictions with foreign capital by reaching an accommodation with the latter and not by eliminating the basis of its economic power. Thus Ulyanovsky came close to repudiating the official view that projected India as pursuing the path of economic independence.

A sharply critical tone about the Congress leadership can be noticed in several other articles published

in the Soviet weekly *New Times* in 1966. Y. Gotlober and Y. Shtykanov wrote in that article "Towards Election Time in India" that the death of Jawaharlal Nehru was "bound to disturb the political equilibrium both within and outside the Congress". The Soviet commentators also noted that wide-ranging debates in the Congress on the ways to solve the enormous economic problems faced by the country and observed, "although the party leadership tries to represent India's capitalist development as 'building towards socialism', these debates often reveal widely divergent and even entirely opposite views".  

Similarly another *New Times* article "The Indian Economy: Trying Times" by A. Vladin noted that Indian big business was developing ever closer associations with foreign capital resulting in some 2000 agreements with British, American, West German and other concerns. It also observed that the monopoly groups of Indian capital were "steadily gaining in power and influence".  

The Soviet journalist highlighted the demand for nationalisation of banks by many members of the All India Congress Committee at its session held at the end of September 1966. He was critical of the election manifesto prepared by the Congress leadership and endorsed by the All India Congress Committee session for its "vague, amorphous" formulation.


about "public control of credit institutions". The author further wrote, "They (the main difficulties of country's economic development) have their roots in the socio-economic nature and structure of Indian society, in the present economic policy, in other words, in the inevitable contradictions of the capitalist path which the country is now following under the leadership of the Congress party."8

An article highly critical of the growth of capitalist monopoly in India appeared in the Soviet monthly International Affairs in April 1967.9 Its author N. Savelyev wrote, "Although capitalist monopoly in India has yet to assume its final shape, it is a fact that the process is fast and large scale. The underlying factor of this process is the financial and economic power of the big national bourgeoisie, which has grown in the last ten years and its wealth which has multiplied during the period of independence ... all this has taken place behind the official slogans about building a socialist society".10 Savelyev also observed that the public sector which should have become the economic foundation of social progress, did not at all check the growing power of the public

8. Ibid., p.7.
10. Ibid., p.36.
national monopolies". The creation of an infrastructure by government freed them from the necessity of making obligatory but "unproductive" investments in transport, means of communication, training of technical specialists, etc.

The Soviet scholar highlighted the effect on public life and policy of the ruling party and government of such a high degree social stratification of India's national bourgeoisie. He also referred to the existence of a relationship of not only atagonism but also of cooperation between big monopolies and foreign capital. In this connection he mentioned that Soviet scholars are becoming more and more aware of these economic, social and political processes in India "in view of the increased political activity of the Indian monopoly bourgeoisie and consequently, of imminent serious clashes in Indian society and potential departures from the established neutral course in foreign policy. The class ambitions of Indian big business, according to the author, were clearly taking on a social aspect. They were hampering the democratic and agrarian reform. The Soviet commentator alleged that the big business opposition compelled the Indian government to give up the idea of nationalisation as a means of expanding and strengthening the state sector. He also noted that the Indian monopolists and their various reactionary adherents have now entered the political arena with a view
to radically reorganising the ruling Indian National Congress Party and the government. He also aired the allegation that the big capitalists threatened to deprive the Congress Party of financial aid if their candidates were not included in the Congress list. A number of leading capitalists' names were mentioned among the Congress candidates for election to the Parliament and State Assemblies.

Notwithstanding this critical approach to the negative aspects of the policies pursued by the Congress as a result of the strengthening of reactionary forces inside the party particularly after the death of Nehru, the Soviets at the same time expressed great confidence in the stability of Indo-Soviet ties. At the XXIII Party Congress in 1966 Brezhnev referred to Indo-Soviet relations in glowing terms as a "traditional friendship ... that had withstood the test of time." 11 Obviously such positive assertions were not merely meant to serve as a cover for Soviet anxiety about the reactionary forces gaining an upper hand in the Congress. They were equally a product of Moscow's strong conviction that objective conditions demanded continuation of close ties with India irrespective of a change in political alignments inside the Congress. Western scholar, Richard B. Remnek, rightly underscores this fact. He writes: "A decade of Soviet political support in the face of western pressure and Chinese intimidation, underscored by economic and military aid, led them to express

