

**Valeria Nezgovorova:**  
**Gift Banners of 1923 Party's Anniversary**  
**Ceremonial and Symbolics**

*Based on the materials of the flags and banners collection of the State Central  
Museum of Contemporary History of Russia (SCMCHR)*  
*(Submitted paper)*

The beginning of 1920-s in Russia was marked by introduction of New Economic Policy (NEP), reviving of trade and private capital. In these conditions communists were at the uncompromising war with Christian ideology and demonstration of "bourgeois" ideology. Implementation of Marxist dogmata into public consciousness took place via "change of religious and Christian symbols by Marxist and communist symbols for the masses", as Russian philosopher N.A. Berdyayev noticed it (1874-1948) [1]. In everyday life the usual ceremonies were filled with new content: the newspapers were a riot of articles about "Komsomol Easters", "red christening", "red marriages", etc.

In 1923 for the first time the jubilee of Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik) RCP(b) was widely celebrated, and its 25th anniversary coincided with the 40th year after K. Marx death. The preparation for the anniversary celebrations was begun from the beginning of the year. The Central Committee (CC) of RCP(b) considered the forthcoming celebrations as the ideological event of primary importance [2]. The growth of the party was urgent: the party organizations at the local level were like islands in the sea of numerous "non-party masses". The statistic data published in Pravda newspaper evidenced insufficient party's influence even among the industrial workers; and the rural "units" did not exceed 3 persons in most cases. At the beginning of 1923, 485,500 people were in RCP(b) [3]. In such conditions the festivities occurred under the slogan "for reinforcement of the party and for the party" [4].

This should have been facilitated by the developed ceremonial of celebrations: workers who were not the members of the party, were invited to the party meetings and became the focus of attention: the lectures on the party's history, the reports of local organizations, the

cultural program – for instance, a concert, amateur plays, “comradely dinner” were intended for them <sup>15</sup>].

Step-by-step arrangement of celebration was the important moment: general meetings at the enterprises and in the districts, city, guberniya party conferences with participation of non-partisan workers, and, finally, an invitation of delegations consisting of non-party workers to the regular 12<sup>th</sup> convention of RCP(b) <sup>16</sup>]. The newspapers did not stint the encomiastic epithets for the party, forming its image in the mass consciousness – “the teacher and the leader, hero of labor, struggle and victory”.

Special attention in the press was paid to greetings of workers who were not party members. The importance and solemnity of the moment was mentioned in flourish expressions: “Only the Communist party is our leader and the protector of workers’ and peasants’ interests, - was a shout of shouts screamed out in this day by the workers of the Central city laundry along with the whole proletariat. Their rough hands inscribed this all-time slogan at the red labor banner and delivered it to the local party unit on March 25 as the pledge of unity”. This was written in one of the Rabochaya Moskva newspaper’s March issues, a body of Moscow RCP(b) committee <sup>17</sup>]. Such creative work is not the only example of giving the fleur of planet scale event to the simple meeting at the plant. Revealingly, the gift considered as the emotional outburst “from below” is in the center of attention.

The reports about festive meetings give the detailed lists of presents. Thus, at the meeting in Rogozhsky district of Moscow, the regional committee of the party was presented with: bust of Lenin, nominal badges with Marx portrait, the book with Lenin and Trotsky biographies. But the major part of emotions was caused by presentation of a banner on behalf of Optovik factory: “Nikolayev, the worker, shyly brings in the banner. Ilyich is smiled in the velvet folds. All people stand up as a one man. The applauses and music embarrassed the worker completely... That minute, which he would never forget, he was not able to say a word” <sup>18</sup>]. Both the presenters and those, for whom these gifts were designed, took them as the symbol of ideological unity between the non-partisan persons and the Communist party. Unlike

other presents, the gift banner was the original “material personification” of this unity. It’s notable that in enumerating of gifts the newspapers sometimes say that the workers “present banners and gifts”.

