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# **'When the Elephant Swallowed the Hedgehog': The Prague Spring & Indo-Soviet Relations, 1968**

By Swapna Kona Nayudu, July 2017



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# **‘When the Elephant Swallowed the Hedgehog’: The Prague Spring & Indo-Soviet Relations, 1968<sup>1</sup>**

Swapna Kona Nayudu

## **Introduction**

This paper introduces India’s responses to the Prague Spring of 1968. Historically, this episode has been studied in the larger flow of crises that constituted the Indo-Soviet relationship, such as the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 and the Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. The Soviet Union’s handling of these political crises—according to traditional narratives—attracted widespread international censure, and yet the Indian state continued to support Moscow (or, at the very least, not publicly condemn its actions). India’s support for the Soviet Union constituted and led to the development of a robust relationship between the two states, culminating in the signing of the Indo-Soviet Treaty of Friendship of 1971.

This simplistic narrative ignores other vital influences on the Indo-Soviet relationship, particularly from the 1940s to the 1960s. The Communist Party of India (CPI) and its various factions played a pivotal role in the relationship. The ideological and political positions adopted by the CPI over the years (first in relation to Moscow, prior to Indian independence; then in relation to New Delhi, post-1947) influenced bilateral relations between the two states. Yet, analyses of the Indo-Soviet relationship often ignore the role of the CPI. To fill this gap, this paper studies the ideological crisis within the CPI that led to two splits, first in 1964 and then again in 1969, and the fallout of these splits on Indo-Soviet relations. The Prague Spring of 1968

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<sup>1</sup> The title is a derivation of a populist slogan from the revolution: ‘An Elephant Cannot Swallow a Hedgehog’. Although foreign policy literature tends to refer to India as an “elephant”, that metaphor should not be confused with this Czech slogan that gained currency in the unrest of 1968; the elephant referred to here represents the Soviet Union.

overlapped with this upheaval within the CPI, and thus is an ideal episode from which to study the vicissitudes of relations between the states.

The paper is written in two parts. The first section discusses the development of Indo-Soviet relations in conjunction with the evolving positions of the CPI, both ideological and political, from the 1940s to the 1960s. Conventionally, Indo-Soviet relations are studied in the context of three partnerships: those between Jawaharlal Nehru and Nikita Khrushchev, Indira Gandhi and Leonid Brezhnev, and Rajiv Gandhi and Mikhail Gorbachev.<sup>2</sup> This section of the paper considers the first relationship in light of the positions of the CPI within the Indo-Soviet relationship. There is a short discussion here providing some context on the time period up to Stalin's death in 1953, the subsequent Khrushchev thaw, and how the Kremlin's new Third World policy drastically changed relations between the two states. This is followed by a discussion of Indian communists, their political organization and the role they played in balancing the Indo-Soviet relationship in the lead up to 1968.

The second part of the paper provides an Indian account of the Prague Spring of 1968. The discussion here is twofold: the response of the Indian state and, second, the discourse developing within the CPI. The consequences of turmoil within the party after its first split in 1964, the lead up to the second split of 1969, and the domestic upheaval of insurgencies in Telangana and Naxalbari, are clearly visible in the way the party responded to the events of 1968. The paper concludes by pulling together the various positions adopted and discarded at the time by the two factions of the party. By emphasizing the CPI's influence in shaping Indo-Soviet relations, the paper suggests that it is crucial to look to the multiple strands of thought within which bilateral relations emerge.

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<sup>2</sup> Vojtech Mastny, 'The Soviet Union's Partnership with India', *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Volume 12, Issue 3, Summer 2010, 50-90

## **Nehru, the Soviets, and the Communist Party of India**

In the 1940s, the differences between socialism and communism were reflected in the organization of political parties in India in a rather unusual manner. There was no organized socialist party in India, although socialist tendencies had always been present in Indian politics in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century in one form or another.<sup>3</sup> At the time of independence in 1947, the “socialist commitment” was housed within the ruling party, the Indian National Congress. Nevertheless, the spectrum of socialism represented was quite broad and worked in tandem within the party’s framework of overarching democratic principles.<sup>4</sup>

Structurally, the most organized politics of the left could be found in the form of the Communist Party of India (CPI). Following a three-way split that took place in two stages, first in 1964 and then again, in 1969, the CPI, the CPI (M), and the CPI (ML) emerged as the main factions of the communist political organization.<sup>5</sup>

The CPI’s leaders from the start looked to the CPSU for direction, although Moscow was only forthcoming in spurts. Initial contact after independence came when Shripad Amrit Dange, founder of the CPI, travelled to Moscow in August 1947 and met with Andrei Zhdanov, who had until June 1947 been Chairman of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic. Comrades Dange and Zhdanov discussed India on the eve of independence, its leaders and their views on foreign policy. Dange assured Zhdanov that although anti-Soviet tendencies existed amongst the leadership, Prime Minister Nehru had his own line of thinking: “That of extending friendly

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<sup>3</sup> M N Roy and other early communists had an influence, but it was the CPSU’s influence that bore the heaviest mark. The Comintern’s Sixth Congress of 1928 seems to have had a formative influence for the CPI, which was founded in 1925. For a full discussion of the influence of western Marxist traditions on the CPI, see Praful Bidwai, *The Phoenix Moment: Challenges Confronting the Indian Left*, (New Delhi: Harper Collins, 2015), 1-78.

<sup>4</sup> Granville Austin, *The Indian Constitution: Cornerstone of a Nation*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 390.

<sup>5</sup> These have furthered splintered in the succeeding years, with the CPI (M) splitting into the All-India Coordination Committee of Communist Revolutionaries and the CPI (ML – Marxist-Leninist), but for the study of an event that took place in 1968, it suffices to pay attention to the two splits.

relations with the Soviet Union but not allowing Soviet influence to extend in India.”<sup>6</sup> In Dange’s reading, this implied that Nehru-led progressives within the Indian National Congress and within the Indian government were open to the idea of a cooperative and perhaps collaborative relationship with the Soviet Union, even as they did not allow communism to spread in India. Dange was also of the view that the Congress could work comfortably with the CPI, as both parties were interested in working for and with the proletariat. Thus, even though Nehru was, in fact, “bourgeois,” he was considered a viable, and indeed a useful ally.<sup>7</sup> On this matter, the views of this moderate faction within the CPI remained constant in subsequent years. Dange eventually took a line similar to that of other leaders such as P.C. Joshi and Ajoy Ghosh, advocating active collaboration with the Nehru-led government at the center.

By 1948, however, other CPI leaders, such as C. Rajeswara Rao and B.T. Ranadive, aimed for a complete revolution along the lines of China. This latter faction considered India’s independence from Britain a mere ploy. Their slogan *yeh aazaadi jhoothi hai, desh ki janta bhookhi hai* (“this freedom is a sham, the masses are impoverished”) implied that the Congress Party was an agent of imperialism. Thus, two factions within the CPI developed distinct positions on whether to support the Nehru-led government or work against it.

