

UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM
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AN INTRODUCTION TO THE BAYKOV SOVIET POSTER COLLECTION
David Wilson : March 2013

The collection is named after Alexander Baykov, who set up the department which later became the University's Centre for Russian and East European Studies (CREES). Baykov died in 1963 and did not collect the posters himself. Most of them were produced while the Soviet Union was ruled by Leonid Brezhnev, who died in 1982. Brezhnev was followed in quick succession by Yuri Andropov (d. 1984), then by Konstantin Chernenko (d. 1985); he was followed by Mikhail Gorbachev, who remained in power until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. There are new posters from each of these periods, but an important part of the collection is in the form of reproductions of classic posters from the early years of the Soviet Union and the Second World War ("The Great Patriotic War"). There are also several folders of 21st-century reprints of classic posters.

The new online catalogue for the collection includes the following important features.

- (1) Transcriptions of the Russian captions with English translations of these (which may vary from those given for the same posters in other collections).
- (2) Full names and dates for the majority of the artists. A separate list of artists and their posters is also available; this includes photographers as well as graphic artists.
- (3) Other production details, as printed on the posters themselves. Besides the usual details of publishers and dates, these include names of editors, details of printers, size of print runs, and price.

The collection contains about 2000 separate images, some of which are duplicated, and represents work by over 550 separate artists. To give some idea of the range of subjects covered and the artists involved, a brief selection of posters in the collection is described below. Although just a single finding number is shown here, some of the more famous images are represented in the collection by several reprints – these can be located by using the list of posters by each artist which is mentioned above. The dates shown are those when the posters were originally published.

NOTE ON THE TRANSCRIPTION OF THE RUSSIAN ALPHABET

The online catalogue for this collection uses a version of the British Standard system (BS 2979), which has been simplified by omitting accents and all other diacritical marks except for an apostrophe, which is used to transcribe the Russian "soft sign". This system is generally compatible with most search algorithms, although some slight ambiguities may arise in relation to the letters E and I. In particular, the digraph YE is not used for initial E, as it is in some other systems. Readers used to the Library of Congress system should note that the letters transcribed with the digraphs IA and IU in that system are transcribed here as YA and YU, the usual convention in Britain. Some names and other words appear in the simplified transcription with the unfamiliar endings –II or –YI. For everyday purposes, names like this are usually spelt with a simple –Y and in these notes the familiar spelling Trotsky has been used instead of Trotskii.. Apart from this and the spelling of Baykov's own name (which would otherwise be Baikov), the simplified system has been used for all the names in these notes.

The collection also contains a number of posters by Ukrainian artists. The system used for transcribing their names and any poster captions in Ukrainian is broadly the same as that used for Russian, except that the Ukrainian alphabet uses different Cyrillic letters for I and Y.

Revolution and the Art of Propaganda

For the first few months after the Bolsheviks seized power at the end of 1917, Russia was in chaos. The political poster became an important medium for the Bolsheviks to communicate with a largely illiterate population. Established commercial artists and members of various new artistic movements were mobilised to support the new regime.

810/1.
A year of
proletarian
dictatorship.
APSIT
(1918)

One of the first was the Latvian artist Aleksandrs Apsitis, better known as Apsit, who was well established as an illustrator for books and journals before the war and had then produced patriotic posters for the tsarist regime. However in 1918 he was recruited to work for the Bolsheviks and he produced many posters over the next 18 months. This image, in rather traditional style reminiscent of that used in posters for the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905, is often described as being the first Soviet poster. It shows a blacksmith with a hammer as the typical urban worker, a convention used in many early posters, and a male peasant with a sickle as the typical rural worker.

784/4.
Step forward
for the defence
of Petrograd!
APSIT
(1919)

In August 1919, Petrograd (the former St Petersburg) was threatened by the White forces under General Yudenich. Most of the Red Army was engaged in fighting elsewhere and, to hold the city until reinforcements could be brought in by rail, Trotsky raised a Red Guard of Petrograd workers. This poster was produced in a single day at this time of crisis. Soon after producing it, Apsit left Petrograd and, fearing that the Bolsheviks were losing the Civil War, he eventually returned to Latvia.

