CHAPTER V

THE INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS AS AN INSTRUMENT OF SOCIAL PROGRESS: CHANGING SOVIET PERSPECTIVE ON THE THIRD WORLD, (1972-1987)
Notwithstanding Mrs. Gandhi's landslide victory in the 1971 Parliamentary elections followed by an impressive victory in March 1972 Assembly elections in the states, the political situation in the country was far from stable. A succession of monsoon failures resulted in poor harvest and economic difficulties were further aggravated by the steep hike in oil prices in the wake of the 1973 Arab-Israel conflict. India's gross domestic product which had grown by 3.7% in the 1960-70 period, declined to 1.2% between 1970 and 1974. The Left in the Congress was becoming critical of Mrs. Gandhi's failure to implement anti-monopoly legislation effectively. An intra-party revolt in Orissa, language riots in Assam, agitation on job reservations in Andhra and student unrest in large parts of the country marred the political scene. Even then unmindful of these negative trends Moscow continued to give direct political support to the ruling Congress party. At a public meeting in Delhi during his December 1973 visit to India, Brezhnev said that the Congress "... has put forward an important democratic programme of vast social and economic changes aimed at improving the life of the people. It has proclaimed socialism as its goal. It is known that wide political and public circles of India come out for socialism."

The Congress Party's return to power in Uttar Pradesh Assembly elections in February 1974 in spite of growing popular unrest over food shortages and rising prices made the opposition resort to direct methods of agitation to dislodge it from power. A spontaneous students' movement in Gujarat led to the dissolution of the State Assembly. The movement, however, collapsed under its own contradictions. After the failure Jayaprakash Narayan launched a Gujarat-type stir in Bihar on the twin issues of corruption and authoritarianism of Mrs. Gandhi's government and demanded dissolution of Bihar Assembly.

The Soviet media decried the agitation in Bihar led by Jayaprakash Narayan as "one of the specific forms of his (Jayaprakash Narayan) subversive tactics". Jayaprakash was accused of attempts to destroy the "present Parliamentary democratic structure" and replace it with an absolutely new political system based on "non-party democracy" under which there would be no general elections, no political parties and all legislative and executive bodies from top to bottom, would be composed of people appointed by "general agreement". Soviet political commentator Viktorov observed, "It is not at all surprising, therefore, that Narayan's movement is backed to

the hilt by the religious and chauvinistic Jan Sangh, the semi-fascist R.S.S. and other right-wing reactionary parties and organisations. Some of them, according to the Indian press, are financed not only by the monopolies and landowners but by western intelligence services as well."³ He also noted that in Narayan's anti-government campaign the Indian Maoists are also taking part and that it was likewise supported by the socialist leaders and the leaders of the parallel Communist Party (CPM) "for whom the Indian National Congress and Mrs. Gandhi's government and not the Right-wing reactionary forces are enemy No.1."

The New Times article referred to above, expressed satisfaction over Jayaprakash Narayan's alleged failure to win over "in any large-numbers the workers and other wage earners, as well as other representatives of low castes and tribes, that is, the sections of the population which, because of social and property status, suffer most from the present economic difficulties and the food shortages." It attributed Narayan's reliance on "the students and other young people of petty bourgeois origin, on the urban and rural middle class" to his failure to win over the working class and people belonging to the scheduled castes and the scheduled tribes. Jayaprakash Narayan was accused of flattering the youth by calling

³. Ibid.
the students as "the only revolutionary forces" and of praising Mao Tse-tung as "the greatest revolutionary borne in a thousand years." The article under reference also noted that "Narayan's movement has been somewhat on the decline", and hailed the decision of the Congress Working Committee in October 1974 to launch a national counter-offensive to foil the attempts of the Fascist forces and mentioned the agreement on joint action by the Indian National Congress and the Communist Party of India in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh.

In the Soviet assessment of the crisis developing in India in 1974 both objective and subjective factors played their role. Besides such objective factors as drought, flood, energy crisis on account of rising oil prices, subjective factors like non-cooperation of the big business with the government by reducing investments in industrial development and pressurising the government to lift controls over purchase of grain and its sale at fair prices further aggravated the economic difficulties which in turn made it possible for the reactionaries to exploit popular discontent and channelise it into a

4. Ibid. In a later article V.Zhitomirsky thus wrote about J.P. Narayan: "This 'independent' who took for his watchword the Maoist shibboleth of 'total revolution', has been given diverse support by the chauvinistic Jan Sangh party and other reactionary forces." ("India: the People's Will", New Times, No.31, 1975, pp.12-13).
political agitation. The big farmers and traders were accused of hoarding foodgrains to force up the grain prices. The Soviets also felt concerned over the merger of "seven Right-wing parties and groups" in a new political party called Bharatiya Lok Dal with Swatantra members occupying key posts in it. The New Times article by Viktorov referred to the attempts of the Rightists to strengthen their position in the executive body of the ruling party itself and blamed the "growing hesitancy and inconsistency displayed by the Indian National Congress in implementing its own programme and its readiness to make concessions to big business, landowners, rich farmers, wholesalers and foreign capital" for creating conditions for the success of the Rightist elements.

The Soviet press commented adversely on the demand for Mrs. Gandhi's resignation following the June 12 judgement of the Allahabad High Court pronouncing her guilty of election malpractices. Thus A. Usvatov in an article published in New Times quoted from Indian press that Mrs. Gandhi was indicted by the Court only on two of the five charges which were partly technical and that the more substantial charges against her could not be proved. The Soviet journalist called the campaign launched by Jayaprakash as an "extra-parliamentary movement ... led

5. Ibid.

by the notorious J.P. Narayan. The election petition filed in the Allahabad High Court by Raj Narain who was called a "Right-wing socialist" and the J.P. agitation were described in the New Times article as "links of one and the same chain". The author of the article highlighted mass demonstrations and meetings in support of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and gave prominence to the statement issued by the Central Secretariat of the National Council of the Communist Party of India which warned against "yielding to blackmail and pressure from right reactionaries ... including those within the Indian National Congress" and called upon the government to take "all necessary steps to implement as quickly as possible the programme of radical socio-economic reforms adopted by the ruling party".