The two sides clashed and the internal schisms within the CPI became evident once a domestic insurgency in the Telangana region started to gain momentum in the 1950s.<sup>8</sup> The rift in the party was resolved by an intervention from Moscow, which initially favored Ranadive’s “ultra-left” faction over Joshi, Dange, and others but quickly retreated from this position. These

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<sup>6</sup> ‘Record of the Meeting Between S.A.Dange and Soviet leaders in 1947’, taken from Purabi Roy, Sobhanlal Datta Gupta, Hari S. Vasudevan, *Indo-Russian Relations: 1929-1947*, (Calcutta: Asiatic Society, 2000), 443

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> For a discussion of the three waves of insurgency including the first mentioned here, see Jonathan Kennedy and Sunil Purushottam, ‘Beyond Naxalbari: A Comparative Analysis of Maoist Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in Independent India’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 2012, Volume 54, Issue 4, 832–862. This wave was followed by the accession of Hyderabad to the Indian Union - for a detailed account of the events of the accession, see Srinath Raghavan, *War and Peace in Modern India*, (New Delhi: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 65-100

positions reflected the distinctive approaches of both factions on the question of collaboration with non-communist political parties, but also more fundamentally the ideological schisms between them, with the latter faction being decidedly more Trotskyist and veering towards a Chinese version of communism.<sup>9</sup> Thus, the ideological rift within the CPI was quite clearly distinguishable by the beginning of the 1950s.<sup>10</sup>

A delegation consisting primarily of members from the Dange faction then made another trip to Moscow to meet with Stalin in February 1951. Reports of their arrival in Moscow and their subsequent meetings demonstrate Moscow's ambivalent views of the CPI and its effectiveness (or lack thereof) on the Indian political scene. A backgrounder prepared for Stalin briefed the Soviet leader on the history of the CPI and raised the controversial question of the suitability of the Chinese model for India.<sup>11</sup> The CPI delegation met with both Stalin and Malenkov. From the transcripts, one can draw three conclusions: first, the ideological rift experienced by the two factions within the CPI mirrored the positions adopted by the Soviets and the Chinese and so in effect constituted a precursor to the Sino-Soviet split of 1959. Second, Stalin categorically refused to issue any instructions to the CPI. Distancing himself in official records from the CPI's actions, Stalin quite clearly stated, "I gave you no instructions. This is just advice, which is not obligatory for you."<sup>12</sup> Third and most significantly, Stalin asked the delegation to focus on liberation from British imperialism using whatever political means

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<sup>9</sup> Sudipta Kaviraj, *The Split in the Communist Party of India*, unpublished PhD thesis, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi

<sup>10</sup> These strategic positions in fact masked the lack of theoretical debate within the party, whose cadres had no access to Marx's or Lenin's writings, often learning what they thought they knew of either from Stalin's *Dialectical and Historical Materialism*. Consequently, the CPI had no exposure to the rich debates on the challenges to pursuing socialist politics within bourgeois democracies, and no diversification of sources from which they could fashion their own particular brand of communism. For a fuller discussion of the international linkages that the CPI pursued or didn't, see Praful Bidwai, *The Phoenix Moment: Challenges Confronting the Indian Left*, (New Delhi: Harper Collins, 2015), 1-78.

<sup>11</sup> 'Memo to Soviet General Secretary (Joseph Stalin) Regarding Communist Party India's (CPI) Delegation to Moscow', Memorandum sources from the Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (RGASPI), 8 February 1951, accessible at Parallel History Project on Cooperative Security <http://php.isn.ethz.ch/collections/colltopic.cfm?id=56237&lng=en>

<sup>12</sup> 'Record of a Conversation between Stalin and representatives of the Indian Communist Party,' 9 February 1951, Russian State Archive of Socio- Political History [RGASPI] F.558/ Op. 11/D. 310/LI 71-86. Translated by Gary Goldberg and accessible at History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/113938>

necessary without worrying about criticism from within the left.<sup>13</sup> In fact, he cited the examples of Lenin and Mao, both of whom had been criticized by the left within the left but had chosen to adapt their models to the specific conditions within their respective countries and had therefore met with success.<sup>14</sup>

Dange, who had declared Nehru a bourgeois in his previous meeting in Moscow in 1947, was present with this delegation when another leader raised a question about “what [was] meant by ‘national bourgeoisie.’”<sup>15</sup> This signaled a moment of reflection within the CPI with respect to the government in New Delhi. Specifically, the CPI mulled what constituted a true version of communism and who their energies should be directed against: the imperialists or the bourgeoisie. Stalin cut to the heart of the matter by asking the delegation whether they thought the Indian bourgeois were interested in taking over the territory of another country.<sup>16</sup> In a follow-up meeting with the delegation, Malenkov stressed the importance of remaining united and offered clandestine help to stop the factional infighting within the CPI and to help them draft a program to that end.<sup>17</sup> In fact, further correspondence between the Politburo in Moscow and members of the CPI delegation mentioned the need for a tactically effective united front achieved by reconciling the two CPI factions.

In short, Moscow’s agenda at this point was to turn the CPI into a politically viable and effective organization, but not to pit it against the government at the center. This meant the CPI had to court the progressive elements within the Congress Party, while not acquiescing entirely to their political agenda. This of course left the ultra-left faction outside the scope of the Moscow

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Transcript of Meetings Between Politburo Members Georgy Malenkov, Mikhail Suslov and Communist Party of India (CPI) Delegation, 21 February 1951, Russian State Archive of Socio Political History (RGASPI) F. 558/Op. 11/D. 310/LI. 114-118, accessible at the Parallel History Project on Cooperative Security <http://php.isn.ethz.ch/collections/colltopic.cfm?id=56281&lng=en>

plan for the CPI. Even though Malenkov was pushing to reconcile factions within the party, the CPSU's direct encouragement of one faction did more to alienate the other, and it was unclear what Moscow aimed to achieve through this strategy. This ambiguity in the Stalinist view of the Communist Party of India remained until the leader's death in 1953.