796/1.
The enemy is
at the gates!
KOCHERGIN
(1919)

Like the previous poster, this one by Kochergin was produced within a day when Yudenich's forces were approaching Petrograd. Printing resources were very limited during the civil war and more colours meant longer production times, so many posters only used red and black. Red had been associated with Socialism at least since the days of the Paris Commune in the 1870s, and this was exploited by the Soviet propagandists who used the fortunate coincidence that the Russian word for "red" also means "beautiful". Red also had sacred connotations in religious icons. Kochergin was a leading member of the Agitprop (propaganda theatre) movement and produced about 100 posters.

810/5.
Comrades,
let's defend
the October
Revolution
with rifle &
hammer!
MOOR
(1920)

This is another red and black poster, this time by Moor, whose real name was Orlov. He had taken part in the 1905 revolution and then became established as a cartoonist for several satirical journals. After the October Revolution he continued to draw cartoons for newspapers but also branched out into poster art, producing just over 50 posters during the two years of the civil war. He became a respected senior figure in poster design and somehow survived Stalin's purges. The poster shows a heroic figure ringing a great alarm bell while revolutionary fighters bayonet the White general Wrangel.

784/5.
Have you
volunteered?
MOOR
(1920)

This is one of the most famous Soviet posters. Because of its pointing figure, it has been compared with the image of Lord Kitchener on the British poster “Your country needs you!”. However Moor denied having been influenced by that.

The collection contains several examples of the “ROSTA Windows”. These were posters produced by the Russian Telegraphic Agency (ROSTA) that were displayed in the windows of shops and other large buildings. ROSTA provided the only reliable

802/1.
Red Army soldier,
take the last
straw...
MAYAKOVSKII
(1919)

means of communication for Bolshevik activists around the country. Like many of the early Windows, this one by Vladimir Mayakovskii was produced in sections, using cardboard stencils. The completed poster was then made by pasting the sections onto a board. Here “the last straw” is Kharkov, and the final panel shows the US president, Woodrow Wilson, with a pot labelled “Russian Question” and the caption “You made this

porridge – now eat it.” One of the other panels is noteworthy for showing an early version of the hammer and sickle device – the hammer for the (male) industrial worker and the sickle for the (female) peasant. Mayakovskii, who was also a leading Futurist poet and a friend of Boris Pasternak, was responsible for designing and writing the text for this and many of the other Moscow Windows. The style of drawing is reminiscent of the traditional Russian *lubók* or broadsheet.

796/10.
Ukrainians and
Russians have a
common cry ...
MAYAKOVSKII
(1920)]

While the civil war in Russia was not finally won, the Bolsheviks were threatened by an invasion from newly independent Poland. “Ukrainians and Russians have a common cry – the workers shall never again be ruled by the Polish landowners!” is another Window produced at this time by Mayakovskii, but using lithography rather than stencils.

943/2.
Beat the Whites
with the Red
wedge!
LISITSKII
(1920)

Among the experimental artists was “El” Lisitskii, who had studied in Germany and then travelled widely in western Europe. He was a founder of the Suprematist art movement. In 1919 he joined Shagal (“Marc Chagal”) at the Vitebsk School of Art. He later returned to Germany for a while as a Soviet cultural ambassador and his work had a major influence on the development of the Bauhaus movement. Two thousand

copies of this very abstract lithographed poster were produced in 1920.

796/12.
Work hard and
steady; keep your
rifle ready!
LEBEDEV
(1920)

802/15.
May Day
Workers’
Procession.
LEBEDEV
(1921)

These are two examples of Windows produced for the Petrograd ROSTA using linocuts, a technique which enabled production of more copies than the stencils used by Moscow ROSTA. Lebedev was one of the few artists who unconditionally supported the Bolsheviks.