Very often the ceremony of presentation of gift banners was accompanied by the original loyalty oath. Thus at the meeting of Zamoskvoretsky district workers, the district committee of RCP(b) was presented with a banner. When passing it, Gusev, the worker, said excitedly: “If there is a need we will all die under the RCP banner” <sup>99</sup>. At the same meeting the workers from Krasny Proletary plant presented the banner with the words: “To the Communist party and its Zamoskvoretsky headquarters we give this Red banner, and its oldest member, the woman of revolution – comrade Zemlyachka – is the honorary metalworker of the plant”. The secretary of Zamoskvoretsky district committee of RCP(b), Rozaliya Zemlyachka, who was at the meeting, responded with the next words: “The most valuable thing for me is the status of metal-worker” <sup>100</sup>. Such demonstrations of pietism in front of common workers along with the whole solemn, festive atmosphere of the meetings facilitated the raise of their self-esteem and overcoming of shyness for public appearances. From the other side, the most active persons, later on elected as delegates to the 12<sup>th</sup> congress of RCP(b) were found in the course of meetings. The congress was the culmination of jubilee celebrations, devoted to the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the party. For the first time the delegations of workers who were not party members, took part in the work of the Party congress. Mass greetings and numerous gifts from non-partisan workers should have shown visually the party’s support. Presentation of banners became widely popular.



It is well-known that the museum collections of the country have many gift banners, produced in 1923. The collection of the State Central Museum of Contemporary History of Russia has about 60 jubilee banners of the Moscow region and central guberniyas enterprises. It is worth noting, that the decisions on selection of the gift were made collectively: by the general meeting of workers, by the specially elected commission, the meeting of trade union board. The decision on appearance of banners – the slogans and images - was also collective. The dimensions, fabric, design methods depended both on the

opportunities and tastes of customers and on the skill level of manufacturers. In general, cloths had rather large size; many of them had the shape of church banner and were made of silk, velvet, broadcloth and cotton. Graphic compositions and slogans were painted with oil, made in appliqué method, embroidered. The mate-



rials from the “old regime stocks” were often used – metal bullion and lace intended for fitting out the imperial army, canonical dress clothes and prop clothes.

The majority of banners which are in the SCMCHR’s collection were presented at the thirteenth meeting of the 12<sup>th</sup> party congress, which was specially devoted to greetings and took place at the Bolshoi Theatre in the evening of April 23, 1923. That’s what Pravda newspaper wrote of the beginning of the ceremony: “The long line of delegations from the non-party workers of St. Peter, Moscow and other Russian cities is headed by the non-partisan worker of Trehgornaya manufactory, comrade Bahvalov, presenting the congress on behalf of 10,000 workers of several Krasnaya Presnya district enterprises the Red Banner

and the letter in which the workers declare: “In 1905 Presnya district was at the barricades, and today, if it becomes necessary, we will come again as a single man” [11]. Besides, Bahvalov had already had such experience: at the solemn meeting of workers of Trehgornaya manufaktura textile factory, which took place on March 16, 1923, and was devoted to the party’s jubilee, he presented the banner with the words: “Upon the first call of the party the factory workers will always come under this banner for the joint struggle and work” [12].

Banners were presented with pride, like a relic. The picture from our museum’s funds records a ceremonial moment: non-party workers, greeting the congress, are standing in front of the delegates at the Bolshoi Theatre’s scene with their banners. A picturesque group with unfolded gift banners raised over the heads impresses emotionally and reminds of the final scene of the play – the demonstration or the religious procession. The latter comparison is intensified by presence of banners having the church banner structure.



The delegations of the non-Party workers on the stage of the Bolshoi Theatre. The 13th of April 1923

With all diversity of banners, its general feature was the red color. To that time the red flag had become a state symbol of Bolshevik Russia and the sacred relic of revolution, the object of special worship. The gift jubilee banners acted like a symbolic sign of solidarity of ideas and the unity of party’s and working masses’ aims. Thus, when presenting the banner, the spokesman for Dinamo plant asked the workers to hold

this banner “higher”, and if necessary, to carry it all over the world, as “there should be no place without this banner” [13].