By the time Bulganin and Khrushchev came to power, there was renewed enthusiasm in Moscow to cultivate Indo-Soviet government-to-government ties. In 1955, India had found itself at the threshold of a new phase of South-South cooperation.<sup>18</sup> At a time when the Iron Curtain dominated the imagination and the conduct of foreign policy worldwide, the Asian-African Conference was held at Bandung in Indonesia in April 1955.<sup>19</sup> The Americans were divided in their attitudes towards these newly decolonized and/or non-aligned powers in Asia and Africa, partly due to Washington's alliances with Britain, France and other powers with colonies and partly due to their fear that these new states would swing leftward.<sup>20</sup> The Russians, seemed more accommodating of Afro-Asian neutrality. In the event that the newly-independent states could not be asked to join the communists, it seemed the Russians were content as long as they did not join the imperialist camp. A dying Stalin saw in the new bloc a political opportunity, saying of an earlier version of the Bandung declaration issued by Nehru and Zhou Enlai in 1951 that it was "not a bad declaration" and that the Soviets "would have been glad to sign it."<sup>21</sup> This in itself did not signal any substantial change in the Indo-Soviet relationship at the time, but it certainly

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<sup>18</sup> To get a sense of how simultaneously these major events occurred, see illustration table in LIFE Magazine, Issue of 30 May 1955, 21

<sup>19</sup> For a discussion of the deliberations on race in the context of the Cold War, see Richard Wright, *The Color Curtain: A Report on the Bandung Conference*, (Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 1956), 245

<sup>20</sup> For a detailed study of these views, see Robert B. Rakove. *Kennedy, Johnson, and the Nonaligned World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 315

<sup>21</sup> Stalin, quoted in 'India', *Memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev: Statesman, 1953-1964*, Volume 3, (Penn State Press, 2007), 725

carried great symbolic weight. As the processes of de-Stalinization began with Khrushchev at the helm, it became easier for the Soviets to give this tilt towards India a more substantive agenda.<sup>22</sup>

In fact, the earlier Stalinist line towards India seems to have been completely discarded by the time mutual visits took place in 1955 between Indian and Russian leaders.<sup>23</sup> When Khrushchev and Bulganin visited India in 1955, Nehru discussed with them the role of the CPI, expressing his anxiety that the CPI was trying to incite revolution at Moscow's beckoning. Khrushchev denied any such role of the CPSU in directing the CPI, pointing to the dissolution of the Comintern as an indicator that the CPSU was sympathetic towards aspirations for communism in non-communist states, but would not hand-hold or direct any concerted efforts.<sup>24</sup> In fact, during the course of the Bulganin-Khrushchev visit, the CPI seems to have been totally eclipsed by Nehru's personality and the rapport he had built with Khrushchev on his earlier visit to Moscow. This brushing aside of the CPI was made even more conspicuous by the efforts of the new Soviet leadership to reach out to new leaders, irrespective of their views on communism, as long as they were unwilling to join the "imperialist" coalition—a strategy referred to by the Americans as "muscling in on Santa Claus."<sup>25</sup> To the Soviets, India under the leadership of Nehru offered no cause for complaint in this regard, a view cemented during official visits between the countries.<sup>26</sup>

Nehru continued to pressure the Soviets into distancing themselves from the CPI, and the Soviets obliged in official talks. When Mikoyan, First Deputy Premier of the USSR, visited

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<sup>22</sup> See, Benjamin Nathans, 'Uncertainty and Anxiety: On Khrushchev's Thaw', *The Nation*, September 26, 2011

<sup>23</sup> This movement had already begun when the USSR used its veto power in the UN in India's favour as early as 1952, and therefore, during Stalin's time. See, Ashok Kumar Mukhopadhyay, 'Ideological and Institutional Focus of Independent India', in Jayanta Kumar Ray, *Aspects of India's International Relations, 1700 to 2000* (New Delhi: Pearson Education India, 2007), 102

<sup>24</sup> Sankar Ghose 'Non-Aligned World Leader', in *Jawaharlal Nehru: A Biography*, (New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1993), 277

<sup>25</sup> David Engerman, 'Setting the Pattern: South Asia in the Cold War', in Robert McMahon, ed., *The Cold War in the Third World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 256

<sup>26</sup> For a prescient commentary on the visit and the "hard-luck" of the Communist Party of India, see, Christopher Rand, 'Bulganin, Khrushchev and Lakhs', *The New Yorker*, Issue of 31 December 1955, 27-28

Nehru in March 1956, the Prime Minister asked him whether it was correct that communist parties in non-communist countries “rather lived in the past and functioned in a different way from the Communist parties in communist countries,” to which Mikoyan replied that “the behaviour of communist parties in different countries was determined by the particular circumstances of the party in each country” but that “with this the Communist Party of the Soviet Union was not concerned.”<sup>27</sup>

Half a year after this meeting, revolution broke out in Hungary, causing a great deal of embarrassment to the Soviet Union and to Nehru, who was accused of having “fallen for the entire bill of goods;” that is, the Soviet version of events as they unfolded in Budapest.<sup>28</sup> By the time Nehru’s “de-Bulganisation”—the American idea that Nehru had come under the influence of Bulganin to such an extent that it affected his objectivity—had begun, Western states and many constituents within India were highly critical of the government’s belated response to the actions of Soviet troops in quelling the Hungarian Revolution.<sup>29</sup> This criticism came quite significantly from the socialists, with Indian leaders like JB Kripalani, Ashok Mehta, and HV Kamath accusing Nehru on the floor of the Indian Parliament and in the press of having applied a double standard, comparing the situation in Hungary to the simultaneously unfolding crisis in the Suez.<sup>30</sup> Although there was much mediatory correspondence between Nehru and Bulganin, Indian non-alignment received quite a setback, as India seemed publicly to have accepted the inevitability of the Soviet crushing of the Hungarian Revolution. Despite much censure of the

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<sup>27</sup> ‘Notes on Conversations Between the Prime Minister of India and Mr. A. I. Mikoyan, First Deputy Premier of the USSR, in the Prime Minister’s House on March 27, 1956.’ Notes on Mikoyan-Nehru Conversations, 26–28 March 1956, in Subimal Dutt Papers, Subject File 19, 1956, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi.

<sup>28</sup> Eisenhower, quoted in Document No. 92: Memorandum of Discussion of the 303<sup>rd</sup> Meeting of the National Security Council, 8 November, 1956, available in Csaba Bekes, Malcolm Byrne, Janos M. Rainer, *The 1956 Hungarian Revolution – A History in Documents*, Central European University Press, 2000, 664

<sup>29</sup> Escott Reid, *Envoy to Nehru*, (Oxford University Press, 1981), 177.

<sup>30</sup> J. B. Kripalani, “For Principled Neutrality: A New Appraisal of Indian Foreign Policy”, *Foreign Affairs* 38, 1 (1959): 58.

Soviets in private by Nehru, Nehru's unwillingness to outright condemn Soviet action brought India and the Soviet Union much closer together than ever before.

The largest impact of the Hungarian Revolution on Indo-Soviet relations was to establish Nehru as a crucial partner in international politics for Moscow. Previously, Indian mediation at the end of the Korean War and India's involvement in the repatriation of prisoners of war had already brought Nehru to the attention of Moscow. The mutual visits of leaders in 1955 laid the foundation for more enthusiastic cooperation between the two states. By 1956, the Soviet Union was convinced that the Third World was emerging as a force in world politics and that India was in a strong position of leadership within the Third World, so any alliances with India would have to be built through Nehru. This left the CPI in an extremely uncomfortable position, as by the end of the 1950s, the relationship between Moscow and New Delhi had far outgrown the relationship between the CPSU and the CPI.