confidence in Indo-Soviet ties." Kosygin in his speech before the Supreme Soviet contrasted Soviet policy towards more radical developing countries. While noting that "we do not conceal that our sympathies are first of all on the side of those peoples who have chosen the path of non-capitalist development", Kosygin proceeded to spell out Soviet relations with non-aligned states like India in the following words: "In view of the closeness of positions of the Soviet Union and those of the developing countries on many international problems, the Soviet government will maintain close contact with these countries in the interest of peace and the expansion of the anti-imperialist front." This distinction made by the Soviets between the developing countries following the more radical path of socio-political transformation along the path of non-capitalist development and the developing countries following an anti-imperialist course in their foreign policy while internally pursuing a path of capitalist development has been interpreted by many western scholars as Soviet approach "to distinguish ideological sympathies from considerations of mutual self-interest". Such a view is, however, based on a narrow understanding of the Soviet ideological approach to the newly independent countries. It may be pointed out that cooperation

and solidarity with the anti-imperialist struggle of the former colonial peoples as a whole regardless of their different levels of social development has been the core of Soviet ideological approach towards the national liberation movement since the days of Lenin. Soviet support to Kemalist Turkey and Afghanistan under the feudal monarchy of Amanullah in the days of Lenin disprove the assertion of western authors about Soviet policy towards non-aligned India as based on non-ideological considerations of sheer power politics.

A sharply critical tone characterised Soviet writings of the period on Indian affairs in general and developments inside the Congress in particular. Writing on the eve of the 1967 general elections Soviet political commentators, Yuri Gotlober and Yuri Shtykanov, highlighted the emergence of a reactionary bloc in India the core of which was formed by Swatantra Party and Jan Sangh. In their opinion while the Swatantra spoke chiefly for the big bourgeoisie and Rajahs, the Jan Sangh drew its support from the landowners and lower and middle bourgeoisie of town and country. They believed that the united reactionary front would be spearheaded not so much against the ruling party as against the left progressive forces, and in the first instance the Communists. The Soviet commentators noted the tactics of the Swatantra not to

field candidates against most of the right-wing Congress candidates including Morarji Desai. This was attributed by them to the desire of these parties to force a right-wing swing in Congress policy. Gotlober and Shtykanov also commented on the three-pronged tactics of the Indian big business namely supporting the reactionary parties, financing candidates of other parties including right-wing Congressmen and seeking to get its own men elected to the Parliament and State legislatures. They also quoted a section of Indian press which carried news about the House of Birla contributing to election funds of about 100 candidates, mainly Congressmen.

The Congress party's denial of ticket to Krishna Menon to contest for the Parliament from the Bombay constituency also came in for adverse comment by Soviet Weekly New Times which alleged on the basis of Indian press reports that the Congress was pressurised by Washington. The weekly also mentioned that many capitalists, big landowners and rajas were out to obtain Congress nominations.16 The results of 1967 elections were deeply analysed by Soviet political observers like N. Pastukhov, Y. Gotlober and Y. Shtykanov in a series of articles published in the Soviet weekly New Times. In fact Soviet political commentator A. Reginin had observed in an article published in the New Times (No. 5, February 1967) that "the Congress

will find it increasingly difficult to maintain its leading position". He had referred to a noticeable decline in Congress influence since the death of Nehru in 1964. Pastukhov who had witnessed the three previous parliamentary elections frankly admitted that he did not expect the National Congress "to lose so much of prestige and authority, built up particularly in the struggle of independence." The Soviet commentator observed that the election results "have in many ways created a new political situation in India. Noting a greatly reduced majority of the Congress in the new Lok Sabha (278 seats against 361 in the previous one), its debacle in Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Rajasthan, Bihar, Orissa, Kerala, Madras and West Bengal, defeat of its prominent leaders including the party President Kamaraj, Chief Minister of Panjab, Bihar, Madras and West Bengal, 10 Central Ministers and 50 Ministers in the states, Pastukhov described the Congress reverses in the 1967 elections as "the worst defeat the Congress has suffered in the 20 years since independence". The Soviet commentator highlighted the contradictory nature of the election results as manifested in the defeat of many prominent right-wing Congressmen like S.K. Patil and Atulya Ghosh, Swatantra President, N.G. Ranga and Acharya Kripalani, who contested as an independent, together with prominent left-wingers Krishna Menon and K.D. Malaviya and

the simultaneous strengthening of the rightist and leftist opposition forces (the Swatantra Party increased its Lok Sabha representation from 18 to 43 and Jan Sangh from 14 to 35, the Communists raised their seats from 29 to 40). Pastukhov attributed the defeat of the Congress in the first place to its failure "to carry out its programme of raising living standards, effectively checking the growth of prices, taxes and unemployment and solving India's food problem."