When on the night of June 25-26, 1975 Mrs. Gandhi proclaimed a state of internal emergency leading to imposition of press censorship and arrest of J.P. Narayan, Morgrji Desai and other opposition leaders along with their thousands of supporters Moscow gave unequivocal support to the measures taken by Mrs. Gandhi. A Pravda political commentator argued that the "right-wing opposition" had been trying for some time to create "an atmosphere of chaos, anarchy and lawlessness in the country" and that

7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
the steps taken by the government were "timely and necessary".9

Soviet political observers Y. Gotlober and Y. Shtykanov in their article published in New Times soon after proclamation of emergency by Mrs. Gandhi quoted the latter that the J.P. movement was "closely following the pattern of lies and deception employed by Fascism in Europe".10

They likened J.P. Narayan's call for "total revolution" to remove the government "if necessary by force, if it bars the way to this revolution" to Mao Tse-tung's "cultural revolution" in China. They noted that J.P. Narayan had urged the army "not to carry out the decisions and the orders of the Central Government" and that Charan Singh, Chairman of the B.L.D. had threatened the people with "Civil War".

Gotlober and Shtykanov commented that the measures taken by Mrs. Gandhi's government met with "understanding and approval in Indian democratic circles". They also observed that the situation "on the whole is normal and reliable barriers to anarchy and violence have been raised" and that "the steps taken by the government to remove the danger to the internal security of the Republic presented by the Right forces have proved both timely and


Referring to the "world-wide reverberations" of the Indian events, the Soviet observers charged the "Western capitalist press" with giving "biased reports" about the steps taken to stabilise the situation in India and also accused the Chinese of giving encouragement to the "reactionary intrigues". Another New Times article also mentioned that the situation in India was stabilising. The author rebutted the anti-Indian propaganda conducted by the London Times and the New York Times which insisted that there was a crisis of democracy in India and observed, "The tears being shed over the fate of democracy are nothing but so much hypocrisy".

The 20-point programme announced, by Mrs. Gandhi to improve the life of the people and end poverty by taking steps to intensify industrial output and carry through progressive reforms in agriculture came in for praise by the Soviet media. Thus the New Times correspondent in New Delhi wrote, "There is already news of a universal reduction in food prices. The tough steps taken against hoarders have forced them to bring to market hidden stores of grain, oil and other products. At the same time wholesale purchases are being made to build up government food stores against rising prices." 13

11. Ibid.


The laudatory tone of the Soviet press persisted and the 20-point economic programme of Mrs. Gandhi was hailed by A. Usvatov as covering "many issues vital for the people". He noted the statement in Parliament by C. Subramaniam, Minister for Finance, who said that the programme was only "a beginning in the new direction and that further steps would be taken to enable the country to build a new society." A 25% increase in the plan allocation for the year 1975-76 (82% to be derived from internal sources) and the expected rise of 5-6% in the industrial production as against the 2% in the previous year were highlighted by Usvatov who also mentioned the amendment of new agrarian laws in Maharashtra and enactment of laws in Orissa, U.P., Rajasthan and some other States forbidding the working of the promissory notes. Other achievements of emergency listed by the Soviet commentator included among others punishment to black marketeers, tax evaders and hoarders, tightening of state discipline, increased efficiency of the civil service, curbing of corruption and reduction of prices, etc. "The actions taken by the Indian government against internal and external reactionaries were responded to with full understanding in the Soviet Union", wrote Y. Tsaplin in the *International Affairs* of August 1976. Earlier the

Pravda asserted on 25 January 1976 that the emergency was necessitated by attempts of "internal subversion" aided by external forces to capitalise on the difficulties posed by the 1975 economic crisis to create an atmosphere of pandemonium - "there are few who question the timeliness and expediency of the measures undertaken by the government." Interestingly, instead of making any critical reference to the government action at the instance of Mrs. Gandhi's powerful younger son Sanjay Gandhi, to demolish houses in the name of town planning and beautification, the Soviet journalist wrote approvingly that "in the capital itself, a programme of slum clearance and allocation of housing plots for the homeless has been drafted."15 The establishment of joint committees in various states to implement economic reforms, primarily agrarian reforms, including representatives of the C.P.I. was welcomed as a "major positive development" by A. Usvatov.

In a subsequent write-up in the same Soviet weekly Soviet journalist V. Skosyrev even praised the decision of the Conference of employers in public and private sector and representatives of the trade unions not to resolve to strikes and lockouts. Skosyrev wrote, "A sharp decrease in the number of labour disputes, which formerly paralysed whole branches of industry for weeks, has also helped liven up the economy. There has been a noticeable increase

15. Ibid.
in the output of steel, coal and electrical energy. As a result, wholesale and retail prices have stopped rising and have even dropped in some instances.\(^\text{16}\) Praising the Congress leaders for strictly abiding by the Constitution, the Soviet commentator pointed out that the opposition parties continued to function legally and were in office in two States (Gujarat and Tamil Nadu) and one Union Territory (Goa). He further noted that 40% of the persons detained after June 26 had been released by mid-September which spoke of the "normalisation of the political situation." The instructions of the Central Government to the State Governments to speed up enactment of laws on ceiling on land and distribution of surplus land among farm labourers and landless peasants were particularly commended by Skosyrev who wrote: "The government and the executive of the ruling Indian National Congress are making fresh efforts to eliminate feudal survivals in the countryside."\(^\text{17}\)

The 75th session of the Indian National Congress held from 29 September 1975 to 1 January 1976 at Chandigarh which coincided with the 90th anniversary of the founding of the party evoked a positive response in the Soviet press. In an article published in Soviet Weekly \textit{New Times} on this occasion the government was complimented for stabilising the Indian economic situation, putting an end


\(^\text{17}\) Ibid.
to the spiralling of prices and for its decision to assume control over 3,000 filling stations and the large oil refinery operated by the Burmah Shell in Bombay. The expected rise in agricultural output and the government's anti-feudal measures were also welcomed. In his write-up "Indian National Congress Conference", Vasily Tretyakov referred to the "resounding victory of the Indian National Congress in the Panchayat elections held in December 1975 in the Gujarat State, (the citadel of the oppositionist forces) and attributed it to the anti-feudal measures undertaken by the government. 18

An article by A. Usvatov to mark the Republic Day anniversary in January 1976 struck a note of optimism. The author wrote: "This year the people of India are observing the Republic's 26th anniversary in an atmosphere of national patriotic uplift, of hope for more rapid progress and better life for the broad masses," 19