Following the Sino-Soviet split of 1959, the CPI faced a theoretical crisis unfolding in two stages. First, the CPI had severely underestimated Nehruvian politics as being incapable of transcending the political binary between capitalism and communism, both domestically and internationally. Internationally, this meant they had not fully grasped the growing strength of the non-aligned position in mediating conflicts between the two blocs and had also not grasped the extent to which the Kremlin's new Third World policy would be accommodating of Nehru's non-aligned politics. Second, for this reason, the CPI also misread the ways in which non-aligned India responded to international events, especially those within the socialist sphere. Events in the international sphere involving the Soviet Union affected the CPI directly because Moscow formulated policies to respond to those events and the sum of those policies reflected the changing nature of socialism. When Nehru began to negotiate with Moscow's responses, the CPI

found itself on the receiving end of a policy formulated by Moscow, often times in keeping with the exhortations of Nehru, or at the very least actively engaging with his views.

On Nehru's part, given the excessive Soviet responses to the uprisings in Hungary and Poland, he was uncertain whether the Soviets would continue to remain cooperative with the UN, let alone the West. In the early 1960s, when Khrushchev threatened to dismantle the UN, Nehru was at the forefront of trying to dissuade the Soviets from doing so. This brought him in close contact with the Soviets and required a constant appraisal of the state of socialism in socialist states. In fact, Nehru's diplomatic machinery kept a close watch on the ideological upheaval unleashed by the split between Beijing and Moscow, possibilities of counterrevolution within the satellite states, and on whether Khrushchev's "road to Socialism may turn out to be a road out of Socialism."<sup>31</sup> Events then moved quite quickly with the Sino-Indian War of 1962, when Nehru received a huge setback to his diplomacy, passing away a couple of years later.

The five-year period between 1959 and 1964 in fact inaugurated a new phase for the CPI too. The CPI was divided on matters of policy, each faction finding themselves more closely aligned either with Moscow or with Beijing. When the 1959 split formalized the differences between those two centers of communist power, the CPI, in ferment for more than a decade, was quick to follow suit. It split in 1964 into the pro-Soviet CPI, and the pro-Chinese CPI (M), an abbreviation for Marxist. Thus, the Sino-Indian War of 1962 and the Sino-Soviet Split of 1959 together provided the impetus and the occasion for ideological differences to be formalized into political divisions.<sup>32</sup> In 1969, the Marxist branch split in half—becoming the CPI (M) and the

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<sup>31</sup> KPS Menon, 'Ideological Controversy Between Russia and China', (Moscow: Annual Political Report for the Year 1960, Embassy of India), 21, Ministry of External Affairs File No. 12/60 (A), National Archives of India, New Delhi

<sup>32</sup> This phrasing borrowed from Sudipta Kaviraj, *The Split in the Communist Party of India*, unpublished PhD thesis, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi

CPI (ML), or Marxist-Leninist—and so by the end of the decade, the erstwhile CPI had three principle groupings.

### **India Responds to the Crisis in Czechoslovakia**

In January 1968, a pro-reform movement took place within the Czechoslovak Communist Party headed by Alexander Dubcek, a man who had risen to power quite dramatically. The party's new "Action Program" heralded by Dubcek intended to expand intellectual and cultural freedom. Soon, a flush of student activism in the cities, and worker strikes and farmer revolts in the provinces invigorated the movement. Amongst the main reforms proposed were decentralization of the economy, democratization of the political space, and the imposition of restrictions on the secret police, thus bettering conditions for speech, travel and writing. Dubcek also presided over deliberations on the three-way division of the country.<sup>33</sup> This period came to be known as the Prague Spring.<sup>34</sup>

Unsurprisingly, the Soviet Union did not consider these events favorably, and a plan for the "normalization" of circumstances in Czechoslovakia soon became a core concern of the CPSU Politburo.<sup>35</sup> The pace of the reforms had also become a source of anxiety for those within the Czechoslovak Communist Party. A divide developed between those supporting further reform and those concerned with the reforms that had already taken place. Dubcek was struggling to contain this factionalism when the Soviet clampdown began. Acutely aware of the

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<sup>33</sup> Into Bohemia, Moravia-Selessia and Slovakia - this proposal was later omitted in favour of the dissolution of Czechoslovakia into the two nation-states of the Czech Republic and Slovakia, although this was formalized only in 1993.

<sup>34</sup> For more substantive discussion of the Prague Spring, see Galia Golan, *The Czechoslovak Reform Movement: Communism in Crisis, 1962-1968*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 1971; Vladimir Kusin, *The Intellectual Origins of the Prague Spring: The Development of Reformist Ideas in Czechoslovakia, 1956-1967*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971); Philip Windsor and Adam Roberts, *Czechoslovakia, 1968: Reform, Repression and Resistance*, (London: Columbia University Press, 1969)

<sup>35</sup> For instance, an alarmed report to the CPSU says, "To cross the border, all a tourist has to do is stick his head out the window of a bus and show a paper to the border guard, who then smiles happily at him and wishes him a good time in Prague... Thus, in a very direct way, Czechoslovakia is being permeated every day with spies, anti-socialist and anti-Soviet literature, religious objects of all sorts, and other such things." Cf. Yu. Ilynskyi Reports on Items from the Czechoslovak Media", 12 May 1968, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, TsDAHOU, F.1, Op. 25, Spr. 28, Ll. 81-85 accessible at <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/112167>

effects the events in Prague were having on the Soviet Union itself, the Soviets feared the impact they might have on the rest of the socialist bloc.<sup>36</sup>

An argument has been advanced suggesting the Soviet leadership was not altogether enthusiastic about a military intervention and that divisions existed within the Warsaw Pact (Hungarian leader Janos Kadar, for instance was firmly against going in).<sup>37</sup> However, when President Tito of Yugoslavia visited Prague, his pronouncements of support for the liberalization policies of Dubcek and “independence, equality and non-interference” for Czechoslovakia seem to have alarmed the Soviets a great deal.<sup>38</sup> The chaos surrounding Tito’s visit deepened when Romanian President Ceausescu came to Prague soon after to reaffirm bilateral ties through the renewal of a treaty. Speculation on the terms of the treaty proved inflammatory, with a newspaper suggesting that a democratic bloc be formed between Yugoslavia, Romanian, and Czechoslovakia. The treaty recast the terms of defense against external aggression, leaving open-ended the question of aggression by members of the Warsaw Pact.<sup>39</sup> Both these visits occurred in quick succession and with great intensity, and with adulation for both visiting leaders. Soon after, the Soviets responded first by occupying Czechoslovakia and then by issuing a retroactive statement explaining the occupation, in what came to be known as the Brezhnev Doctrine.