Y. Gotlober and Y. Shtykanov in their *New Times* article highlighted the fact of 9 states with some two-thirds of the total population of India having non-Congress government. 18 They turned their focus to an analysis of state politics dividing the non-Congress ruled states into three groups, namely, West Bengal and Kerala with coalition governments consisting of Left and democratic parties including the Communists; Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Panjab with governments consisting of representatives of both the Right and Left, and Orissa, Haryana and Madhya Pradesh with the Right parties forming the governments. The State of Madras was treated as a class by itself with a "local democratic" party, D.K.K. in power. The Soviet political observers also noted the aggravation of internal contradictions in the Congress following its poll reverses. Quoting the Congress President K.Kamaraj, Gotlober and Shtykanov concurred with his judgement that the Congress

policy of talking about socialism but doing very little about it led to the party's setbacks in the elections as the socialist declarations frightened away the rich and non-fulfilment of these promises caused disillusionment among the masses. According to Soviet commentators the most reactionary Congress followers broke with it long ago, some joining the Right-wing Swatantra while others remaining in the Congress to fight the democratic and progressive trends in it. They compared the reactionary opponents of progressive reforms in the Congress to "a built-in delayed-action bomb capable of exploding any moment" and viewed the withdrawal of some local groups in states calling themselves Jan (People's) Congress on the election-eve, disagreeing with the policy of the Congress leadership and contesting the state elections with their own political platform as a rule in bloc with right-wing parties. They also observed that many of the Congress followers elected to the Legislative Assemblies left the party after the elections, not so much because of political differences as because of personal rivalry and struggle for power and influence (this referred to the group led by Charan Singh in Uttar Pradesh though the latter was not specifically mentioned). The Bangla Congress in West Bengal was treated as another category of defectors from the Congress "who insist on more resolute action to carry out the progressive reform programmes" and who came out against the right dominating the leadership of the ruling party in that state. The process of
forming organisations by former Congressmen was analysed by the Soviet political observers in their article under reference. Their different political orientations were taken note of and a reference was made to the efforts to unite them in a nationwide party called the Bhartiya Kranti Dal at a conference held in Madhya Pradesh in November 1967. The efforts of the right-wing spokesmen to impart a conservative character to the new party were also mentioned by the Soviet political observers. In another article Gotlober and Shtykanov commented on the dismissal of the United Left government in West Bengal as an indication that the Indian National Congress was out to restore some of its lost positions. But they remarked that the latest changes in the Indian state governments (imposition of the President's rule in West Bengal and Haryana) could hardly be expected to ease political tension in India as "the struggle is being increasingly joined not only by political parties, but by the people at large, as is evident among other things, from the events in West Bengal." 19

The New Times article by A. Kutsenkov published to mark the twentieth anniversary of Indian independence nostalgically reminisced about the period of Nehru's stewardship of the Congress party. The author wrote, "Led by a statesman of the calibre of Jawaharlal Nehru,

it (the Congress) proclaimed a far-reaching programme of economic and social reform and charted the fundamentals of India's foreign policy. That was what came to be known as Nehru line. He noted the ebbs and flows of the democratic movement in India which according to him marched from success to success until 1962 when in the autumn of that year after the Sino-Indian border crisis the right made a bid to seize the political initiative. Besides the border conflict the other factor contributing to the onslaught of the Right was, in Kutsenko's opinion, "the Congress leaders' inconsistency and hesitancy in implementing the reforms proclaimed." He concluded that many Indians felt "that within the Congress too, the elements prepared to make further concessions to big business at the people's expense have been gaining in strength in recent years." He also noted that the political programmes of the left non-Congress state governments enjoyed popular support and were helping to build up the democratic movement.

In the post-1967 period the Soviets appeared to be obsessed with the growing ascendency of the Right in the Congress party and the increasing tendency on the part of Swatantra, the ultras in the Jan Sangh Party and other conservative forces "to form in order to combat the growing influence of the democratic parties and groups working

for far-reaching socio-economic transformations." Interestingly a write-up in *New Times* on the election of President and Vice-President of India held in May 1967 took note of the difference of more than 10% votes polled for the Congress candidate for President Dr. Zakir Hussain and V.V. Giri from the same party for Vice-President (Dr. Hussain receiving 54% and Giri close to 65% of the votes polled) and referred to speculations that despite agreement on the candidates for the two posts among all opposition parties, some Swatantra and Jan Sangh MPs voted for the Congress candidate for the office of Vice-President. From this the Soviet commentator drew an inference that there were powerful groups in the Swatantra and Jan Sangh which were seeking to form a bloc with the Indian National Congress.