From the other side, urgent political ideas were embodied in the symbols of banners: emblems, slogans and graphic compositions.

The state emblem – “the sickle and the hammer” – was the most popular. To the beginning of 1920-s such painters as N. Altman, A. Arnshtam, E. Lansere, S. Chehonin, S. Gruzenberg and others created various variants for the sickle and the hammer emblem, which became widely popular due to decoration of the first soviet festivals, magazine graphic arts, trade union emblems, pieces of propaganda porcelain. In the beginning of 1920-s the emblematic compositions of gift banners were created under their influence.

On the jubilee banners made to the 25-th party anniversary, the sickle and the hammer emblem was most often presented as a component part of compositions, added with symbolic images of the shining sun, the Globe, the flaming torch, laurel wreaths, widely used during the February revolution as the implementation of freedom and solidarity idea. Thus, the gift banner presented to Gluhovskaya unit of RCP by Bogorodskoye unit of all-Russian trade union of textile workers, the sickle, the hammer and the blazing torch are united into one composition. At the end of 1920-s the image of torch on the banners was hard to find. To that time Lenin’s idea of the “world revolution” was replaced by an objective “for construction of socialism in one separate country”, set by J. Stalin. Numerous variants of “the sickle and the hammer” emblem had went away, and the tendency for unification was clear. In the next decade this emblem, as well as the sun and the five-point star were often represented in the



The banner gifted to the Gluhovskaya unit of RCP by Bogorodskoye unit of all-Russian trade union of textile workers. Moscow region.

Composition with the sickle, the hammer and the flaming torch

Woollen cloth, painting. 146x164

structure of USSR's state emblem and the emblems of union republics, trade unions' emblems, emblems of other public organizations.

It should be noted that the images of state emblems of Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic, the USSR and the union republics were reproduced at the gift banners from the beginning of 1920-s. For instance, the front side of velvet banner presented to Moscow district committee of RCP(b) by the workers of Sobolevo-Schelkovskaya



The banner to the Moscow district committee of RCP by the workers of Sobolevo- Shchelkovskaya textile factory, Moscow region.

The State Emblem of Soviet Russia  
Velvet, golden thread, embroidery. 104x147

factory at the 25-th anniversary of the party, has an emblem of Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic in its center, beautifully embroidered with gold thread, and the text above: "Move forward from victory to victory". Four stars with state emblem embroidered in the corners make you remember the tradition

for decoration of Russian military banners. Beginning from 1930-s, the USSR emblem had become the most popular emblem on the banners, although not the only one.

The graphic compositions of gift banner images of labor instruments are almost compulsory, and serve as an emblematic designation of union between workers and peasants. First of all, this is hammer, anvil – sometimes with broken chains, ear wheel, as well as scythe or plow, sheafs and ears. They could be drawn separately or add the figures of working class representatives, just like on the banner of Moscow factory of Department for production of state emblems "Goznak".

The hammer usually acted as a symbolic sign defining the belonging to the new selected class, and as an instrument for struggle against the world capital. Just in this sense the congress was presented with the real

hammer by the AMO plant and the words: “We beat the economic devastation with the hammer. We beat the counterrevolution with the hammer under the guidance of RCP(b). We will vigorously beat the world bourgeoisie with the hammer” [14].

At the same time, on the gift banners of 1923 the composition combinations of “industry” working instruments can be seen, such as shuttle, reel, wrench, abacus, books, lyre, etc. The tools were often supplemented with the figures of people of different occupations. The examples of placement of ready-made products on the banners are tire on the banner of Krasny Kauchuk plant, cable bobbin near the tower and the searchlight on the Moscow cable plant workers’ banner.