Leonid Brezhnev, the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, reiterated the doctrine, first presented by an ideologue in the Russian

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<sup>36</sup> For instance, in another report, P. Shelest complains about subversive publications from the CSSR arriving in the Ukraine, mostly as a part of regular subscriptions. See, ‘Informational Note on Subversive Materials Arriving from the CSSR’, June 4, 1968, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, TsDAHOU, F. 1, Op. 25, Spr. 28, Ll. 166-167 accessible at <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/113087>

<sup>37</sup> Jiri Valenta, *Soviet Intervention in Czechoslovakia, 1968: Anatomy of a Decision*, (Washington DC: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 264

<sup>38</sup> For analysis of the visit, see J Pelikan, ‘The Visit of Josip Broz Tito in Prague in August 1968’, *Slovanske Historicke Studie* (Slavonic Historical Studies), 2007, vol. 32, 131-147; also, see in *Tito, the Bloc-Free Movement and the Prague Spring* (), 402-404; ‘Big Welcome Awaits Tito’s Visit to Prague’, *Reading Eagle*, August 9, 1968, accessible at <http://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=1955&dat=19680809&id=NB4rAAAIAIAJ&sjid=kKAFAAAIAIAJ&pg=4772.4145767> and ‘Tito back from Visit to Prague’, *Reading Eagle*, August 12, 1968, accessible at <http://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=2519&dat=19680812&id=Ov5dAAAIAIAJ&sjid=IV8NAAAIAIAJ&pg=6383.5042085>

<sup>39</sup> Karen Dawisha, *The Kremlin and the Prague Spring*, p.277

newspaper *Pravda*.<sup>40</sup> In essence, the doctrine called for limits on reformist movements within the Eastern Bloc, so as to avoid compromising the front with NATO.<sup>41</sup> But, most importantly, the doctrine was a statement on the occupation of Czechoslovakia by Soviet-led Warsaw Pact forces starting from 20-21 August, 1968. The occupation was deeply shocking for many reasons, most of all because Dubcek had stressed his commitment to the Warsaw Pact and intended to democratize communism, not be rid of it entirely.<sup>42</sup> Yet, the communists debated the problem from two opposing points of view: the political—the possible crumbling of the socialist order—and the legal—the preservation of Czechoslovak sovereignty. In the end, the former proved too imperative.<sup>43</sup> Communist camps the world over deliberated and while some, such as Castro, saw the liberalization attempts in Czechoslovakia as “the beginning of a honeymoon between the liberals and imperialism,”<sup>44</sup> others such as Ceausescu found the Soviet occupation indefensible, calling it an act of “social-imperialism.”<sup>45</sup>

This debate resonated strongly with the CPI and the CPI (M), particularly as they had just borne witness to a few major domestic developments: the Sino-Indian War of 1962, the

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<sup>40</sup> Kavalov and Brezhnev, both quoted in the rise and fall of the Brezhnev Doctrine in Soviet foreign policy By Matthew J Ouimet, p.55. For reference to Kavalov's piece, see Endnote 1.

<sup>41</sup> For a discussion on the aspects of the doctrine specifically in the case of Czechoslovakia, see Wilfried Loth, 'Moscow, Prague and Warsaw: Overcoming the Brezhnev Doctrine', *Cold War History* 1, no. 2 (2001): 103-118.

<sup>42</sup> For a detailed analysis of the lead-up to the actual occupation, see Jiri Valenta, *Soviet Intervention in Czechoslovakia, 1968: Anatomy of a Decision*, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991; Bischof, Karner, Ruggenthaler, *The Prague Spring and the Warsaw Pact Invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968*, The Harvard Cold War Studies Book Series, Rowman and Littlefield, 2010; Kieran Williams, *The Prague Spring and its Aftermath: Czechoslovak Politics, 1968-1970*, Cambridge University Press, 1997; In fact, the occupiers and the occupied seemed to be located so strongly within the fold of the communist ideology that the material archived from the protests urges for “*klid a rozvaha*” (calm and level-headedness) using the exact same jargon as the occupiers who were calling for “normalization”. For a collection of this material, see *The Soviet Invasion of Czechoslovakia: August 1968*, Materials from the Labadie Collection of Social Protest Material, Special Collections Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, especially Documents 3A, 3E and 4B, all accessible through the website of the British Library.

<sup>43</sup> The Soviets used two letters written by a handful of pro-Moscow hardliners as proof that the counterrevolution had to be stopped, as per the wishes of the general population. For the letters themselves, and a note detailing its contents and writers, see, 'Letter from Czech Communist Politicians to Brezhnev Requesting Soviet Intervention in Prague Spring', August, 1968, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Published in Czech in *Hospodarske Noviny*, July 17, 1992. Translated for the Cold War International History Project by Mark Kramer, accessible at <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/114636>

<sup>44</sup> 'Speech by Cuban Prime Minister Major Fidel Castro on the Czechoslovak Situation', Havana Domestic Television and Radio Services in Spanish, 24 August 1968, transcript available at Latin American Network Information Centre, University of Texas, accessible at <http://lanic.utexas.edu/project/castro/db/1968/19680824.html>

<sup>45</sup> Romanian Prime Secretary Ceausescu's speech in Bucharest; for the entire transcript, please see 'Czechoslovakia: A Country Study', Glenn E. Curtis, ed. (Washington, D. C.: Federal Research Division of the Library of Congress, 1992).

subsequent split in the CPI leading to the formation of the CPI (M) in 1964, and the *Naxalbari* uprising of 1967.<sup>46</sup> The 1962 war drew the CPI into three factions: the internationalists (supporting China), the centrists (neutral), and the nationalists (supporting India). However, the 1964 split occurred along ideological lines, between the left (CPI) and the ultra-left (CPI [M]), both of which were electorally very active. From within the CPI (M), one sub-faction adopted a militant stance and later further split away from the CPI (M) to form the Communist Party of India-Marxist-Leninist (CPI [ML]).

In the period between 1966 (the year of the Tashkent Declaration) and 1971 (the year of the Indo-Soviet Treaty of Friendship), the communists in India found themselves negotiating the political realities of domestic coalition politics, while attempting to maintain some of their more international ideological commitments.<sup>47</sup> In the Indian General Elections of 1967, United Front governments led by the CPI (M) came to power in the states of Kerala and West Bengal with prominent leaders in EMS Namboodiripad and Ajoy Ghosh.<sup>48</sup> The communist parties were adapting a role that would be palatable to India's electoral politics. At this time, it seemed like a strong aspect of the method adopted by the organized left in India was to undermine the state by working through its institutions.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> They published a monograph on the issue, authored by the then Chairman of the Communist Party of the USA (CPUSA). See, Gus Hall, *On the Events in Czechoslovakia*, Communist Party of India, 1968, pp. 23; For an interesting note on the *Naxalbari* movement, see, Bibek Debroy, 'The Last of the Three', *The Indian Express*, March 25, 2010, accessible at <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/the-last-of-the-three/595405/0>. For a succinct analysis of the split and its effect on the politics of the 1967 elections, see Bipin Chandra, 'From Shastri to Indira Gandhi – 1964-1969' in his *India After Independence*, 223-227 and for a note on *Naxalbari*, see section titled 'The Naxalites', 230-231.