A strand of anxiety runs through Soviet press write-ups on the Indian situation throughout the year 1968. The Soviets felt concerned over both domestic as well as foreign policy of India. In the field of conduct of foreign affairs they felt worried over the setback to their policy of bridging the gulf between India and Pakistan in the Tashkent spirit on account of the strong opposition in India to the recent move to befriend Pakistan through a token supply of arms as part of their

overall attempt to wean that country away from China. Mrs. Gandhi's overture to China to improve relations was seen as a countermove to bring pressure on Moscow to stop its supply of arms to Pakistan. The controversy was ultimately resolved with the reported Soviet decision to stop arms supplies to Pakistan conveyed by Soviet Premier Kosygin to the Indian side during his visit to New Delhi at the end of January 1968 on his way to Vietnam. The Soviet press cautioned that joint action by India and the Soviet Union was "all the more essential since the imperialists are persisting in their efforts to drive a wedge between peaceful states, notably between the Soviet Union and India."  

22. Similarly, Soviet weekly New Times wrote after the Soviet visit of President Zakir Hussain in July 1968: "It would be a mistake however, to assume that good relationships will develop by inertia and grow stronger of themselves, without efforts on both sides. All the more so since close Soviet-Indian cooperation does not suit everybody, not only in the West, but regrettably in India herself where from time to time the reactionaries mount anti-Soviet campaigns."  

23. The complexity of the domestic situation in India was highlighted in a series of three articles by Lev Stepanov, Special correspondent of New Times:  

Stepanov mentioned the falling industrial growth rate from 1964 onwards from 5.8% to 1.7% in 1968 and average annual increase of 12% in prices. While admitting that the military conflicts with China and Pakistan and the severe drought had an adverse effect, he did not agree that these were the root causes of India's economic malaise. The Soviet analyst expressed his view that without social reforms economic progress was impossible or at any rate extremely difficult. 25 He also made a reference to a sharp change in the attitude of the Indian big business towards the public sector in a period of 10 years. If, in 1957, he wrote, the state sector was for the big Indian capitalists "Enemy Number One", in 1968 Birla declared that the private sector was not out to malign the public sector. Lev Stepanov concluded that Indian big business had realised that the "unpleasantness connected with the state participation in economic life" was "more than compensated for by the profits guaranteed to private businessmen by the state protection of their markets, their supply avenues and their positions vis-a-vis the trade unions." 26 A similar change was noted by him in the attitude of the rich peasantry towards the cooperatives. "The conservatives", wrote Stepanov "now want to preserve the cooperatives in their present

26. Ibid.
form which places them under the domination of the money-lenders and middlemen, while the left forces are working for their reorganisation along democratic lines."  

Lev Stepanov analysed the challenges to the Indian Parliamentary democracy in the wake of the situation that emerged as a result of the non-Congress parties coming to power in a number of states while the Congress continued to rule at the Centre. In this connection he expressed concern over the imposition of the President's rule in Bengal in February 1968 followed by the fall of the coalition government in Uttar Pradesh in April, in Bihar in June and in Panjab in August of the same year. The Soviet political observer referred to the views of some Indians who felt concerned at the "imperfections of the system" that allowed the party in power at the centre to disregard the will of the state electorate. He commended the call given by the Communist Party of India at its 8th Congress in February 1968 to forge left unity on a platform of joint political action for defence of democracy through mass struggle against subversions of parliamentary democracy. He wrote, "... the right danger is becoming very real. The Right may well try to seize on some turn of events, to amend the present system of political institutions into a more conservative, more reactionary shape." He further noted that leading members of Rightist parties

27. Ibid.
were pressing for restriction of the political freedom of the Left, particularly the Communists, and also referred to a report in the Statesman of April 25 about the Congress Party President Nijalingappa also joining the chorus. 28

The results of 1967 elections were not seen by knowledgeable Soviet political commentators on Indian affairs as anti-Congressism or a negative vote as Indian writer Nirad Chaudhuri and K. Rangaswamy, editor of the Hindu had suggested. Thus Lev Stepanov in one of his articles under reference wrote, "... Chaudhuri and Rangaswamy are mistaken in reading the election results as 'anti-Congressism pure and simple'." The distribution of the Opposition vote was by no means fortuitous ... In some states Left opposition parties came to power, in others Right, in still others pretty motley coalitions. But this was most certainly no haphazard inter-regional mosaic but a reflection of differing socio-economic conditions." 29 Thus the advent of the Swatantra to power in Orissa was seen as a product of a "traditional" society abounding in strong feudal survivals and the triumph of the Left opposition parties in West Bengal and Kerala a result of sharp antagonism of a modern society.

