

<sup>Source</sup>  
Copy of a letter No. 11774-4/88 of November 30, 1968 from the  
Ministry of India, Moscow (Mr. V.K. Arora) to Mr. S. Datta,  
Foreign Secretary, Ministry of Internal Affairs, New Delhi.

Please refer to my telegram No. 888 dated the 18th November, 1968, about Mr. Dhandekar's talk with our Law Delegation. The Law Minister tells me that he had not asked for this interview and the presumption, therefore, is that the Supreme Court, USSR, had found it on their own.

2. The Soviet Prime Minister looked very fit and was in excellent spirits. When Mr. Sen introduced members of his delegation to him and described one of them, Mr. Arora, as a prominent lawyer and a member of the Communist Party of India, Mr. Dhandekar said: "Why did you include him? Was it a mistake?" The Law Minister replied without laughter that it was a case of peaceful co-existence. Another delegate, Mr. Kumar, was introduced as a former member of the CPI who had left the Party. When Mr. Sen commented: "That is good", Mr. Dhandekar asked: "That is good! his being a former member of the Party or his leaving it?"

3. The Law Minister started off by conveying the greetings and good wishes of our Prime Minister to Mr. Dhandekar. The Soviet Prime Minister expressed his gratitude and spoke in very warm terms about the respect and affection in which Mr. Kumar is held in the USSR. The Soviet people would never forget his visit to this country or the great contribution he was making to the cause of preserving peace in the world.

4. Mr. K.C. Chatterjee said that during the opening session of the Parliament on November 17, Mr. Kumar had spoken of President Brezhnev's forthcoming visit to India. He had given a reference to it in the newspapers, Mr. Dhandekar said. Brezhnev's constitution, however, was not built for warm climates and he had difficulty in standing heat. The time for his visit would, therefore, have to be carefully selected. I told Mr. Dhandekar that according to the present arrangements, Brezhnev's visit would be to visit India in February and that it was not very hot at that time of the year. February should be all right, Mr. Dhandekar replied, except perhaps for South India. They found Kumar and Dandekar warm even in November.

5. The talk then turned to the new Soviet Seven-Year Plan which is to be discussed at the first Congress of the CPSU in January next year. Mr. Dhandekar spoke enthusiastically and with confidence about the USSR overhauling the U.S. production and living standards by about 1970. "Even if we do it by 1972, we shall not mind: time is not sitting on our hands. If there is a depression in the U.S., we might do it earlier."

6. Dattas have been engaged in the work about the feasibility of the USSR overhauling the U.S. living standards by 1970 even if the production in main branches of the economy went up according to plan. With this

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In mind, Mr. Dzhurabov said that if their aim were only to catch up with the U.S. living standards, they would do it before 1970. He referred to the colossal rate of capital investments in the USSR and said that if they were diverted to meet the consumer demand for even a year, it would make an appreciable difference to the standard of living. That, however, would be a short-sighted policy and would be like creating an impressive super-structure on relatively weak foundations. That was why the Soviet Union had not before itself the objective of overtaking the U.S. in 1970 production and living standards. The heavy industry would continue to have priority in the next Seven-Year-Plan, though the production of consumer goods would also increase very substantially.

7. The targets in the new Seven-Year Plan, Mr. Dzhurabov went on, had not been pitched too high. It should, therefore, be relatively easy to fulfill them. If the plan were over-fulfilled by even 1% in the first year (1969), this would make an additional sum of 11 milliard Roubles available. The corresponding figure in the last year of the Plan would be about 19 milliard Roubles, since the anticipated increase in the current production figures by 1968 was about 80 per cent. This works out to an average of about 18 milliard Roubles for each year of the Plan on the basis of its being over-fulfilled by 1%. Since the over-fulfillment was likely to be of the order of 2% to 4%, the amount which would become available from this source alone as "pocket money" would be between 800 and 400 milliard Roubles. The intention was to use this primarily for increasing production of consumer goods, shortening the working day and also extending assistance to under-developed countries.

8. Mr. Dzhurabov then referred to Soviet plans for reducing the consumption of alcohol in the country. This would be done mainly by creating public opinion against drunkenness and by a further rise in the price of hard liquors such as vodka and cognac. There would also be restrictions on the serving of these in restaurants. As a step in this direction, they had stopped serving vodka and cognac at Kremlin receptions and the only entertainments drinks offered were wine and beer. "If we go further along this path, our receptions may become completely dry like yours".

9. The Government of India, Mr. Dzhurabov said, did well in not serving alcoholic drinks at public receptions. "We would never have surprised if we had had to drink in that house". Asked whether the Soviet Government proposed to introduce complete prohibition in some form as an experimental measure on the Indian model, he said: "That is a bad law even in India in the Soviet Union it would be completely unworkable. Quite apart from the differences in climatic conditions and customs, such a large army would be required for the enforcement of prohibition that the guns would not be worth the soldier". Turning to the Premier-General, Mr. Indira, he said: "We want to reduce rather than increase the powers and functions. We hope that with rising living standards, the role of unions would decline till we have no need of a Premier-General and his staff".

10. Reduction in the consumption of alcoholic drinks would naturally mean a substantial loss of revenue. The Soviet Government proposes to make this good by a sharp increase in the production of sugar as the profit margin in that industry also is high.

11. One of the members of the delegation made a highly influential remark to the effect that, according to reports, Mr. Brezhnev liked drinking vodka. Happily, however, Evguenov, who was interpreting, pointed it to make it relatively inoffensive. Mr. Brezhnev said that the report had been deliberately and maliciously fabricated by the former U.S. Ambassador in Moscow, Charles Habbes. Even foreign correspondents had refused to support his baseless allegations. At this stage Mr. Brezhnev went off into a brief autobiographical interlude and said "I never touched vodka till the age of 30. Even during the civil war, when I was in the Red Army, I never drank anything stronger than beer. In our present leadership, there is no one who has a weakness for drink though it is true that Stalin used to be rather fond of that sort".

12. I asked Mr. Brezhnev about his views on the recent developments in Pakistan. He said that he was no expert on the internal situation in that country but from what he could see, a military dictatorship had been set up there. This was a reactionary step, particularly as the war which appeared to have no intention of getting to grips with the fundamental problems of the country. Here maintenance of law and order by the use of the armed forces would only intensify class contradictions and no Government could last indefinitely in such circumstances. India would have to be particularly vigilant about developments in Pakistan. The only leaders might try to divert the attention of the people from internal problems which they could not solve to a military adventure over an issue such as Kashmir.

13. It was a pity, said Mr. Brezhnev half-sarcastically, that India and the USSR had to pass through third countries to meet each other. Why he asked, did we not arrange our frontiers in a different way at the time of partition. Then the Law Minister replied that they had been determined by the British and not by us, Mr. Brezhnev said laughingly that one could always modify them!

14. In one of his recent articles, Walter Lippman refers to the need for massive U.S. assistance to India to make her a showpiece of the American way of living. "Their objective", Mr. Brezhnev said, "is to convert India into a propagandist of their ideology. So, on the other hand do not expect you to become Marxist simply because you are receiving assistance from us". Mr. Sen's reply to this was that India had her own way of living and had no intention of becoming anyone else's showpiece.

15. Throughout the talk Mr. Brezhnev was full of enthusiasm and visits to India and of the tremendous progress credited to his country. He concluded by requesting the Law Minister to convey his warm regards and wishes to Prime Minister Indira."

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