Justifying the imposition of emergency on the basis of its achievements, the Soviet commentator further added: "The stage of emergency introduced last summer has made it possible to beat off the assault of the Right-wing reactionaries and the ultra-left forces which were clearly bent on spreading anarchy and chaos in the country in order to seize state power, divert the Republic from the

path of progressive development and emasculate its peaceful anti-imperialist foreign policy.\footnote{Usvatov also highlighted the significance of stable and rapid growth of production in the public sector "which had always been strongly attacked by the Right." In this context he mentioned that the 75th session of the ruling Indian National Congress reaffirmed that the commanding heights of the economy must continue to rest with the public sector.}

The 10th anniversary of Mrs. Gandhi's rule received attention in the Soviet press. Viktor Sidenko, \textit{New Times} Correspondent in Delhi quoted the assessment by the Indian press of a decade of Mrs. Gandhi's rule describing it as a "decade of achievement".\footnote{He cited the opinion of the Delhi Press "that Indira Gandhi's decade in office has been a period of important transformations aimed at consolidating the state sector of the economy, restricting this sphere of operation of monopoly capital and dismantling the feudal system of landownership".}

The imposition of Presidential rule in the Southern State of Tamil Nadu in February 1976 was welcomed by the \textit{New Times} correspondent in Delhi Viktor Sidenko as a step supported by "all the national patriotic forces". \footnote{"The developments in this state", wrote Sidenko, "were fraught with danger for the country's unity and progress."} The

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20. \textit{Ibid.}


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dismissal of the DMK ministry headed by M. Karunanidhi and institution of an enquiry into charges of abuse of office, corruption and embezzlement was also prominently mentioned in the write-up by Sidenko. The author attributed the defection of 7 members of the Janata Front Parties in Gujarat leading to the fall of the state government to the "openly anti-national stance" of the front which made some of its members to quit the front. The resignation of the government headed by Babu Bhai Patel in Gujarat on 24 March 1976 was hailed in the Soviet press as a "blow to the Right". Its ouster was acclaimed as the fall of the last Rightist government in the Indian States. The fall of the Janata Front Party's government in Gujarat was attributed by the Soviet Weekly to its sabotage of implementation in the state of the 20-point programme of socio-economic reforms advanced by Indira Gandhi which it was alleged "evoked growing discontent among the masses as evidenced by the results of the December elections to the panchayats (village committees) in the state." In June 1976 Moscow played host to Mrs. Gandhi's entire family including her both sons and their wives and children. General-Secretary Brezhnev expressed satisfaction that the situation in India had stabilised as a result

23. Ibid.
25. Ibid.
of "firm and decisive steps she (Mrs. Gandhi) had taken to thwart the efforts of domestic and external reaction."

The Soviet leader also stated: "Your government's actions against external and internal action met with full understanding in the USSR. Reaction's attempt to launch an offensive encountered a resolute rebuff from all democratic forces of India." 26

Soviet political commentators lavished praise at the reforms in industrial management and agrarian relations following the declaration of emergency. Thus in his already cited article Sidenko noted the progress made with regard to implementation of the 15th point in Mrs. Gandhi's 20 point programme of reforms which dealt with workers' participation in industrial management. He mentioned that this reform has been implemented since 30 October 1975 in 670 undertakings. Sidenko also noted that 16,47,000 acres of surplus land under the land ceiling law has already been acquired and 4,24,000 acres of it has been distributed among landless peasants. He also mentioned that 50,000 bonded agricultural labourers have been freed from their obligation to work for repayment of their debts. The pet theme of Soviet writings in this period was unity of all progressive forces for effective realisation of the 20 point programme. The padyatras by C.P.I. workers to collect information about implementation of the programme in the countryside were highlighted in the Soviet

press. A write-up by New Times correspondent in New Delhi mentioned that "the idea of cooperation between the Indian National Congress and CPI is meeting with understanding among certain segments of the ruling party although it must be admitted that there are some in the Congress who are opposed to it." The Constitutional amendment declaring India a "democratic secular socialist republic" was also approvingly mentioned in the Soviet press as an indication that socialism has become the national objective.

A note of caution could also be noticed in Soviet writings of the period. Thus Sidenko wrote: "Although the situation in India is not in their favour, the possibility of the Right forces trying again to attack the Gandhi government's policies should not be excluded. Vigilance, reliance upon the broad masses and cooperation with all the patriotic, progressive forces are indispensible for the Indian National Congress". The Soviet press also focussed on the "disquiet" caused among the "democratic public" by influential quarters inside the ruling Indian National Congress coming out in support of the holding of a Constituent Assembly and expressed satisfaction over rejection of the move by the "left and democratic, national patriotic forces, including the progressives in the Indian National Congress led by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi."

27. V.Sidenko, op.cit.
28. Ibid.
Communist-baiting by Mrs. Gandhi's all powerful younger son Sanjay in the last days of Emergency must have caused concern to the Soviets even if they could not openly express it. Sanjay's ruthless drive for demolition of houses in the name of slum clearance, family planning excesses particularly on minorities and denigration of the public sector were leading to sharp differences with the C.P.I. Mrs. Gandhi announced her decision to go the polls in January 1977. Confident of her return to office, she desired to legitimise her power and prove her credentials as a democrat to the USA in order to remove the barriers in the path of forging closer ties with that country. The opposition leaders were released from prison and censorship of the press was suspended. Mrs. Gandhi had, however, miscalculated about the capability of her opponents to come together in a single party called the Janata to challenge her power in the elections. The C.P.I. fought the 1977 election in cooperation with Mrs. Gandhi's Congress party. The Soviet press and radio openly backed Mrs. Gandhi and conducted hostile propaganda against the Janata party. Even on the election eve the Pravda commented, "If the propagandist facade with which the Janata Party makes it appeal to the Indian electorate is removed, it appears as the direct tool of extreme reaction, the defender of landlord interests, financers, local and foreign monopolists." 30

During the election campaign not only the *Radio Peace and Progress* which the Soviets describe as independent of government control but *Izvestia* itself which is the organ of Soviet government openly denigrated the opposition. The Daily's New Delhi correspondent V. Skosyrev wrote: "The reactionaries are trying to consolidate their ranks as the elections approach. The leaders of the four Right-wing parties the Organisation Congress, the Jan Sangh, the B.L.D. and the Socialist Party have agreed to form a unified coalition called the Janata Party. The leadership of the alliance lacks a positive programme that can kindle the imagination of the average voter. The leaders of the Janata Party are driven together, only by their desire to remove Indira Gandhi's government from power at any cost."31