29. Ibid., p.12.
The results of elections to the state legislatures of West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Panjab held in February 1969 were analysed and commented upon by Soviet political commentators Y. Gotlober and Y. Shtykanov in a New Times write-up. Gotlober and Shtykanov hailed the victory of the United Left Front in West Bengal which obtained 214 of the 280 seats in the Legislative Assembly (the Communists almost doubled their seats reducing the Indian National Congress strength from 127 in 1967 to 55 only). They attributed to success of the United Left Front to the organisational and guiding role played by the Communist-led working class and the unity forged by the local organisations of the Communist Party of India and the "Parallel Communist Party" which overcame the differences that led to the split in the Communist movement in 1964. According to the Soviet commentators the fact of absence of "clear-cut differentiation of forces in the other three states" (Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Panjab) and the disunity among the left and democratic forces in these states told on the election results. The appeal of the Communist Party of India for the promotion of unity of the three leading left parties - the Communist Party of India, the Parallel Communist Party and the Samyukta Socialist Party - was prominently mentioned by Gotlober and Shtykanov.

The political developments in India following the poll debacle of the Indian National Congress in the 1967 general elections and mid-term elections in several states in February 1969 received great attention by the Soviet media and academic circles. The crystallisation of alignments underway for quite some time was noted by Soviet scholar P. Shastitko.\(^{31}\) The formation of independent state parties - Vishal Haryana Party, Jan Congress in Orissa, Kerala Congress, Bangla Congress - was attributed by him to internal contradictions within the Congress. Referring to the growing discontent on account of the failure of the April-1969 Faridabad session of the Indian National Congress to arrive at any decision on a number of key problems facing the country, the Soviet scholar wrote approvingly about the special message of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi to the All India Congress Committee session held in Bangalore in July 1969 proposing a number of important socio-economic reforms such as the nationalisation of big private banks, curbs on the growth of monopoly, continuation of land reforms, and other measures "capable of stimulating economic progress and improving the material conditions of the working sections of the population." The nationalisation of 14 leading private banks and the resignation of Morarji Desai from the Cabinet in protest against the withdrawal of the

finance portfolio from his charge were also highlighted by Shastitko who on the basis of Indian press reports also mentioned the association of Desai with big business. The said Soviet commentator also referred to the efforts of the reactionary parties – the Jan Sangh, Swatantra and the Bhartiya Kranti Dal - "not only to coordinate their activities, but also to achieve organisational unity." He concluded, "At the present stage of the political struggle in India, the nationalisation of banks and the other progressive reforms draw more and more clearly the dividing line between the left-democratic elements, including the Congress Left, on the one hand and the reactionary, Right-wing monopoly elements on the other."

The trend of jubilation over nationalisation of big private banks continued in write-ups on Indian political developments in the Soviet press. Thus A. Usvatov cited the comment of the National Herald on the election of Mrs. Gandhi's candidate for the Office of President of India that Giri's election was welcomed all over India as "a victory for democracy and a triumph for the progressives." Usvatov wrote: "The success of the democratic candidate shows that through United action the Left forces are becoming an important factor in Indian politics, capable of ensuring the consistent implementation of socio-economic reforms in the interests of the people."  

32. Ibid. 
Soviet commentators did not accept the Western views that the sharp differences in the Congress Party leading to its split represented a contest for power and influence in the party between Indira Gandhi and the old Congress leaders - Nijalingappa, Desai and others. As Usvatov observed quoting Mrs. Gandhi's statement at a press conference, in Delhi on 8 November 1969, "... it is a clash of views on economic and social policies." 34 A senior party expert on Indian affairs, P. Kutsobin, made a detailed analysis of the causes leading to the 1969 split in the Indian National Congress. According to him discontent and the imperative need for change underlay the developments which caused a grave crisis in the Indian National Congress. While noting the considerable headway made in overcoming economic backwardness and the advance in industrialisation, abolition of extreme forms of feudal exploitation and in strengthening economic independence, Kutsobin observed, "but for all that, development along capitalist lines has been accompanied by formidable difficulties and vexing contradictions, due primarily to the fact that economic progress has not been accompanied by much-needed social change. As a result economic advance has mainly benefited the top crust of the property-tied classes and brought about no appreciable improvement in the material condition of broad sections of the working

population." Tracing the history of internal struggle in the Indian National Congress from the Nehru period, Kutsobin observed that not being able to challenge Nehru's policies openly, the Right-wing Conservative elements occupying key positions in the party resorted to more flexible tactics of sabotaging his progressive policies by outwardly continuing to pay lip service to them. The differences, however, came to the fore in the wake of crushing Congress defeat at the 1967 polls when the right-wing forces in the Congress led by the Syndicate of leaders - Nijalingappa, S.K.Patil, Atulya Ghosh and Morarji Desai who had close links with big business challenged the programme of progressive socio-economic measures proposed by the Centre-Left forces in the Congress headed by Mrs. Gandhi at the Bangalore meeting of the All India Congress Committee.