After the civil war he worked mainly on book design and newspaper cartoons. Despite being denounced for “Renoirist tendencies” in the 1930s, he survived to produce more posters in the Second World War.

789/5.
The First of May is
All-Russia Voluntary
Work Day.
MOOR
(1920)

Another red and black poster. The *subbotnik* or “voluntary work day” was a way of forcing workers to work on Saturday, their traditional day off. Again, blacksmiths are the typical workers. The design is noteworthy for showing a woman as the blacksmith’s assistant. Women were increasingly depicted in roles traditionally reserved for men.

812/7.
At the grave of
Counter-Revolution.
DENI
(1920)

Denísov, who used the pen-name Deni, was an established satirical cartoonist who worked for various journals before the Revolution. Although his style remained essentially journalistic, he produced a large number of successful posters, many of which featured evil capitalists wearing top-hats, like the one shown on the right of the grave in this one.

On the left is shown an Orthodox priest (another hate-figure) and the ghost of a White soldier hovers above. The names on the grave (Kornilov, Kolchak, Yudenich etc.) are those of the White leaders.

796/8.
An illiterate is like a
blind man.
RADAKOV
(1920)

The literacy campaign was a major priority for the Soviet regime. Like Moor and Deni, Radakov had worked for satirical journals before the war. He also contributed to the Petrograd ROSTA Windows.

796/4.
Help!
MOOR
(1921)

This poster was issued at the time of the Volga Famine, in which an estimated five million people died. It has a striking image of an old peasant and two broken stalks of barley. An international relief effort was set up, the bulk of the food being supplied by the USA.

947/2.
There have never been
better teats.
MAYAKOVSKII &
RODCHENKO
(1923)

This extraordinary image, like a voodoo doll, is an advertisement for dummies and teats for babies’ bottles manufactured by the state rubber company, Rezinotrest. The caption is in rhyme, and may be loosely translated as:

There have never been better teats, it must be told.
I could go on sucking them till I’m old.

But who would want their baby to look like this?

After Lenin

810/18.
Long live the
Komsomol.
SAMOKHVALOV
(1924)

The collection has many posters promoting youth movements connected with the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). Children between the ages of about 10 and 15 were recruited into the Young Pioneers movement (which used the Boy Scouts’ motto “Be Prepared”). The Communist League of Youth (Komsomol), was designed for young people aged between about 14 and 28. Samokhvalov mainly worked as a book illustrator.

947/5.
Books!
On all branches
of knowledge.
RODCHENKO
(1925)

This early example of photomontage was produced for Lengiz, the Leningrad State Publishing House. For the poster, Rodchenko used his photo portrait of Lili Brik, the “artistic muse” of his friend Mayakovskii, with whom she had become infatuated. After becoming increasingly disillusioned with Stalin’s version of communism, in 1930 Mayakovskii committed suicide by shooting himself. Many years later, Lili successfully petitioned Stalin to republish Mayakovskii’s poems.

810/5.
Poster for the
“Negro Operetta”.
STENBERG &
STENBERG
(1926)

The name “Negro Operetta” was borrowed from an Anglo-American minstrel show which had toured Russia in the autumn of 1913. The Stenberg brothers, whose father was Swedish, had been born and raised in Russia and were deeply involved in the avant-garde movement in the theatre. In addition to posters for Sergei Eisenstein’s films, they produced this poster for an American song-and-dance show which was officially called “The Chocolate Kiddies” – it introduced the Charleston to Russia.

789/5.
Liberated woman,
build Socialism!
STRAKHOV
(1926)

This poster was originally produced for an International Women’s Day and subsequently used again for other events publicising the emancipation of women. Strakhov-Braslavskii, to give him his full name, had originally trained as a sculptor and then, after the Revolution, he drew political cartoons. In 1921 he drew a series of posters called “The Revolutionary Alphabet”, perhaps inspired by Mayakovskii’s “Soviet Alphabet” of 1919. In 1925 Strakhov won a gold medal at an international exhibition in Paris for a poster commemorating Lenin.