The *Izvestia* write-up on the Indian election campaign extolled the achievements of Mrs. Gandhi's government during the Emergency. The despatch from its New Delhi correspondent quoted above included the following passages: "Unquestionably much has been achieved in the 19 months since the government began to carry out its measures. The state has dealt a blow to black marketeers and smugglers. It has managed to stabilise the prices of necessities .... There have also been success in carrying out the agrarian reforms...."32 Raising the question of the chances of the

32. Ibid.
principal contending parties, the Soviet journalist referred to the Indian government's foreign policy which supported national liberation movements and development of relations with the Soviet Union and other socialist countries as a "contributing factor" in the resounding victory of the Indian National Congress in the 1971 elections. He, however, noted that the social base of the Indian reactionaries had survived and that the big business was trying to force the government to make new concessions to the private sector as the wealthy peasants and zamindars were blocking land reforms through their henchmen in the bureaucracy. Mentioning attempts by the Rightists to divide the patriotic and democratic forces by creating conflicts between the Congress and the Communist Party the Izvestia informed its readers about statements by the Congress Party leaders in West Bengal, Kerala, and a number of other states favouring negotiations with the Communists for mutual support in the elections. 35

A bias towards the Indian National Congress is visible in the New Times write-up by V. Tretyakov on the election manifestoes of the ruling Indian National Congress and the Janata party. It noted that the Indian National Congress has urged the voters to give it "a clear and unequivocal mandate to carry the nation forward unitedly to peace, progress and prosperity through democracy, secularism, and socialism, safeguarding the integrity of the

33. Ibid.
nation." Describing the Janata Party as a "bloc of right-wing parties and groupings", "demagogically" proclaiming the forthcoming election to be a "choice between freedom and slavery, between democracy and dictatorship" Tretyakov wrote that it was canvassing the support of the voters on the basis of promises to put an end to poverty within 10 years "without mentioning concrete steps."

Only after the announcement of the election results which must have come as a serious shock to Moscow one finds references in the Soviet press to mistakes and excesses during Emergency period. On the basis of comments of Indian press which placed the responsibility for Mrs. Gandhi's poll debacle upon the gross abuse of power in the Emergency period, I.Kovalev wrote in the Izvestia, "Mistakes and excesses in the implementation of measures that grew out of laws passed after the state of Emergency was declared in 1975 had an effect. The agrarian reforms proclaimed by the leaders of the Congress Party were brought to virtual standstill because of the opposition of the wealthy farmers. The Congress Party leadership antagonised part of the working class by reducing wage supplements." The "refusal" of the leaders of the ruling party in contrast to previous elections, to "cooperate with the C.P.I. in the majority of states" was also described by

Izvestia write-up as another important factor in the electoral reverses of the Congress Party besides the Emergency excesses and mistakes. Similarly, A. Usvatov wrote in the New Times, "As one gathers from Indian press reports, the opposition succeeded during the election campaign in bringing up cases of abuse of power during the state of emergency declared in June 1975 and the excesses for which the National Congress Youth Organisation was chiefly responsible during the government's family planning programme to reduce the country's birth rate. This provoked mounting discontent among the people which eventually told on the election returns. As for the country's basic issues of social and economic progress and improving living standard of masses, they were, as it were, relegated to the background. 36

For a while it appeared as though the victory of the Janata spelled doom for Soviet policy. Within five weeks of the election results Foreign Minister Gromyko landed in New Delhi for a fence-mending exercise with the Janata government. At the reception hosted for the Soviet Foreign Minister in New Delhi Atal Behari Vajpayee assured him "that the bonds of friendship between our two countries are strong enough to survive the demands of divergent system, the fate of an individual or the fortunes of a

political party. 37 Prime Minister Morarji Desai accepted the Soviet invitation to visit Moscow. The visit took place in October 1977. Morarji Desai emphasised in his speech at a reception in Moscow that Indo-Soviet relations were "not based on personalities or ideologies but on equality, national interest and common purposes." 38 Notwithstanding Desai's statement at his first press conference after becoming Prime Minister that the Indo-Soviet Treaty would be dormant and would not be allowed to come in the way of India's relations with third country, and Atal Behari Vajpayee's subsequent declaration that they would follow the path of "genuine non-alignment", the Janata government soon realised that any radical change in Mrs. Gandhi's policy towards the Soviet Union was not in India's national interest. The trade and economic ties and cooperation in the field of defence made the Janata leaders reconsider their earlier postures.

The Soviets also fully reciprocated the Janata government's desire for cordial Indo-Soviet ties. Moscow was trying to shed its old bias towards Mrs. Gandhi's Congress party. The Diary of Soviet-Indian Friendship (1977) published by the Information Department of the Soviet Embassy in New Delhi did not put the name of the Congress ministers to whom the Soviet leaders had sent greetings on the 26th

January. True, some reservations did remain about the Janata Party's economic programme. As New Times correspondent in Delhi, V. Tretyakov, observed in one of his write-ups on the Republic Day anniversary in 1978, "In the view of local observers, the Janata Party's economic programme has not yet been fully formulated and contains certain contradictions. After all, this party was formed less than a year ago by five different political organisations representing a wide range of views." Yet, the Soviet journalist emphasised the recognition by the Janata Party of the "leading role of the public sector and the importance of planning. He also noted the Industry Minister George Fernandes's announcement that a new five year plan would be adopted in near future, and that, while preserving the basic objective of rapid increase of production by small enterprises, the sixth five year plan would continue to focus attention on heavy industry, notably steel production and power development. Mentioning the increased American pressure on India's new rulers through Indian big business to increase the avenues for penetration of multinationals in the country's economy, the New Times write-up expressed satisfaction over reports in the Delhi press about Morarji Desai telling President Carter during the latter's Indian visit that India "maintained and would maintain very friendly relations with the

Soviet Union. Similarly, the Izvestia correspondent in Delhi wrote: "After the Janata Party came to power some people here predicted of worsening of Indo-Soviet relations. The new Indian government has refused these conjectures."