According to Kutsobin Indira Gandhi and her supporters had "no alternative but to take resolute action to foil the plans of the Right." The Soviet political observer made a critical reference to the role of Kamaraj. Describing him as an exception in the company of other syndicate leaders having close ties with the big business, Kutsobin remarked that "although Kamaraj continued to profess loyalty to "socialist ideals, in practical terms, he speaks for that part of South Indian bourgeoisie whose

36. Ibid.
interests are becoming bound up more and more with the interests of big business elsewhere in the country. 37 Kutsobin viewed the developments leading to the Congress split as essentially a result of the struggle over the "choice of country's path of development". He observed that the majority of India's people were instinctively or consciously opposed to capitalism and wanted the country "to launch out on one or another type of non-capitalist development." Kutsobin also wrote that the policy of "progressive socio-economic changes proclaimed by Indira Gandhi is welcomed by all the Left, Democratic forces of the country."

The rival Congress sessions held at Bombay and Ahmedabad in December 1969 by the two groups were commented upon by Soviet scholar A. Iverov in a New Times article. 38 The article is noteworthy for the author's critical understanding of the programme of both the rival factions in the Indian National Congress. Iverov wrote that the session in Bombay was attended by the followers of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, "most of whom stand for progressive socio-economic reforms". According to the Soviet scholar the Ahmedabad session of the syndicate-led Congress backed the nationalisation of banks "to camouflage its real stand". Referring to the resolutions passed at the Ahmedabad Conference on agrarian reforms, bank

37. Ibid., p.7.

credits to small and poor farmers and artisans and abolition of the former rajahs' privileges, Iverov observed that they reflected "social demagogy" and were aimed at winning over the peasantry and the middle classes. The Conference in his view revealed "that the Syndicate is becoming the rallying point for Indian reaction, with the Syndicate-Swatantra-Jan Sangh axis as its striking force."

Analysing the character of the Congress led by Mrs. Gandhi, Iverov acknowledged that there were "different ideological and political trends" in it. Quoting Indian magazine Link, he wrote, "It would be simplifying things to call the split in the Congress a split between the pro-monopoly and anti-monopoly groups. But while there was a very large group of anti-monopolist, democratic-minded politicians among Mrs. Gandhi's followers, there were none at all among the followers of the Syndicate." Iverov also noted the CPI Secretary, Rajeshwar Rao's comment that the Congressmen following Mrs. Gandhi were "not a homogeneous mass either ideologically or politically" and that there were quite a few reactionary elements" among them who tried to prevent the implementation of progressive measures. The Soviet scholar also commented that the resolutions passed at the Bombay Conference did contain some important provisions, although some of the radical demands raised by the delegates were not fully reflected in them.

In contradistinction to the generally enthusiastic reaction of the popular Soviet press to the 1969 Congress
split some serious Soviet academic writings displayed considerable caution and even some nervousness towards the Indian developments. Soviet writings had been pointing to divisions within the Congress leadership since Nehru's death. The new Congress leadership under Mrs. Gandhi's leadership was viewed as a "Centre-left" coalition including the left represented by a group of younger political leaders like Chandra shekhar and Mohan Dharia and Centrists like Jagjivan Ram, C. Subramaniam and Fakhruddin Ali Ahmad. The former "Syndicate" members like Y.B. Chavan and K. Kamaraj joined Mrs. Gandhi since they had supported the idea of bank nationalisation. Soviet scholar Iverov observed that several Centrists in Mrs. Gandhi's camp did not favour bolder anti-imperialist measures and had spurned the idea of the Indian National Congress entering a Centre-Left coalition with political parties on the Left. The Soviets, it may be noted, discussed the prospects of restructuring the Party system of India through creation of a union of democratic parties at the Conference of Soviet Indologists held in December 1970.

