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Guide to the Dr.
Harry Bakwin and
Dr. Ruth Morris
Bakwin Soviet Posters
Collection 1930-1932



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Descriptive Summary

Identifier	ICU.SPCL.BAKWINPOSTERS
Title	Bakwin, Dr. Harry and Dr. Ruth Morris Bakwin. Soviet Posters. Collection
Date	1930-1932
Size	19 items (4 linear feet)
Repository	Special Collections Research Center University of Chicago Library 1100 East 57th Street Chicago, Illinois 60637 U.S.A.
Abstract	This collection contains nineteen Soviet political posters produced in the early 1930s, collected by the American physicians Dr. Harry Bakwin and Dr. Ruth Morris Bakwin during two trips to the Soviet Union. The majority of the posters promote the First Five Year Plan (1928-1932), a series of industrial targets designed by the Stalinist regime to build up heavy industry in the Soviet Union. Most of the posters are in Ukrainian, with the remainder in Russian. The posters depict various aspects of the industrialization and militarization drive of this period, as well as general themes in the communist worldview and important moments in Marxist history.

Information on Use

Access

The collection is open for research.

Digital Images

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The images presented here may include materials reflecting the attitudes, language, and stereotypes of an earlier time period. These materials are presented as historical resources in

support of study and research. Inclusion of such materials does not constitute an endorsement of their content by the University of Chicago.

The University of Chicago Library appreciates hearing from anyone who may have information about any of the images in this collection.

Citation

When quoting material from this collection, the preferred citation is: Bakwin, Dr. Harry and Dr. Ruth Morris Bakwin. Soviet Posters. Collection, [Box #, Folder #], Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library

Historical Note

After the October 1917 Revolution, the Bolshevik Party seized on the political poster as a medium to convey information and ideology to the masses. The political poster assumed an especially important communicative role during the Russian Civil War (1918-1921), though the production of posters was decentralized across various Bolshevik organizations and scarce paper led to small issues and uneven distribution. Due to the low level of literacy in the country, visual means of conveying political messages were privileged during the early years of Bolshevik rule. The first Soviet posters were designed to be visually striking and easily comprehensible for the illiterate but, over the course of the 1920s, the written word assumed an increasingly important role in poster art as efforts to improve the literacy rate succeeded.

In order to be easily interpreted in a period of profound social and cultural flux, the imagery of Soviet posters drew on recognizable themes and icons from popular culture, Russian religious traditions, commercial advertising, fine arts, symbols and themes of the Russian and Western European labor movements, and the political art of the tsarist era. Poster artists were a diverse group, many with formal artistic training. Their work adorned public spaces and sites of socialist construction across the Soviet Union, such as schools, factories and workers' clubs, lending legitimacy to the nascent Soviet leadership and communicating the new socio-cultural values to Soviet citizens.

The onset of the Stalin's First Five Year Plan in 1928 led to an explosion of political posters facilitated in part by the centralization of the poster printing industry in 1931 under the Art Department of the State Publishing House (Izogiz), which operated under the direct supervision of the Central Committee, the highest political organ of the Soviet government. Many posters now began appearing in issues of the hundreds of thousands, not only in Russia but across the various socialist republics and outside urban centers.

The First Five Year Plan set a series of industrial targets designed to build up heavy industry and allow the Soviet Union to compete economically with Western capitalist countries. Poster art of this time communicated these goals to Soviet citizens by featuring images of strong, healthy, usually male workers engaged in these heroic tasks, and with slogans promoting efficiency and

productivity in labor. Industrial development depended on high productivity in agriculture in order to feed the urban workforce and sell grain to pay for industrial machinery; hence Soviet authorities aggressively pursued the policies of collectivization and “de-Kulakization” (the forcible removal of supposedly ‘bourgeois’ peasants who were believed to be exploiting other peasants). Though collectivization was extremely unpopular and fiercely resisted, political posters often depicted peasants, usually female, as cooperative and supportive of Soviet policies. Youth also played an important role in the implementation of the Five Year Plan and in building the new socialist society. The Komsomol (Communist Union of Youth) was actively involved in the collectivization of the countryside and implementing other Soviet cultural campaigns, such as the fight against religion. Poster art of the time often depicted their youthful enthusiasm for Soviet goals and rallied them to action. During this time, Soviet leaders and citizens also worried about “capitalist encirclement” and the threat of war; hence, a number of Soviet posters called on the population to prepare both mentally and physically for armed conflict.

During the First Five Year Plan, traditionally agricultural and rural Ukraine underwent rapid industrialization, with dramatic consequences: the period saw the construction of many new industrial regions, increased industrial output, and swelling urban populations, but collectivization of agriculture and forced requisitioning of large grain quotas also led to widespread famine by 1932.

Scope Note

This collection contains nineteen Soviet political posters produced in the early 1930s, collected by the physicians Dr. Harry Bakwin and Dr. Ruth Morris Bakwin during two trips to the Soviet Union. Most of the posters promote the First Five Year Plan (1928-1932), a series of industrial targets designed by the Stalin regime to build up heavy industry in the Soviet Union. Thirteen posters are in Ukrainian, three are in Russian (Items 7, 10 and 11), one is in Ukrainian and Russian (Item 16) and one is missing its text but was produced in Moscow (Item 4). These Ukrainian posters are a unique resource, considering Ukraine was one of the most important sites of industrial development under the Five Year Plan.