The Impact of Stalinism

796/15.
For the defence
of the USSR.
KULAGINA
(1929)

The Soviet propaganda machine had been largely controlled by Trotsky until he was removed from power by Stalin in 1927. After this there was a distinct change in the artistic styles that were approved by the regime. This poster in the Constructivist style was designed by Valentina Kulagina, the wife of Gustav Klutskis (see below), who shared his interest in photomontage.

767/5.
Peasant woman,
go to the
Collective Farm!
CHEREMNYKH
(1930)

The collective farm or *kolkhoz* was an important part of Stalin’s First Five-Year Plan but provoked widespread resistance from the rural population. The poster campaign to promote the *kolkhoz* was probably aimed mainly at the urban population, who did not understand the true situation on the land. This poster shows a peasant girl, with her scarf tied in the traditional style (beneath her chin). She heads for the new mechanised farm, resisting the clutches of a *kulak* (rich peasant) and a priest. Cheremnykh had begun his career as a newspaper artist and cartoonist. It was he who originated the idea of the ROSTA Windows, for which he did about 500 drawings.

797/8.
Come on Comrade,
join us on the
Collective Farm!
KORABLEVA
(1930)

Another *kolkhoz* poster – in a more obvious Socialist Realism style (which became obligatory in 1934) – shows a *kholkoz* girl, with her scarf tied behind her head in the modern Soviet-worker style. Korableva went on to produce a number of patriotic posters in the Second World War.

796/17.
Let's mechanise
the Donbass.
DEINEKA
(1930)

Donbass is the colloquial name for the coal-mining and industrial region of the Donets Basin in the Ukraine. Deineka had studied under Moor. He also produced a number of monumental paintings of historical events and designed mosaics for a Moscow metro station. He survived Stalin, despite being denounced in the 1940s.

789/7.
From NEP Russia
will come a
Socialist Russia.
KLUTSIS
(1930)

789/7.
Let's carry out the
plan of great works.
KLUTSIS
(1930)

These are two examples of photomontage by the Latvian artist, Gustav Klutsis, husband of Valentina Kulagina. The caption on the first one is chosen to justify discarding Lenin's New Economic Policy ("state capitalism") in favour of

Stalin's first Five-Year Plan (1928-1933) for a centralised command economy. Despite loyally following the party line, Klutsis was arrested and executed in 1938. His wife survived and produced posters throughout the war.

767/10.
Learn technical skills
and take the lead in
building Socialism.
SEROV
(1934)

This poster shows muscular Soviet women – reminiscent of later champion Olympic hammer-throwers and shot-putters. Serov was a member of the original "Militant Pencil" group (see below). He won many awards for his artistic work during the Stalin years and was President of the Soviet Academy of Arts from 1962 to 1968.

The Great Patriotic War

775/1.
The Motherland
is calling!
TOIDZE
(1941)

This is one of the most famous wartime posters, somewhat reminiscent of Moor's "Have you volunteered?" described above. It is quoted in two other posters in the Baykov collection (Numbers 647 and 800/5). The document in the woman's hand is the military oath that every soldier had to swear. Like Stalin, Toidze was a Georgian. He had endeared himself to the leader by painting a flattering portrait of him in the early 1930s. The personification of Russia as a female figure had first been used on posters during the Russo-Japanese War and was revived in the First World War.

806/2.
We will defend
Lenin's city.
SEROV
(1941)

A number of older designs were pressed into service again for wartime propaganda. This poster is a reworking of Apsit's 1919 "Step forward for the defence of Petrograd!" (784/4) described above.

775/9.
For the
Motherland!
TOIDZE
(1943)

Another poster by Toidze combines ideas from the two previous posters. The inclusion of a child emphasises the idea of the red-robed female figure as “Mother Russia”.

775/18.
How have you
helped the Front?
MOOR
(1941)

This is one of several versions of Moor’s “Have you volunteered?” (784/5), which was adapted to show a modern Red Army soldier.