<sup>47</sup> For instance, in their election manifesto of 1967, the CPI (M) failed to mention the Chinese nuclear tests (not unlike the manifesto put forward by the Congress Party) but called for the normalization of relations with China (it was the only party to do so). See, Mirchandani, 'India's Nuclear Dilemma', p. 53 quoted in George Perkovich, 'India's Nuclear Bomb', p.132

<sup>48</sup> However, the United Front government in West Bengal was suspended later that year, and the state was put under President's rule until 1969. Fresh elections were held in 1969, and Ajoy Ghosh was back as Chief Minister, but that changed yet again the following year with his resignation, and the state went back to President's rule. Interestingly, in the 1970 no-confidence vote against Indira Gandhi, both the CPI and the CPI(M) offered issue-based support to the government and refused to vote against the Prime Minister in parliament. See Csaba Nikolenyi, *Minority Governments in India: The Puzzle of Elusive Majorities*, in the series 'Party Politics Before 1989', Taylor and Francis, 2009, 30

<sup>49</sup> This point is also made in Javed Alam, p.291. For a lucid analysis of the dilemmas brought on by the split, see 'Confrontation Between the Two Wings – CPI & CPI (M)', in Ram Shakal Singh, Champa Singh, *Indian Communism: Its Role Towards Indian Polity*, Mittal Publications, 1991, pp. 88-91

While the factions of the CPI were focused on electoral strategies, they were also negotiating the differences emerging within the international socialist camp. The effects of the on-going Sino-Soviet split were deeply felt in India's communist quarters, where the positions adopted by the dissenting factions mirrored those of the larger ideological fallout.<sup>50</sup> Therefore, inherently, their internal exhortations echoed their pro-Soviet or pro-Chinese biases.<sup>51</sup> The split, and the above-mentioned Nehru-Khrushchev partnership, had weakened the Soviet hold on the communists in India, and one faction was now overtly pro-Chinese.<sup>52</sup> The communists had come a long way from 1951, when Jayaprakash Narayan had said about the CPI that "every communist party must follow the dictates from Moscow because Moscow alone knows what is good or bad for Russia."<sup>53</sup> Conversely, China now occupied a central position in the narrative of the left in India. Within the communist parties in India, the distinction, and indeed, the anxiety between the Russian and the Chinese interpretations of the socialist program became quite stark up to the point when the split occurred.

Subsequently, South Asia on the whole became a key site for the tensions of this split to play out.<sup>54</sup> The Soviets became increasingly invested in securing their interests through a brisk engagement with the military, political and economic aspects of their relationship with India. Additionally, then Prime Minister of India, Indira Gandhi, was deeply aware of the debt owed by India to the Soviet Union for facilitating the conclusion of the Tashkent Agreement of 1966,

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<sup>50</sup> For a detailed discussion of the context, see Lorenz M. Luthi, 'The Collapse of Socialist Unity, 1956-1957', in *The Sino-Soviet Split: Cold War in the Communist World*, (Princeton University Press, 2010), 46-79

<sup>51</sup> For a useful collection of archival material, and related analysis on the views of the CPI and the CPI(M) on the Chinese, see Robert V. Daniels, *A Documentary History of Communism*, Volume 2, (I.B.Tauris, 1987), 206-211

<sup>52</sup> This was strengthened by the CPC's endorsement of the *Naxalbari* incidents.

<sup>53</sup> Jayaprakash Narayan, 'India: Struggle for Freedom, Political, Social and Economic', Ed. Yusuf Meherally, Hope India Publications, 2006, p.203

<sup>54</sup> David Engerman, 'Setting the Pattern: South Asia and the Cold War', in Robert McMahon [Ed.], *The Cold War in the Third World*, and quoted therein, Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005)

which formally ended the Indo-Pakistani War of 1965.<sup>55</sup> Thus, in the years leading up to 1968, the Indo-Soviet bilateral relationship developed into a very close one, in fact leading commentators to sound a word of caution against Soviet influence muffling India's independent voice in international affairs.<sup>56</sup>

This growing closeness became difficult to manage for New Delhi when the Soviets occupied Czechoslovakia in August 1968. Initially, in a statement in the Lok Sabha, Indira Gandhi noted this development with disapproval, stating "the right of nations to live peacefully and without outside interference should not be denied in the name of religion or ideology..."<sup>57</sup> The American press in particular gave the Indian position favorable coverage, commenting that Mrs. Gandhi had "urged the Soviet Union and its allies to withdraw their troops 'at the earliest possible moment.'"<sup>58</sup> The editorial also mentioned that in fact, "her statement was in marked contrast with the silence of her father, Jawaharlal Nehru, during the Russian invasion of Hungary in 1956."<sup>59</sup>

Yet, in the United Nations Security Council, India avoided condemning the USSR, finally abstaining in the vote on the Czechoslovakia matter.<sup>60</sup> Unsurprisingly, India's non-vote attracted widespread criticism from the American press. Editorials first noted that leaders from within the socialist bloc, like Tito and Ceausescu, had not hesitated in distancing themselves from the Soviet position.<sup>61</sup> It was then reported that conversely, in abstaining from the vote,

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<sup>55</sup> MS Rajan, 'The Tashkent Declaration: Retrospect and Prospect', *International Studies*, Volume 8, Issue 1, 1966.

<sup>56</sup> 'A. Appadorai, 'Indo-Soviet Relations', in Virender Grover, *USSR/CIS and India's Foreign Policy*, (New Delhi: Deep and Deep Publications, 1993), 118.

<sup>57</sup> Indian and Foreign Review, Volumes 5-6, Publications Division of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, September 1968, p.5

<sup>58</sup> 'Indira Gandhi Rebukes Invaders', Boston Globe, 22 August 1968, U Thant Files Czechoslovakia Files - S-0860-0017-01 Press Clippings, United Nations Archives and Records Management Section, New York.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> For a brief listing of India's voting decisions at the United Nations on Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Afghanistan, see Sreemati Ganguli, *Indo-Russian Relations: The Making of a Relationship, 1992-2002*, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Institute of Asian Studies, 2009, p. 43

<sup>61</sup> 'Communists and Prague', New York Times, 23 August 1968, U Thant Files Czechoslovakia Files - S-0860-0017-01 Press Clippings, United Nations Archives and Records Management Section, New York.