Faithful to its policy, which had become traditional by now, of maintaining cordial ties with the party in power, and the C.P.I. and ignoring the non-Communist opposition parties, the Soviets started distancing themselves from the Indian National Congress which performed the role of the main opposition party. The Soviet media observed silence on Mrs. Gandhi's Indian National Congress. The New Times, broke this silence by publishing a small column on the split which occurred in the party following a Conference held in Delhi on January 1 and 2, 1978 by the supporters of Mrs. Gandhi. This information was published under the rubric scanning the news. The New Times highlighted the joint statement by the Indian National Congress President K.B. Reddy and Indian National Congress Parliamentary group leader Y.B. Chavan that the holding of a "national conference" of the Indian National Congress members under the motto unity and strength was merely a cover-up for attempts to split the party along personal and factional lines. The weekly also reported K.B. Reddy's

40. Ibid.
41. Izvestia, 23 March 1978.
statement that the election of Mrs. Gandhi as the party president was "at variance with the Indian National Congress Charter and therefore unlawful." The other two occasions when the Soviet Weekly made a brief mention about Mrs. Gandhi and her Congress Party were the Congress victory in the Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh State Assemblies in February 1978 and Mrs. Gandhi's success in the by-election to the House of the People of the Indian Parliament held on 5 November 1978 in the constituency of Chikmagalur in the Karnataka state. On both occasions the reference to Mrs. Gandhi and her party was made in the regular scanning the news column.43

The resignation submitted by Morarji Desai on 15 July 1979 was followed by the appointment of Charan Singh as Prime Minister by President Sanjiva Reddy. Commenting on the crisis in the Janata Party the Soviet media referred to the "fragility of the Janata Party as a political force consisting of "heterogeneous elements". "The amalgamation in the spring of 1977 of five parties then in opposition in the Janata Party was ... largely a formal move and was not accompanied by measures essential for cementing the party's ideological and political unity" - wrote A.Knyazev in New Times.44 In another article in the same Soviet

Weekly, A. Knyazev wrote favourably about Charan Singh's first statement over the radio on 28 July 1979. He noted the new leadership's stress on concentrating on such serious socio-economic problems as unemployment, the continuing rise of prices and inflation, the substantial disproportions between the incomes and living standards of different strata of the population, and corruption in the state machinery. Knyazev also mentioned Charan Singh's bias in favour of small enterprises in industry and agriculture without de-emphasizing the importance of the construction "where necessary" of large scale enterprises both private and state-owned.

The inclusion in the new government of leading old Congressmen was interpreted as an indication that Charan Singh intended seriously to tackle the solution of the complex social and economic problems facing the country.

The Janata split in 1979 resulting in the ouster of Right-wing groups from power, the support given to Charan Singh by many Indian National Congress M.Ps including followers of former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and Charan Singh's announcement that his foreign policy would continue to be based on non-alignment were reassuring factors for Soviets who were, however, not sure of the survival of the new government for long. A subsequent write-up on India by Alexander Bovin was, however, not so favourable to Charan Singh. Bovin wrote that Charan Singh

was seen in India as the "spokesman of the well-to-do-farmers who favoured the pre-eminent development of agriculture and of light industry". He was said to favour a reduced role for the public sector, and a slowed-down rate of industrialisation. 46 The Soviet commentator observed, "... the fact remains that people are weary of the endless kaleidoscoping of political leaders and slogans, of the epidemic of party defections, and of the plethora of unredeemed promises." 47

Unlike in 1977, the Soviets did not publicly compromise themselves by showing their preference for the ruling coalition of parties. The initial Soviet reaction to Mrs. Gandhi's victory suggested that the vote was not so much "for" her as "against" the discredited Janata and the Lok Dal coalitions. Thus A. Usvatov wrote, "The disappointment of the population in the political opponents of the INC (I) has proved great indeed. During the Janata Party's rule, specially in its latest period, the prices rose steadily, the unemployment problem did not become less sharp, and bloody conflicts on religious, communal or caste grounds repeatedly flared-up in different parts of the country." 48 The Pravda correspondent's reaction was that the elections in India reflected the serious change


47. Ibid.

in the balance of forces that had taken place after less than three years of rule by the Janata Party and the coalition government. According to him the results showed that the Indian National Congress Party had the greatest popularity in the country. The Soviet journalist noted the absence of any opposition party with a more or less significant number of seats in the Parliament. He also made a special mention of increase in the representation of the Communist parties in the Parliament from 36 to 53 which he attributed to agreement on a common list of candidates. Welcoming the new balance of forces in the new Parliament and throughout the country the Pravda correspondent V. Shurygin commented that it would as a whole "create favourable conditions for the restoration of political stability."49

While the Soviets welcomed Mrs. Gandhi's return to power in the interest of political stability in India which was likely to leave less room for manoeuvring in South Asian affairs by the Chinese, they soon began to develop a wariness towards Mrs. Gandhi. Since her return to power Mrs. Gandhi showed a distinct disinclination to pursue her old pre-1977 radical left-of-the centre policies. The Soviet move into Afghanistan was sought to be exploited by Mrs. Gandhi to widen the country's diplomatic options. Mrs. Gandhi showed her interest in a more balanced relationship with the U.S. and was keen to continue

the process of reconciliation with China which she herself had initiated in 1976 to be advanced by the Janata government. Brezhnev's Indian visit in December 1980 was not returned by Mrs. Gandhi until September 1982. Mrs. Gandhi was not happy at the hostile stance taken by the C.P.I. towards her government in the post-1980 period and she wanted the Soviets to pressurise the C.P.I. The C.P.I. decision at the 11th Party Congress acknowledging that the Party's support for the Emergency was "wrong from the beginning" and that the Party "insufficiently realised that the fight against the increasingly anti-people internal policies of the Indira Gandhi government had to be given priority ... even while supporting its anti-imperialist foreign policy as well as its progressive internal measures" irked Mrs. Gandhi who viewed the presence of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union delegation at the C.P.I. Congress as an endorsement of the latter's decision. According to I.K. Gujral, former Indian Ambassador to Moscow, the Soviets were distressed by the step-by-step denigration of the C.P.I. during the Emergency and the 1977 election results made clear to them the high price the C.P.I. had paid for close cooperation with the Congress (I) and were now hesitant to advise the C.P.I. to squander its "hard-earned credibility." During

Brezhnev's December 1980 visit to India Mrs. Gandhi said at a Civic reception in his honour, "understandably, we face onslaught from the 'Right' and, not so understandably, from the 'Left'."  