775/14.
To Moscow! Aha!
– From Moscow:
Ouch!
DENI
(1941)

This is one of a number of cartoons of Hitler drawn by Deni. The character looks uncannily like photographs of Deni himself.

945/3.
Don’t gossip!
VATOLINA &
DENISOV
(1941)

A very famous image by Deni’s daughter-in-law and son which has recently been reused in commercial advertisements. Interviewed shortly before her death, Vatolina said she was tired of being asked about it and had only got involved with poster design as this was the only way of earning a living when she graduated from art school..

789/12.
Stalingrad.
DENI &
DOLGORUKOV
(1943)

An effective reworking of one of Deni’s earlier works from 1921, which had shown a top-hatted capitalist being struck down by the Third International. On the new version, which shows a bloated German general being impaled by the word “Stalingrad”, Deni was assisted by his younger collaborator Dolgorukov, who also produced many posters of his own.

796/26.
We beat Napoleon
– and we’ll beat
that upstart Hitler!
KUKRYNIKS
(1941)

“KUKRYNIKS” was the name used by the artists M.V. Kupriyanov, P.N. Krylov and Nikolai Sokolov. These three, who had studied under Moor, had worked together since the 1920s. They produced caricatures for magazines and newspapers, as well as a number of posters, several of which are in the collection. This is one of a number of cartoon-type posters by various artists which compare Hitler with Napoleon.

789/11/1.
Red Army
Warrior, save us!
KORETSKII
(1942)

This poster, which shows a mother and child threatened by a Nazi bayonet, is by Koretskii, who was a very prolific poster artist. He glorified Stalin and his achievements in the 1930s and then produced many patriotic posters during the war.

799/25.
Set me free!
KAZANTSEV
(1941)

The theme of this is similar to that of the previous poster. It is reminiscent of Moor's Volga Famine poster "Help!" (796/4) described above.

784/14.
The Military
Commissar is both a
father and a friend.
MAL'TSEV
(1943)

This commissar, with his little pistol and a copy of Pravda slung at his belt, must have evoked some comments from real soldiers. Political commissars, who undermined the authority of the military command, very nearly led to the loss of Stalingrad and Stalin was reluctantly obliged to downgrade them.

775/25.
Westwards!
IVANOV
(1943)

This poster shows a Russian soldier is using his rifle butt to smash a German sign saying "To the East". Ivanov was a very prolific poster artist. He had also worked for film studios during the 1930s.

775/26.
We're on our way to
Berlin!
GOLOVANOV
(1944)

This poster shows a typical Red Army soldier, Ivan, pulling on his boots for the advance into Germany. Golovanov had worked as a book illustrator and art teacher before being recruited into producing posters during the war.

775/28.
Hurrah for the
Red Army!
GOLOVANOV
(1945)

This is a sequel to the previous poster, which is included at the top left. Here Ivan has arrived in Berlin. On the wall behind him is scrawled "Got there! Berlin, 24/4/1945. Long live the Russian people."

775/30.
Hurrah for our
victorious troops!
KLIMASHIN
(1945)

Numerous posters celebrating the victory in 1945 were reissued on the 30th anniversary in 1975, probably to raise the profile of the Red Army in the Cold War.

789/14/1.
A 5-Year Plan in 4
years – let's do it!
IVANOV
(1948)

Stalin's third Five-Year Plan had been cut short by the German invasion in 1941. He introduced the fourth Plan in 1945. This poster typifies the claims of over-achievement that marked out all the Plans.

From Brezhnev to the Last Days of the Soviet Union

516.
Revolutionary theory
is our mightiest
weapon!
KORETSKII
(1978)

In this poster Koretskii, approaching his 70th birthday, glorifies the works of Marx, Engels and Lenin. During his long career as a poster artist, he produced over 600 designs. However, the most of the new posters of this last period were produced by artists who had been born in the 1930s or later.