In the next decade trade union emblems replace various graphic compositions on the banners.



The jubilee banner of the Moscow factory of monetary signs “Goznak”. The worker and the peasant with industrial and agricultural implements of productions depicted on the cloth. Silk, painting. 203x193



The banner to the Party Committee of Rogoshsky district of Moscow by the workers of cable plant, Moscow. The cable bobbin near the tower and the searchlight. Velvet, metal thread, embroidery. 94x174

The allegory of workers union presented as figures of worker and peasant, tying the union with handshake, remained to be one of the most popular. On the jubilee banner of



Dulyovo porcelain plant it was, without any doubts, made by the professional artists: a worker with compasses and drive gear against the background of smoking funnels, a peasant with a sheaf against the fields and huts. The rising sun is placed in the center, and there is a slogan above: "Let the union of workers of the world strengthen and grow under the banner of RCP and the III-rd Comintern". The best findings of soviet propaganda porcelain – first of all those made by famous artists - were used in the decorative design of the banner – the black and white artists S.V. Chehonin and A.V. Schekotihina-Pototskaya, whose



The banner of Dulyovo porcelain factory gift to the 12-th Congress of RCP  
Moscow region. Silk, painting. 140x205



The banner to the Khamovnichesky RCP unit of Moscow by the workers of machine-tool plant "Krasnyj Kautchuk". Portrait of K.Marx. The tire as an example of ready-made products. Silk, gold lace, applique work. 136x250

works, without any doubts, were well known to the artists of porcelain enterprise. The peculiar “Chehoninsky type” used in design, is one more evidence for the strength of esthetic impression given by the works of this master.

Portraits of leaders – mainly K. Marx and V. Lenin - appear on the jubilee banners of 1923 – painted in oil, embroidered famous usually portrayed by the photographic portraits made



The banner to the Rogoshsky unit of RCP by the workers of Moscow rope factory  
Portrait of V.Lenin  
Silk, painting. 102x210



embroidered famous usually portrayed by the photographic portraits made

by P.A. Otsyupa in 1918. The banner of Dinamo plant workers has the full-size image of the leader, with hand raised in the directing gesture. Later on, this peculiar gesture,

recorded in pictures and documentary films, was replicated in the Soviet art. Some banners have toasts inscribed in honor of the leader. In the complimentary speeches of almost all delegates, “Ilich” was the indisputable authority,

“the leader”, even “the father”. Many were talking



Photo of V.Lenin delivering the speech on the Red Square on the 1-st of May, 1919. Photo by G. Goldshtein



The banner to the 12th congress of RCP by the workers of Dinamo plant, Moscow. Portrait of V.Lenin  
Silk, gold and silver lace, applique work; painting. 142x224

about his “precepts”.

The portraits of leaders on the gift banners of 1920-s were not prevailing, but the tendency for putting them on the banners as the original “symbol of faith”, like the icons on the church banners, was clearly designated. In the next decade, with the beginning of socialist competition, a variety of challenge banners, containing the portraits and popular sayings of the leaders, appeared – both V.I. Lenin and J.V. Stalin appeared more and more often, with a clear prevalence of the latter.

The design of banners reflects the issue of world revolution popular in the beginning of 1920-s. Widely propagandized illusive ideas of the communist leaders about the soon coming of the world October had influence on

mass consciousness. On the banner belonging to workers of engineering plant Krasny Proletarii, the topic of world revolution is represented by the figure of a blacksmith dressed in shirt and long apron, standing by the anvil, installed on the Globe. He holds a hammer in one hand, while his other hand is raised upwards, to the rays of the rising sun. The composition resembles a famous sculpture by N.Y. Danko, made in 1922 and called “A call from the East”. The banners have slogans containing wishes of the soonest “final strengthening of the



The banner by the workers of engineering plant Krasny Proletarii, Moscow Silk, painting. 162x236



N.Danko. Sculpture "A call from the East", porcelain, 1922

communist kingdom” which brings to mind the analogy with biblical “Kingdom of Heaven”.