Mrs. Gandhi launched an offensive against the ruling Communist coalitions in West Bengal and Kerala in early 1981 and split the Indo-Soviet Cultural Society the same year. Significantly at the 26th Congress of the C.P.S.U. Brezhnev made no laudatory reference to Mrs. Gandhi's domestic policies, confining himself to foreign policy. "Joint action with peaceful and independent India will continue to be one of the important areas of Soviet foreign relations."

During her Soviet visit in September 1982 Mrs. Gandhi was reported to have raised twice the question of left parties in India trying to weaken and destabilise her government. She held the Soviets indirectly responsible for the conduct of the C.P.I.  

One does not know the connection if any between Mrs. Gandhi's request to the Soviets to restrain the C.P.I. and the appearance of an article by Soviet Party academic R. Ulyanovsky in the November-December issue of Soviet magazine *Asia and Africa Today* on the Indian National Congress containing highly laudatory references to the leadership of Mrs. Gandhi and an appeal for the "liquidation of

disunity between the democratic movement and the forces of social progress."\textsuperscript{54} The timing of the article was also significant. It was published on the eve of elections to the State Assembly in Andhra. S. Nihal Singh in his recent study of Indo-Soviet relations attributed this article to Soviet anxiety to assuage Mrs. Gandhi's hurt feelings.\textsuperscript{55} Ulyanovsky emphasised that Mrs. Gandhi's Congress Party came to power again by winning the "trust of the people, and, most important, that of the lower strata of society." Describing the Right-wing reactionary forces as a "dangerous alternative to Indian National Congress power at the national level", Ulyanovsky warned, "This is the chief menace, and it is looming over larger on the political horizon." The Soviet ideologue further added, "The struggle against it is making Indian National Congress headed by Indira Gandhi, a broad organisation with relative historical progressiveness which it of course uses to consolidate its popularity and well deserved authority." Mrs. Gandhi was portrayed by Ulyanovsky as an "outstanding stateswoman of Asia." The Soviet academic showed awareness of "tendencies towards greater concentration of power

\textsuperscript{54} For full translated text of the article, see Mainstream, 18 December 1982, pp.25-29.


in the hands of one person" supported by "influential circles of national capital and referred to proposals to amend the Constitution made overtly on several occasions. He was not sure whether the Congress would resort to such a means of retaining power or it would remain faithful to the democratic institutions established by Nehru. He, however, opined that there could be no better way of "consolidating its authority than to turning to Nehru's socialist ideals seeking to give them realistic content through a policy of social progress in the interests of the Indian working people." 57

Whatever the reason for publishing this article on the Indian National Congress by one of the Soviet Union's leading experts on the national liberation movements, it cannot be denied that it represented a serious Soviet assessment of the leading socio-political forces active on the Indian scene. Despite some disillusionment over the pragmatic course followed by Mrs. Gandhi since her coming back to power again in 1980, Moscow still realised that the forces represented by Mrs. Gandhi's Congress were its safest bet in India in the given circumstances. Mrs. Gandhi's Indian National Congress in the 80s might be quite different from the organisation working under her leadership in the 70s, still it was preferable in the Soviet view to a more reactionary alternative. Mrs. Gandhi's

57. Ibid.
Left-of-the-Centre policies of the 70s might have changed
to simply Centrist policies in the 80s, her diluted anti-
imperialist policy of self reliant development was still
much better than the openly pro-imperialist policies
likely to be followed by the forces poised to replace her
power. A known Devil was after all much better than an
unknown Angel! Thus Ulyanovsky characterised the Indian
National Congress as the "forces of social progress" which
must be supported by the democratic movement against the
Right-wing danger. The fear of repetition of 1977 remains
in the centre of Ulyanovsky's appraisal of Indian National
Congress. He discounted the possibility of the Congress
Party and the political system of the country "reverting
to the situation obtaining in the 1950s, early 1960s."58
"The change of ruling parties at the centre, the increased
influence of the opposition, and the experience of coalition
rule - not just at the Centre but in many states as well - all this distinguishes the situation in the early
1980s as quite different from the situation during the
first three decades of independence" - wrote Ulyanovsky.59
He also added, "The fall of Indira Gandhi's Government
in 1977 led to material changes in the country's party
and political system. Although the rule of the Janata
coalition proved to be short-lived and although Indira
Gandhi's party won a very convincing victory at the 1980

58. Ibid., p.29.
59. Ibid.
elections, the trends and changes of the late 1970s did not - nor could they - vanish without a trace."^60

The parliamentary elections held in December 1984 after the assassination of Mrs. Gandhi gave a powerful mandate to the Indian National Congress (I) headed by Mrs. Gandhi's son Rajiv Gandhi. The election results which gave a record number of seats (401 out of 508) to the Congress Party led by Rajiv Gandhi were widely hailed by Soviet Commentators. The Soviets were particularly happy at the crushing defeat of the Right-wing conservative national parties whose representation in the lower house of the Parliament, as Soviet journalist V. Georgiev noted in his article published in International Affairs, dropped from 72 to 15.\textsuperscript{61} The Congress victory was attributed by the Soviet commentator to popular desire for strengthening the national unity, independence and sovereignty of the republic threatened by separatist forces backed by imperialist circles and the belief that Rajiv Gandhi would follow the course of Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi. The International Affairs article under reference observed that "following this course (of Nehru and Indira Gandhi), India has advanced a long way on the path of progress and won high international prestige."

Pointing to the impressive economic successes scored by

\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., p.25.

India Georgiev stressed that cooperation with the Socialist countries, primarily with the Soviet Union, greatly facilitated India's achievements.