789/15.
Peace to the World.
KARAKASHEV
(1965)

At the height of the Cold War there were many posters on the theme of “peace”, for which the Russian word happens to be the same as that for “world”. This one shows dark clouds being pushed aside to reveal the radiant sun, a motif popular in traditional Russian folk art. Karakashev was one of the leading new poster artists of the late Soviet period.

642.
Young people, join
the textile industry!
LUK’YANOV
(1973)

The collection contains a number of posters extolling the virtues of various industries. This one also uses a design which suggests rays of sunshine. Luk’yanov had worked on cinema posters before turning to political themes in the 1970s.

The name “Militant Pencil” was originally used by a group of Leningrad artists who produced a wall newspaper during the Winter War with Finland in 1939-1940 and then went on to produce over a hundred posters during the war against Germany. The group included Serov (see above). Their logo originally included a rifle on the artist’s palette. The name was revived in 1965 by a new group of artists and poets who produced witty satirical cartoons, often accompanied by verses, as shown in the next three posters. Their aim was “to open the boils on the body of Soviet society” – by exposing the shortcomings of bureaucracy and bad behaviour in society generally.

787/7.
It’s all the same to me.
EFIMOVSKII
(1975)

This poster shows a suspiciously bourgeois couple discussing their fashionably dressed blonde daughter, who is gazing at her bedroom wall which is covered in religious icons and pin-ups of movie stars.

787/1.
There’s no God
up here!
OBOZNENKO
(1975)

The collection contains quite a number of posters celebrating Russian achievements in space. This one neatly combines this with an attack on religion.

822/23.
And this is where
we camped before.
MEN’SHIKOV
(1982)

A new theme in the 1980s was conservation of the environment. This one by a Militant Pencil artist draws attention to the damage caused by pollution.

- | | |
|--|---|
| <p>702.
International
Children's Day;
the First of June.
GETMAN
(1977)</p> | <p>Various "International Days" provided a theme for many posters. Getman had studied under Savostyuk (see next). From 1974 he worked as one of the staff artists for the poster publishers Plakat.</p> |
| <p>667.
The time must not
come.
SAVOSTYUK
(1983)</p> | <p>This is one of a number of posters against the nuclear arms race. Savostyuk had studied under Cheremnykh and worked for many of the poster publishers.</p> |
| <p>594.
Moscow 1980 :
22nd Olympiad.
PANKRAT'EV
(1978)</p> | <p>For the 1980 Olympic Games in Moscow the Russians produced a total of eighteen and three-quarter million posters in 250 designs. Several are represented in the collection. This one shows Misha, the bear-cub mascot, and the logo for the games.</p> |
| <p>680.
I'm going to be an
Olympian.
SMOTROV
(1975)</p> | <p>This pleasant little image, which was produced for the 1976 Winter Olympics, is being used again for the 2014 Games in Sochi.</p> |

SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

Note that each of these sources uses a slightly different system for spelling Russian names.

In Special Collections:

Maria Lafont.

Soviet posters: the Sergo Grigorian collection.

Munich: Prestel, 2007. [ref NC 1807.S65 L34]

In the Main Library:

(1) Stephen White.

The Bolshevik poster.

New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1988. [q DK 269.5 W]

(2) Leah Dickerman (editor).

Building the collective: Soviet graphic design, 1917-1937.

New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996. [NC 1810 B]

(3) Victoria E. Bonnell.

Iconography of power: Soviet political posters under Lenin and Stalin.

Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997 [DK 266.3 B]

On the internet:

(1) Museum of Russian Poster <eng.plakaty.ru/authors>

[Biographical notes and reproductions of posters.

More information on Russian-language version.]

(2) Sergo Grigorian Collection <www.redavantgarde.com/authors/>

[Portraits, biographical notes and reproductions of posters.

More information on Russian-language version.]

(3) ArtRu.info <artru.info/en/ar/alf/>

[Biographical notes. Reproductions of posters for registered subscribers.

More information on Russian-language version.]