To the end of 1920-s, the appeals for world revolution would cede to the slogans calling for unity of party and the fight with opposition.

The issue of Soviet republic’s happy future can also be heard in the graphic design of banners. The banner of workers from the state aviation enterprise Duks, which was presented to the 12<sup>th</sup> congress of RCP(b), has painted columns of Red Army men, marching from the horizon, their commanding officer is



The banner to the 12th congress of RCP by the workers of aviation enterprise Duks, Moscow. Silk, painting. 131x164

going ahead with the flaunting banner, and the plant buildings with fuming funnels are seen at the right side. Huge flying airplane, whose wingspread occupies almost the whole length of cloth, is painted in the sky. Its wings bear the five-point stars and an inscription saying “Duks”. The composition is made in the manner of lubok pictures (popular prints) with a peculiar declarativity, marking out the size of the main details, bright color. The welcoming address is saying about the future: “We, the workers, know, that at this congress you will discuss the issues of state and economic construction, and hope that you will not forget to pay your attention to our aviation industry, called out to play the great role in the future both in war and peace situation” [15]. On behalf of Petrograd guberniya department of People’s public catering trade union, the congress was presented with a banner, having the image of commercial kitchen, the shoot of the new life, where a woman would be released from the routine of household cares.

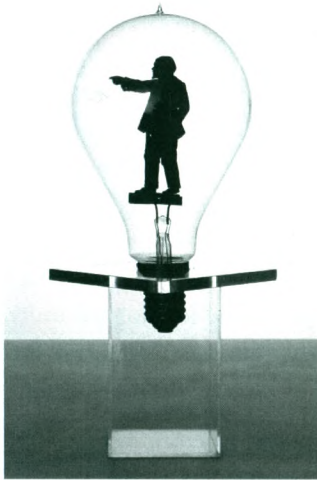
The activation of women at the public arena found its reflection in the pictures and slogans of gift banners, presented by them. The words of gratitude to the party and the new power are peculiar for “women” banners. The banner of Orekhovo-Zuevo weavers bears the



The banner to the Orekhovo-Zuevo unit of RCP by the women-workers of textile factories, Moscow region. Velvet, painting. 140x205

inscription: “The Communist party is trying to emancipate the woman-worker in fact, not in word”. The woman-worker, portrayed on the banner, holds a book in her hand as a symbol of “emancipation”. Her face resembles the iconic image. Most likely, the decoration of the banner was ordered from the local icon-painter.

To make the picture complete, it is necessary to pay more attention to other gifts. One of the workers who appeared at the congress with a welcoming speech, characterized the presents as “poor”. Indeed, the “labor gifts” to the congress were rather modest, as the economic opportunities of enterprises were small. But its ideological meaning was much more important. In his welcoming speech the representative of 800 non-party workers from the electric lamp factory asked the congress “to accept the modest gift – a gas-filled lamp of 1000 candle-powers, the product made by us; let it shine for you as bright as the red



revolution star shines for the whole world”. The welcoming speech informed the congress, that these lamps are “the pride and the work of revolutionary working factories of electric lamps, as its production has been arranged in Russia only after the October revolution, in 1922, and before they were supplied from abroad”. The gift was not a serial sample of product: instead of filament the metal full-size silhouette of V.I. Lenin with his hand up was used.

The workers of the plant producing receiver mechanisms granted the congress a radio receiver with a presentation inscription: “Worker and peasant! With this receiver listen and perceive the thoughts and will of your advance-guard – the RCP. This is the pledge of our victory!”<sup>[16]</sup> The representative of Moscow Serp i Molot plant made the audience laugh when he presented the 12th congress a nail and a hammer with the words: “With this hammer we will punch the nail into “second and a half” International”<sup>[17]</sup>. (In such ironic way the Bolsheviks call International working movement of socialist parties, existing in 1921-1923 and including Russian Mensheviks and socialists-revolutionary).