Georgiev also alleged that the imperialists "are now trying to lull India's public vigilance and to create the impression that the U.S. truly wants good and friendly relations with India." Referring to the high-ranking visitors from Washington, Senators and Generals harping on propaganda assertions of common adherence of India and the U.S.A. to ideals of democracy", he observed, "This 'diplomacy of smiles' is complemented by Washington's increased attempts to use in its own interest the growing need of the Indian economy for modern industrial equipment, specifically electronic equipment, computers and advance technology." 62 Thus some nervousness about a possible tilt towards America under Rajiv Gandhi could be noticed in the International Affairs article. The author wrote in a rather self-assuring vein, "The Indian and world public responded with satisfaction to the statement by Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi that his government would continue to pursue the policy 'bequeathed' by Jawaharlal Nehru and creatively enriched by Indira Gandhi." He noted that the government policy laid special stress on modernising the national economy through developing both the public and private sectors and introducing advance technology and other achievements of the scientific and

62. Ibid., p.45.
technological revolution on a large scale. Rajiv Gandhi's efforts to create a new administrative culture for service of the masses, his new national policy on the education and the operation of the 7th five year plan with its emphasis on food, employment and productivity came in for appreciation by the author who also showered encomiums on Rajiv Gandhi for confirming by practical actions his government's foreign policy priority for extensive support for the struggle for peace, continuation of policy of non-alignment and enhancement of the role of the non-aligned states. Rajiv Gandhi's declaration to resume 20-point programme was particularly highlighted by Georgiev.

India's initiative for organising a meeting of six heads of states or governments in Delhi in January 1985 to focus attention on measures to halt the arms race, to prevent militarisation of the outer space and to strengthen world peace was hailed by the Soviet publicist.

The programme of the Indian National Congress (I) under the leadership of Rajiv Gandhi continues to draw appreciation from influential party intellectuals in the USSR. Thus writing in the 1985-1986 Soviet Year Book on India published from Moscow in 1987, P.V. Kutsobin observed, "At the present time the Indian National Congress (I) sees its main tasks in the preservation of unity and territorial integrity of the country, in implementation of technical modernisation of economy and declares the
necessity for struggle against poverty. At the May 1985 meeting of the All India Congress Committee, faith in socialism and principles of planned development was again declared and the state sector was viewed as the basic instrument for raising the level of industrialisation. However, Kutsobin hastened to strike a note of anxiety. He added, "At the same time these practical steps of the government, the new budget which made important concessions to big business in the form of liberalised imports, expansion of economic and trade relations with the West and the trans-national corporations, could lead to considerable negative changes in the economic policy of the ruling party." 

In the field of foreign policy Kutsobin noted that the leadership of the Congress Party was devoting great attention to the questions of preservation of peace, prevention of nuclear war and other burning problems of our times. It supports the strengthening of international position of India and its active role in the non-aligned movement and world affairs. But he also observed that although great significance was attached to cooperation between India and USSR and other socialist countries, "at the same time in the Indian National Congress (I) leadership the efforts of leaders favouring closeness of India

with the USA and other Western powers have of late become more active." Kutsobin also noted that intra-party elections have not taken place in the Congress for more than 12 years and the party organisation in the states continues to be plagued as before by factional struggle. Soviet political observers like Pravda editor V. Afanasyev and P.V. Kutsobin have referred to the support of the Communist Party of India to the government of the Indian National Congress (I) in its policy for preservation of peace, non-alignment, friendship and cooperation with the Soviet Union and prevention of the nuclear war. According to Kutsobin the C.P.I. expresses its readiness to support the "positive steps of the government in the interest of unity and integrity of the country, its security and defence of peace in the whole world as also its steps in the interests of the people." According to him the C.P.I. is of the opinion that "questions of unity and integrity of the country, defeat of external aggression, preservation of peace in the whole world are extraordinarily important for all patriotic anti-imperialist and secular democratic forces including such forces inside the INC(I)." He, however, also notes the declaration of the C.P.I. that "in so far as the present government continues to follow as before the

64. Ibid., p.178.
65. Ibid., p.179.
capitalist path of development it is not in a position to resolve the sharp political and economic problems facing the country" and that "as such the C.P.I. would continue in future to play the role of left opposition" and "conduct struggle against anti-people, anti-democratic and similar steps and policies of the government."

Kutsobin also emphasised that the C.P.I. is always inclined to distance itself from retrograde actions of the Right-reactionary forces and fights against them. A similar position in relation to the government of the Indian National Congress (I) is followed by the C.P.I.(M) - wrote Kutsobin. According to him the C.P.I. (M) on the whole supports the foreign policy efforts to preserve unity and territorial integrity of the country and opposes the internal anti-people policy of the Indian National Congress (I).  

V. Afanasyev's series of three articles published in Pravda on his return from India after participating in the Indian National Congress Centenary Celebrations in Bombay (December 1985) may be cited as evidence of balanced Soviet view of the social character and achievements of the politics of the C.P.I. (M).

66. Ibid., p.179. In his article "India Today" published in Pravda of 20 January 1986 on his return from India after participation in the centenary celebrations of the Indian National Congress, V.Afanasyev also casually mentioned the support by the C.P.I. to the government's foreign policy and efforts to preserve India's unity and territorial integrity. Afanasyev, however, did not say anything about the C.P.I.(M)’s support.
of the Indian National Congress. According to Afanasyev, India's oldest party, the Indian National Congress (I) was formed in December 1885 by a group of liberal intellectuals who represented the bourgeoisie and landowners. Beginning as a small group of politicians the party under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi gradually developed into a mass and most influential political force which has been at the helm since August 1947 with a short interval between March 1977 and January 1980.

The social basis of the Indian National Congress, wrote Afanasyev, has markedly grown and changed over a century. In his view, "Today it represents the interests of various groups of the Indian bourgeoisie, the petty bourgeois sections of the town and country as well as the intelligentsia. It has been invariably influential among peasants and workers." 67

Afanasyev then proceeds to list the achievements of the Indian National Congress from Nehru to Rajiv Gandhi. Nehru in his opinion began a reorganisation of India's socio-economic system inherited from its colonial past. The 500 odd feudal principalities and large estates of feudal lords and landlords were abolished. India's administrative system was reorganised. The government adopted a policy of industrialisation and of establishing a major public sector in the economy on the basis of development according to plan. The foundations of India's

foreign policy, with non-alignment as its cornerstone was also laid down under Nehru. Commenting on Indian National Congress declaration about its goal of a socialist pattern of society, Afanasyev stressed that the elimination of the private ownership had not been envisaged. A mixed economy coexisting with public and private sector was declared an economic basis. "That is how matters stand today as well" - observed Afanasyev.