India, Pakistan, and Algeria had shown “which nations can and cannot be counted on to stand up for principle.”<sup>62</sup> It was later reported that socialist members of Parliament in India had been unable to vote on and push forward a resolution condemning Soviet action, and had been actively blocked by Mrs. Gandhi, a maneuver that led to the resignation of a much-respected socialist member of Parliament, Ashok Mehta.<sup>63</sup> The press coverage also clearly stated that India had abstained in order to be useful in mediating the conflict and that Mrs. Gandhi had been called upon to “be more courageous.”<sup>64</sup> The episode in the Indian parliament showed clearly the divisions between various factions even within the organized left, with one side supporting Mrs. Gandhi, while the other violently decried the Indian position at the UN, asking for the government to resign, and shouting slogans such as “Long Live Czechoslovakia!” and “Long Live Dubcek!”<sup>65</sup>

The Brezhnev Doctrine brought to the fore schisms between the CPI and the CPI (M). In a lengthy exposition, Brezhnev said that the Soviets had acted “jointly with other socialist countries in defending the socialist gains of the Czechoslovak people” and that the “socialist states respect the democratic norms of the international law” while “they reject the leftist, adventurist conception of exporting revolution.”<sup>66</sup> Not only had he spelled out essentially the right of any socialist state to intervene in another in the event of threats to socialism, he had also directly contradicted the stand taken by the Communist Party of China. This was to be expected, given the ideological split between the two camps. What was astonishing was the dour with

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<sup>62</sup> 'Empty Words?', Washington Post, 24 August 1968, U Thant Files Czechoslovakia Files - S-0860-0017-01 Press Clippings, United Nations Archives and Records Management Section, New York.

<sup>63</sup> This was Ashoka Mehta, who had also played a distinct role in criticising Nehru in 1956, when India had abstained in voting against Hungary in the UNSC. See 'More Nations Assail Soviet; Few Support the Intervention', New York Times, 25 August 1968, U Thant Files Czechoslovakia Files - S-0860-0017-01 Press Clippings, United Nations Archives and Records Management Section, New York.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Joseph Lelyveld, 'India's Stand in UN on Invasion Denounced by Opposition Parties', New York Times, 24 August 1968, U Thant Files Czechoslovakia Files - S-0860-0017-01 Press Clippings, United Nations Archives and Records Management Section, New York.

<sup>66</sup> Leonid Brezhnev, 'Sovereignty and International Duties of Socialist Countries', Pravda, 25 September 1968.

which the CPI (M) responded to the doctrine. In fact, even before the occupation of Czechoslovakia had taken place, the CPI (M) had spelled out an ideological stand inimical to the Brezhnev Doctrine.<sup>67</sup> Thereafter, it took a firm view of the Soviet Union, describing it as a “degenerate...social-imperialist state” in direct confrontation with the Chinese Communist Party. The CPI (M) went on to denounce “the attack on Czechoslovakia [as] an imperialist aggression.” The party maintained that they “must never forget that such resistance is an expression of the principal contradiction of the Czechoslovak people.”<sup>68</sup> Increasingly, they came to see the Prague Spring and the crushing of that revolution as a symptom of the malaise that had come to affect the socialist bloc: that of ignoring the local conditions and aspirations of the people.<sup>69</sup> The disposition of the CPI (M) towards the Soviets had become increasingly jaded; it was now fervent in its opposition to Moscow.

When the Soviet occupation of Czechoslovakia occurred, the communist parties in India were already embroiled in a domestic situation where, despite gaining votes in successive elections, they had failed to consolidate power for themselves at the center.<sup>70</sup> With regard to the Indian domestic political landscape, their stand could be seen as an attempt to recast their position based on ideological tenacity if not on electoral success. The reliance of Indira Gandhi on support from smaller parties, in particular the communist parties, to maintain a majority in the parliament meant she could not completely ignore them, although she did advise caution,

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<sup>67</sup> This shift is discussed in detail in Charu Mazumdar, ‘The Indian People’s Democratic Revolution’, *Liberation*, Volume 1, No. 8, June 1968.

<sup>68</sup> Charu Mazumdar, ‘*Parimal Babur Rajniti*’, *Ghatana-Prabaha*, Volume 2, Issue 1, originally published in Bengali, translation published as ‘Parimal Babu’s Politics’, *Liberation*, Volume 2, Issue 9, July 1969.

<sup>69</sup> Sitaram Yechury, ‘A Review of the Historical Experiences of World Socialism in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century – Some Thoughts’, Paper presented at the International Symposium on World Socialism in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, Institute of Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong thoughts & Chinese Academy of Social Science, Beijing, 2002, accessible at <http://cpim.org/content/historical-experiences-world-socialism>

<sup>70</sup> For exact figures on the votes secured by both parties in all rounds of voting, in both elections, please see, Virender Grover, *Political Parties and Party System*, Deep and Deep Publications, 1997, Table No. 5 on p. 596.

keeping in mind India's military dependency on the Soviet Union.<sup>71</sup> The communist parties were not speaking from a position of strength and so could not affect the narrative entirely, yet they were unreserved in their criticism of the events in Czechoslovakia.

At the time of the Czechoslovak invasion, the communist parties in India were not in a position to denounce the Soviet aggression in and continued occupation of Czechoslovakia, nor openly support the actions of the Warsaw Pact, led by the Soviets. This allowed the government to remain non-committal in its response. Indira Gandhi's government also chose to approach the crisis strategically, not ideologically. In Delhi, the Soviet Union was increasingly seen as an indispensable partner for India.<sup>72</sup> Mrs. Gandhi, thus, successfully pitted the communist parties supporting her government against those asking for the government to resign, thereby using the rift within the communist bloc to show that their position on the matter was internally contested and therefore, ineffective.<sup>73</sup> This provided the government the leeway to continue to build a relationship with the Soviet Union, while continuing to appear non-aligned.

Meanwhile, in Czechoslovakia, the resistance remained more or less peaceful until Gustav Husak, a pro-Soviet hardliner, replaced Alexander Dubcek in 1969. Husak reversed the Prague Spring reforms and began a process of "normalization."<sup>74</sup> The coalition forces of the Warsaw Pact began moving out of the country in October, but Soviet troops did not leave until 1987. In his memoirs, Khrushchev delineated this position clearly: "Once our troops had been

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<sup>71</sup> Lok Sabha Debates, Series 4, Volume 20, 22 August 1968, 459-462

<sup>72</sup> The value placed on the relationship with the Soviets by India was also slowly beginning to become apparent to the US. For an incisive analysis, see Chester Bowles, 'America and Russia in India', *Foreign Affairs*, July 1971, accessible at <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/24266/chester-bowles/america-and-russia-in-india>

<sup>73</sup> Indira Gandhi was faced with a similar conundrum on India's Israel policy. For a short analysis, see P. R. Kumaraswamy, 'India's Israel Policy', Columbia University Press, 2010, pp.201-204; see also Nicolas Blarel,

<sup>74</sup> This trend abated only after the elections of 1971, when Indira Gandhi emerged as the undisputed leader of a victorious Congress at the centre, followed by the signing of the Indo-Soviet Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation. For an interesting summary of the policies of normalization, see Adam Roberts, *Socialist Conservatism in Czechoslovakia, The World Today*, Vol. 26, No. 11 (Nov., 1970), 478-488. For longer treatments of the process, see Vladimir Kusin, *From Dubcek to Charter 77: A Study of Normalization in Czechoslovakia 1968-1978*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1978); see also Galia Golan, *Reform Rule in Czechoslovakia: The Dubcek Era, 1968-1969*, Volume 11 of the Cambridge Russian, Soviet and Post-Soviet Studies, (Cambridge University Press, 1973)

sent into Czechoslovakia, reason required they may be withdrawn *as quickly as possible*. That's the only way a brother country can be made *a real friend*. Of course *troops can be kept there*, and any manifestation of resistance can be *suppressed by force*.”<sup>75</sup> The occupation exposed the Soviet Union to severe criticism, not only for its suppression of protest, but also for the lack of conviction within the socialist camp that was laid bare through the plight of Czechoslovakia.<sup>76</sup> This further widened the discord within the communist parties in India, i.e. between the pro-Soviet CPI and the pro-Chinese CPI (M). After the signing of the Indo-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, the CPI (M) shifted its focus to domestic politics, coming to power in West Bengal in 1977 and governing the state uninterrupted until 2011. Although during this time the party maintained some international presence, its focus was markedly domestic. During the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, the CPI was still consolidating its position through the organization of workers' rights; during the occupation of Afghanistan in 1979, the CPI and the CPI (M) were preoccupied in offering support to a central coalition government. The position adopted by the communist parties in India on the Soviet occupation of Czechoslovakia thus represented a high point of involvement in foreign matters.