In an article published in early 1971, P. Kutsobin, head of the Indian desk in the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, referred to many


"reactionary elements" within the newly reconstituted Congress who did everything in their power to freeze the further radicalisation of the government policy and opposed joining hands with the Communists and other Leftist forces. Yet Kutsobin also held that the Congress split had brought about a major regrouping of class and political forces in India and argued that Mrs. Gandhi's reform programme provided objective conditions for unity of action on the part of all Left Democratic forces against the onslaught from the Right. He took to task the leadership of both the Samyukta Socialist Party and the "parallel" Communist Party, the former for pursuing "blind anti-Congressim" and the latter for asserting that no demarcation of forces within the national bourgeoisie had yet occurred and that no essential differences existed between the "Syndicate" and the Congress led by Mrs. Gandhi.

An earlier article by R. Ulyanovsky in the Pravda evaluated the Indian political developments during the previous decade leading to the Congress split in 1969. According to the author, a small group of Indian monopolists which had gained considerable strength by the mid-1960s had sought to limit the role of the State sector and to reduce to a minimum government planning and regulation of the economy. After Nehru's death these monopolists were

42. Ibid., pp. 27-28.
43. Pravda, 4 September, 1970.
able to extract some important concessions between 1965 and 1968 through "a group of right wing figures" and gained "obedient servants" in the person of the "Syndicate". The Congress defeat in general elections of 1967 intensified the fighting between the Left, Centre and Right within the Congress with the latter group beginning to align with the Rightist parties the Jan Sangh and the Swatantra. Thus in Ulyanovsky's view it was not the promotion of the leftist measures like nationalisation of banks that led to the Congress split. It was caused, according to him, by an offensive launched by the Right-wing forces in Congress in collaboration with the Rightist political parties. Mrs. Gandhi's move for reforms only counteracted this Rightist offensive. Ulyanovsky emphasised the need for forging a united front of all "Left-wing and Democratic forces" against the threat from the Right and chided "certain democratic parties ... who occasionally have taken the path of unprincipled collaboration with conservative and right-wing forces in the struggle being raised by those forces against the Indian National Congress and the government."44 The Soviet ideologue was particularly critical of the Communist Party of India (M) and neo-Maoist splinter groups who failed "to see objective allies in the persons of the non-monopolistic petty and middle bourgeoisie, who are battling the monopolists, feudal lords and foreign capital." Ulyanovsky

44. Ibid.
thus slightly differed with the views of Kutsobin referred to above. Unlike Kutsobin Ulyanovsky did not mention the reactionary elements within the new Congress which opposed further radicalisation of the government policy and sought to convey the impression as if the Congress split represented a clear-cut division between the monopolist and the non-monopolist sections of the national bourgeoisie with the Congress led by Mrs. Gandhi voicing the interests of the latter.

Ulyanovsky's more optimistic assessment of the split was preceded by articles published in Pravda and Izvestia in late 1969. An article by V. Maevskii in Pravda on the occasion of the 80th birth anniversary of Nehru recalled that Nehru had recognised that India's regeneration could not be achieved through capitalist development and that socialism was the only solution. The tenor of the article seemed to suggest that the Soviets now held out the possibility of a non-capitalist path for India. In another article published in Izvestia, Soviet commentator V. Kudriavtsev interpreted the victory of Mrs. Gandhi's candidate in the Presidential election and the nationalisation of banks and other measures of reform adopted by Mrs. Gandhi as an indication that India was seeking a way out of the impasse of the capitalist path of development.

Kudriavtsev, however, cautioned that the crisis was not over and the political struggle over India's future would continue to grow. The Soviet academic circles displayed a caution not only in their analysis of the Congress split but also towards the victory of Mrs. Gandhi's Presidential candidate. Thus A. Iverov warned that despite the victory, of Mrs. Gandhi's candidate, V. V. Giri, the Right had suffered only a temporary defeat and predicted new political battles in the near future. 47 A similar note of caution was sounded by another Soviet scholar O. Maev who observed that monopoly capital still remained strong in the economic and social life of the country. 48 In another article, Maev made it clear that the real significance of the nationalisation of banks would depend on the character and direction of future fiscal and credit policies and warned that if these banks continued their previous policy of financing mainly the enterprises of the monopolies, the fact of nationalisation would have changed very little. 49

In spite of guarded optimism about the developments leading to a Congress split expressed in a section of Soviet academic circles, the Soviets on the whole viewed the event as a decisive shift in Indian politics in a