The posters represent various aspects of the industrialization and militarization drive associated with this period, including the prioritization of heavy industry, labor productivity initiatives, military preparedness, collectivization of agriculture, and the mobilization of youth. Several posters deal with general themes in the communist worldview, such as the corruption and exploitation of workers by international bankers and capitalists, as well as important moments in Marxist history, including the 1871 Paris Commune and the 1917 October Revolution.

This collection includes two posters by Viktor Deni, one of the leading poster artists and political cartoonists of the period. Two posters contain verses written by Dem’yan Bednyi, a Bolshevik poet who frequently wrote agitprop (a Russian combination of “agitation” and “propaganda”) materials for the regime.

Related Resources

The following related resources are located in the Department of Special Collections:

<http://www.lib.uchicago.edu/e/spcl/select.html>

Subject Headings

- Posters, Soviet
- Propaganda, Soviet

INVENTORY

Folder 1

Kaplan and Fridkin, "Agit No. 2", explaining the importance of changing work habits, lithograph, 147 cm x 71.5 cm, undated

View digitized document. <http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/scrc/md/bakwin-001>

Folder 2

N. C., "3690 Kilometers," poster for a new train line to the Ukraine, lithograph, 100.5 cm x 69.5 cm, 1931

View digitized document. <http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/scrc/md/bakwin-002>

Folder 3

B. Bilotskii, "S.R.S.R.," youth in the struggle for the cause of Lenin, lithograph, 103.2 cm x 71 cm, undated

View digitized document. <http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/scrc/md/bakwin-003>

Folder 4

Artillery soldier, lithograph, 72 cm x 103.5 cm, 1931

View digitized document. <http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/scrc/md/bakwin-004>

Folder 5

S. Kukurudza, "15 years of Struggle for the General Party Line 1917-1932," lithograph, 105 cm x 73 cm, 1932

View digitized document. <http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/scrc/md/bakwin-005>

Folder 6

V. Deni, "The Gnat," Dem'yan Bednyi poem, lithograph, 103.5 cm x 73.3 cm, undated

View digitized document. <http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/scrc/md/bakwin-006>

Folder 7

Paris Commune, lithograph, 104 cm x 68.5 cm, undated

View digitized document. <http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/scrc/md/bakwin-007>

Folder 8

"Donbas -- Until We Overcome," Donets Basin in Eastern Ukraine, home to some of the largest factories in the Soviet Union, lithograph, 102 cm x 70 cm, undated

View digitized document. <http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/scrc/md/bakwin-008>

Folder 9

"Proletariat Youth," lithograph, 106.3 cm x 71 cm, undated

View digitized document. <http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/scrc/md/bakwin-009>

Folder 10

N.V. Tsvichinskii, "The Victory of the Five Year Plan is a Strike Against Capitalism," lithograph, 104 cm x 70.2 cm, 1931

View digitized document. <http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/scrc/md/bakwin-010>

Folder 11

"Chemicalization of the U.S.S.R," lithograph, 106 cm x 71.8 cm, undated

View digitized document. <http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/scrc/md/bakwin-011>

Folder 12

M. D., "Celebrate the Commune, Celebrate the Social Revolution..." poster celebrating the socialist revolution, lithograph, 88 cm x 61.9 cm, undated

View digitized document. <http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/scrc/md/bakwin-012>

Folder 13

"The Future Socialism," lithograph, 71 cm x 51.7 cm, undated

View digitized document. <http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/scrc/md/bakwin-013>

Folder 14

V. Vovchenko and E. Svitlichnii, "Cultural Gathering," lithograph, 73.3 cm x 52.2 cm, undated

View digitized document. <http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/scrc/md/bakwin-014>

Folder 15

G. Gritsenko, "One Million Komsomoltsy - Master of One Million Kilowatts," lithograph, 72.7 cm x 50.4 cm, 1931

View digitized document. <http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/scrc/md/bakwin-015>

Folder 16

"1,000,000 Silos, Pits, and Trenches..." poster explaining the importance of properly storing grain, depicting the Komsomol's work, and issuing combat orders, lithograph, 70.3 cm x 52.5 cm, 1930

View digitized document. <http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/scrc/md/bakwin-016>

Folder 17

"Long live the international socialist revolution!" quote by Lenin, poster celebrating the 1917 revolution showing fleeing bankers, lithograph, 99.5 cm x 65.5 cm, undated

View digitized document. <http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/scrc/md/bakwin-017>

Folder 18

V. Deni, "Rot Front" (Red Front, Roter Frontkaempferbund in German, a paramilitary wing of the German Communist Party in the 1920s) worker standing over banking and exchange buildings, Dem'yan Bednyi poem, lithograph, 105 cm x 68 cm, 1932

View digitized document. <http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/scrc/md/bakwin-018>

Folder 19

"Komsomol Member, Be Ready to Defend the USSR; Learn to Shoot Straight!" lithograph, 100.5 cm x 71 cm, 1932

View digitized document. <http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/scrc/md/bakwin-019>