## Conclusion

Perhaps in the context of the Prague Spring, the limited influence of the Indian communists' resistance to Soviet actions only carried weight because of the constant flux of coalition politics. But by presenting two ideological positions from which to mold an approach to the political question of Czechoslovakia, the communist parties moved farthest away from a united front than they had ever been. This separation allowed Indira Gandhi to balance each side

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<sup>75</sup> Nikita Khrushchev, *Memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev*, Volume 3, (Penn State Press), 694

<sup>76</sup> Press coverage from the west was predictably hostile, yet captured the historicity of the moment – ‘By occupying Czechoslovakia, they have, in effect, announced that the Soviet system is so vulnerable that it cannot allow free speech and so brittle that it dare not permit experiment’, Cf. ‘Russia and Czechoslovakia – Death Pangs of an Empire?’, *The Observer*, August 25, 1968, p.6

against the other and formulate a relationship with Moscow on its own terms. This was, in essence, a continuation and expansion of an earlier strategy put in place by Nehru: offsetting internal communism with international communism.<sup>77</sup> Through the 1950s, Moscow's support for a Nehru-led government in New Delhi grew by leaps and bounds. Relations between the Soviet Union and India encompassed aid, trade, and scientific and industrial collaboration. This manner of building relations blurred the lines between the internal and the international with increasing regularity, so much so that the Congress Party used *Pravda* editorials as proof of Nehru's stature and statesmanship internationally. Yet again, this put the CPI in a deeply embarrassing situation and its standing within the communist international suffered, as it was seen as being unable to overcome to local conditions of the Indian political scene.

This distancing from Moscow culminated in two diametrically opposed effects over the course of the 1950s and 1960s. In the former instance, the CPI attempted to align itself more closely with Moscow to move ideologically toward a "truer" form of socialism and to find legitimacy for its actions politically. These overtures were received cautiously by Moscow, and Soviet analysts undertook studies to ascertain the scope and breadth of the socialist experiment in India. There was skepticism on the Soviet side, on whether the Zhdanov line was best suited to the Indian case, and appraisals of how Indian leaders might be approaching these questions, both from within and from without the communist camp.<sup>78</sup> Conversely, no such theoretical reflection was forthcoming from the CPI, which continued to approach the CPSU uncritically, in part

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<sup>77</sup> Sudipta Kaviraj, *The Split in the Communist Party of India*, unpublished PhD thesis, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, p. 373

<sup>78</sup> Sudipta Kaviraj lists Soviet analysis brought out in pamphlets by the People's Publishing House, Bombay. Of particular interest in the list are papers that appeared in the journal *Voprosii [sic] Ekonomiki*, including E M Zhekov, 'Problems of National Colonial Struggle' after the Second World War, V H Maslennilov, 'On Leading Role of Working Class in National Liberation Movement of Colonial Peoples'; and V V Balabushevich, 'New Stage in the National Liberation Struggle of the People of India'. See, Sudipta Kaviraj, *The Split in the Communist Party of India*, unpublished PhD thesis, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, p. 313-314, footnote 7

because the CPSU provided a template on which to organize the Indian left.<sup>79</sup> Nehruvian politics represented a sharp intervention in this to and fro between both sides. Soon, it was evident that New Delhi's direct engagement with Moscow was superseding the relations between the communist parties in both states. When the Soviets wanted to cultivate good relations with India, they did so first without and then despite the CPI.

This brought about the CPI's fallout with not only the Zhdanovian line, but also with the CPSU itself. It is clear that at some point the CPI's political objectives in India were no longer compatible with the Soviet Union's foreign policy towards the country. Even though the left within India was already fragmenting ideologically, it was the Sino-Soviet split of 1959 that legitimized the two strands that emerged in the form of the CPI and the CPI (M).<sup>80</sup> This allowed the CPI (M) to position the party clearly in breach of the CPSU's understanding of theoretical debates within Marxism. The Prague Spring provided occasions for this dissonance to become more obvious.<sup>81</sup>

The ideological-theoretical crisis in the communist parties in India always ran in parallel to the development of Indo-Soviet relations. This crisis pertained not only to the communist parties' self-awareness or their assessment of the CPSU, but also to Nehruvian non-alignment, even in its later form under Indira Gandhi. Even though Moscow had moved away from considering non-alignment merely "a more crafty form of alignment," the organized left in India seemed unable to grasp ways in which non-alignment would shape the Third World, and what

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<sup>79</sup> Bidwai, p.27

<sup>80</sup> Sudipta Kaviraj, *The Split in the Communist Party of India*, unpublished PhD thesis, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, p. 485

<sup>81</sup> Bidwai is of the opinion that the CPI emulated the template of the CPSU and that this process was unaffected by either the Hungarian Revolution or the Prague Spring. In my reading, the crises along with others in the socialist bloc in the following years dealt successive blows to the edifice of the communist parties in India and particularly to their readings of Moscow's centrality to the Marxist project. See Praful Bidwai, *The Phoenix Moment: Challenges Confronting the Indian Left*, (New Delhi: Harper Collins, 2015), p.27

view the Soviet Union would take of this new political process.<sup>82</sup> The Soviet Union, unable in the early years to grasp the radicalism of the non-aligned approach, adapted its position strategically if not ideologically to accommodate and indeed to benefit from India's role in world affairs. Both sides recognized the immense diplomatic fallout of not doing so, and the evident benefits of taking that path.

On the other hand, the CPI/CPI (M) were under some strain to understand this new configuration of world politics, and to recognize their position in it. They were tied neither to Moscow nor to New Delhi, but their politics was inevitably conducted in a framework put together by both in conversation with each other. This curious positioning ironically was caused by and in turn caused the deepening of the Indo-Soviet relationship in the 1960s, and became completely discernable in the response of the Indian state to the Prague Spring of 1968.

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<sup>82</sup> Sudipta Kaviraj, *The Split in the Communist Party of India*, unpublished PhD thesis, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, p. 262-263

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