47. A. Iverov, op. cit., p. 97.
desirable direction and actively encouraged the Communists and other Indian leftist groups to rally behind Mrs. Gandhi and her party. The Soviet line of supporting Mrs. Gandhi paid rich dividend at least for the time being in terms of increased representation of the Communists. But its future success depended on continued support and cooperation between the Communist parties and Mrs. Gandhi's party. The February 1971 general elections gave the Congress Party (R) nearly two-thirds majority in the Lok Sabha enabling it to push through a constitutional amendment depriving the former princes of their privy purses as well as a number of other important reforms. With Mrs. Gandhi firmly in power the Soviets were no longer worried about an unstable political situation in India. They found the new set-up more conducive to closer cooperation. At the XXIV Party Congress held in March 1971, General Secretary Brezhnev hailed the "recent nationalisation of large banks in India and the inspiring victory over Right-wing forces in the recent elections to the House of People of the Indian Parliament."\

The Soviet press welcomed the landslide victory of the ruling Congress Party as "defeat for Indian reaction."\


Soviet journalist Kalyagin attributed the resounding Congress success to the renewal the party had undergone since the break with the Right-reactionary elements. He commented that never before had the right-wing forces prepared so thoroughly for an election contest (they succeeded in forming a coalition - the "grand alliance" - and agreeing on the distribution of candidates) and mentioned the large-scale funding of the election campaign by the U.S. Embassy for candidates favoured by it as also the presence of 25 former princely rulers and 60 spokesmen of big business including members of the Tata and Birla families in the election fray. Kalyagin highlighted the heavy electoral losses of the Jan Sangh, the Swatantra and the Samyukta Socialist Party (from 35 seats in the previous election to 22 in the case of Jan Sangh, from 44 to 8 in that of the Swatantra and from 23 to 3 in the case of Samyukta Socialist Party) and mentioned the humiliation suffered in the poll battle by prominent leaders like Masani, Madhok, Charan Singh, S.K. Patil, Ram Subhag Singh, Sanjiva Reddy, Ashoka Mehta and Tarakeshwari Sinha and the Samyukta Socialist Party leaders George Fernandes and Raj Narain. The Soviet journalist expressed the hope that the Congress government "is now in a position to carry out the important democratic reforms it has promised and which the masses are largely waiting. He emphasised that the reforms were an important factor in influencing the decision of the voters to cast their ballots for the Indian National Congress."
The Soviets further consolidated their relations with India during the course of the 1971 Bangladesh crisis. A twenty-year treaty of peace, friendship and cooperation was signed in New Delhi on 9 August 1971 between India and the USSR. The treaty was meant to serve as a warning to China against intervention in a conflict on the sub-continent. The Soviets continued to exercise a moderate influence urging India and Pakistan to resolve the crisis through negotiations. However, when the conflict between India and Pakistan ultimately took place, the Soviet Union fully supported India. Soviet prestige grew up tremendously in India in the wake of the 1971 Indo-Pak conflict. Soviet gains, however, proved to be ephemeral. Mrs. Gandhi's appreciation for Soviet support was not to last long. Already in February 1972 she told American journalist C.L. Sulzberger that "we are unable to display gratitude in any tangible sense." Mrs. Gandhi's massive majority in the Parliament freed her from dependence on Communist support for survival in power between 1969 and 1971.

Problems soon began to crop up in Indo-Soviet relations and the basically pro-monopoly bias of the ruling party again surfaced to the acute embarrassment of the Soviets. Soviet academic and journalistic writings still persisted in their view that the Indian society was witnessing "a definite movement towards the left in the

popular mood."\textsuperscript{53} Soviet journalist Shurygin made a dig at the dismal performance of the Congress (0) in the March 1972 state Assembly elections in which they could secure only 88 seats out of a total of 2722 as against the impressive score of 1926 of the Indian National Congress led by Mrs. Gandhi.\textsuperscript{54} The Soviet press also highlighted the emergence of the Communist Party of India with 112 seats in the State Legislative Assemblies as the second strongest party in the country after the Congress.\textsuperscript{55} The March 1972 elections for State Assemblies were interpreted as "noticeable shift to the left in Indian public opinion." Shurygin's article, however, also contained critical references to the failure of agrarian reforms. It noted heavy concentration of land with 3\% of landowners owning 23.6\% of the entire cultivable land and 22\% agricultural households having no land at all. While endorsing the Communist Party of India's tactics of forging a unity of left and democratic forces both inside and outside the Congress to mobilise people for solving without further delay the task of socio-economic transformation and for implementation of assurances by the ruling party before the elections, Shurygin


\textsuperscript{54} Ibid.

criticised the parallel Communist Party of India for concentration of its main efforts on struggle against the Indian National Congress. He suggested that Moscow recognised that India was still wedded to the capitalist path of development and for a switch over to non-capitalist path it was necessary to have further mobilisation and organisation of masses for carrying out cardinal structural changes in society.