Coming to Indira Gandhi's period Afanasyev wrote that in 1969-1974 the Indian National Congress government headed by Mrs. Gandhi, effected a number of progressive socio-economic reforms. The main private banks, system of social insurance and some enterprises of coal and textile industries were nationalised. Pensions and other privileges of Maharajahs and Rajahs were abolished. Laws were passed on reducing the permitted limits of landownerships by individuals and on distribution of surplus land among landless peasants. The practical implementation of those laws was actively resisted by the property classes. In spite of sufficient economic progress, social inequality continued growing in India. In June 1975 a state of emergency was imposed when social tensions markedly increased and Right-wing opposition became active. Some progressive social and economic measures were taken within the 20-point programme proclaimed in July 1975. Afanasyev did not mince words about "gross misuse of power" during the emergency and wrote that "attacks against the rights of working people and their
democratic gains kept growing." "All that caused dis-
content among the masses and resulted in the defeat of
the Indian National Congress in the March 1977 elec-
tions."

Mrs. Gandhi's return to power in 1980 was attri-
buted by Afanasyev to her use of "vast political experi-
ence and her talent of influencing the masses." Afanasy-
yev referred to the victory of the Indian National
Congress in the December 1984 elections as spectacular.
Commenting on the internal and external policy of the
Indian National Congress (I) Afanasyev wrote that the
party sees its main tasks in keeping the country's unity
and territorial integrity, in technological modernisa-
tion, and in putting an end to poverty. In foreign
policy the Indian National Congress (I), he wrote,
actively comes out in favour of India's strong inter-
national positions, leadership in the non-alignment move-
ment, for world peace and the prevention of a nuclear war.
He also mentioned that great significance has been
attached to the development and strengthening of India's
friendship and cooperation with the USSR and other
socialist countries.

Unlike Kutsobin, Afanasyev did not mention reaffir-
mation of faith in socialism, planned economy and public
sector by Rajiv Gandhi. He, however, did not strike a
note of anxiety over a section of the Indian National
Congress leadership trying to bring India closer to the
United States. Afanasyev did write about the demand in
some quarters that "free enterprise be encouraged, imports increased, and more trade and economic links established with the West." Referring to his discussions with top ranking Indian officials and ministers in Rajiv Gandhi's government, Afanasyev wrote that all of them were of the view that economic "liberalisation" did not threaten India's independence, economy or culture and that India would never allow itself to be plunged into the debt squeeze that plagued many Asian, African and Latin American nations.

Afanasyev's Pravda article also mentioned that corporations, both domestic and foreign, played a paramount role in India's industrialisation, holding 75% of stocks owned by all private companies. He wrote, "The influence of corporations on the Indian economy seems to be increasingly growing. This prevents the country from getting anywhere near to overcoming its poverty and under-development, the cause of suffering and frustration for millions upon millions of people." 

P. Kutsobin in his already mentioned article dedicated to the commemoration of the centenary of the Indian National Congress referred to the reaffirmation of the Congress commitment to socialism by Rajiv Gandhi at the Bombay session of the party. He also quoted Rajiv's statement that the secret of the Party's century long

existence lay in its refusal to impose a monolithic set of ideas on the country. He disagreed with Rajiv Gandhi that the strength of the party was explained by the existence of different points of view in its ranks.

"The experience shows that the Party's weakness also lies in it since there is lack of clarity and unified understanding of the paths and methods for solving the burning problems before the country in the party leadership" - observed Kutsobin. The leading Party analyst wrote, "There is no doubt that the future of the Congress - a party which has dominated the political scene in the country during the course of an entire century - in many ways depends on how successfully it can together with the healthy forces of the nation cope with the task of overcoming the "old enemies of India"* and at the same time solve the problems that have cropped up in the recent years - separatism, terrorism, centrifugal tendencies which are threatening the unity and territorial integrity of the country."

To sum up, the recent Soviet appraisal of the Indian National Congress has on the whole remained positive notwithstanding the tilt towards the West in the name of modernisation of economy, economic liberalisation, pragmatism, etc. The 27th Congress of the Communist Party of

* Kutsobin was referring to Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's speech on 5 January 1985 in which he defined the struggle for solution of the basic problems of the country as a "war against old enemies of India - poverty, unemployment, disease and illiteracy."

the Soviet Union in February/March 1986 heralded the beginning of a new approach to the national liberation movement and bourgeois regimes in the Third World countries. While reaffirming the solidarity of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union with the forces of national liberation and social emancipation and the Soviet course towards close interaction with socialist-oriented countries, revolutionary democratic parties and the non-aligned movement, the political report presented to the Congress by General-Secretary Gorbachev declared, "The Soviet public is prepared to go on promoting links with non-Communist movements and organisations including religious organisations militating against war."71 The report further noted, "We are living in a world of realities and are building our international policy in keeping with the specific features of the present phase of international development. A creative analysis of this phrase and vision of prospects have led us to a conclusion that is highly significant. Now, as never before, it is important to find ways for closer and more productive cooperation with governments, parties and mass organisations and movements that are genuinely concerned about destinies of peace on earth, with all peoples in order to build an all-embracing system of international security."72

71. XXVII C.P.S.U. Congress Documents and Resolutions, New Delhi, 1986, p.95.
72. Ibid., p.96.
Similarly, the new edition of the party programmes adopted at the 27th Party Congress also contained the following formulation: "The C.P.S.U. stands for the development of contacts with all national progressive parties holding anti-imperialist and patriotic positions. Relations between the Soviet Union and newly free countries have demonstrated that there also exists a realistic basis for cooperation with those young states that are following the capitalist road of development." The changed Soviet perception of developments in the third world was also reflected in the order in which Ligachev welcomed the delegations to the 27th Party Congress. In the order followed by Kremlin's second most powerful leader the Communist and Workers Parties of the socialist states were placed at the top, followed by "ruling parties from Africa, Asia and Latin America which have embarked on the path of social progress and national liberation." The Communist and Workers Parties from Western Europe, Asia, Africa and the United States were placed at the third place with the "revolutionary democratic parties and national democratic parties" put at the bottom. Thus Arjun Singh representing the Indian National Congress at the 27th Party Congress got precedence over Babrak Karmal of Afghanistan and Mengistu of Ethiopia. The overriding concern for peace in the face of a threat of nuclear war and a realisation of considerable difficulties that the

73. Ibid., p.308.
process of socio-economic transformation presently encountered deeply influenced the Soviet approach to bourgeois parties in third world including the Indian National Congress in India. The great importance attached by Moscow to the Delhi declaration on a nuclear free non-violent world testifies to a new Soviet assessment of possibilities of joint action for peace and disarmament with a Congress ruled India.