The cake named “The ship of workers”, with the chocolate figure of Lenin as a captain and the wish to “our proletarian leader to ship to Suez Canal and the Mediterranean Sea” was presented by 25 enterprises of food industry, located in Sokolnishesky district<sup>[18]</sup>.

The original gifts from the textile factory workers of Moscow guberniya were including V.I. Lenin<sup>[19]</sup> and L.D. Trotsky<sup>[20]</sup> into the list of honorary weavers and granting of salary for cultural needs. The Ritual of acceptance of leaders as “honorary workers” was widely used in the Soviet propaganda later on.

The modest “gifts to the leaders” of 1923 were the first warbles in the powerful polyphony of the following years, whose apotheosis was

“Exhibition of gifts for J.V. Stalin from the peoples of the USSR and the foreign countries”, made in 1949-1953.

Summarizing the results, it should be noted that the impressive all-Russian demonstration of unity between the non-party majority with the Communist party’s policy at the 12<sup>th</sup> congress of RCP(b) took place mainly due to skillful arrangement of celebrations. Its peculiar “multiple-stage” structure facilitated the development of optimal ritual, where an important role was given to greetings and gifts of non-party workers. The symbolic gifts, the original signs of the ideological unity with the party prevailed. These qualities took the forefront, not the mastery, art and historical value or the actual money value of the gift.

Gift banners were given the leading role in the solemn ceremonies. Slogans, images, emblems and symbols used at its decoration were in harmony with needs, aims and principles of the official ideology. The same motives were not accidental in the periodic press, design of graphics in the books, posters, arts and crafts.

Diverse variants of emblems, fine allegories and symbols, slogans and appeals, material and ways for designing of banners contain the huge volume of information that gives us a right to consider them as a valuable historical source, including the one for history of emblems.

Later on, in the years of the first five-year plans, “labor reports” become the mass gifts to the party congresses – putting new buildings into operation, overfulfillment of plan tasks for production of goods, etc. The ritual of presentation loses its sacral solemnity, existing at the beginning of 1920-s. Very often the banners, meant as gifts for the party congresses, were sent by mail, and did not stand out among other presents.



#### **Literature and Notes:**

1. N.A.Berdyayev. Sources and purport of Russian Communism. M., 1990, p.126
2. See Pravda, February 25, 27, 28; March 1, 1923.
3. Ibidem, April 24, 1923
4. Ibidem, March 3, 1923
5. Ibidem, March 15, 1923
6. Rabochaya Moskva, March 3, 1923.

7. Ibidem, March 30, 1923
8. Ibidem, March 17, 1923
9. Ibidem, March 15, 1923
10. Ibidem
11. Pravda newspaper, April 25, 1923
12. Rabochaya Moskva, March 16, 1923
13. 12th congress of RCP(b). Stenographic report. M., 1923, p.486
14. Ibidem, p.506
15. Ibidem, p.496
16. Ibidem, p.487
17. Ibidem. See also 12th congress of RCP(b). Stenographic report... p.497; Pravda, April 25, 1923
18. Ibidem, pp.511-512
19. Pravda, April 26, 1923
20. Ibidem, April 25, 1923

### Biographical notes:



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Publications: "The Banner Collection in the Museum of the Revolution" (Proceedings of the Symposium Conservation of Flags, Stockholm, 1994) "The Banner as an award for labour" - "Social History in Museums" (Journal of the Social History Curators group, volume 25, 2000) "Sign of the times: Donated Banners at the State Central Museum of the Contemporary History of Russia." ("Gerboved" 5/2005) "Banners of the first five-year plans at the banner collection of the State Central Museum of the Contemporary History of Russia" ("Gerboved" 5/2006) "1923 - Ceremonial beginnings: gifts on the occasion of the party's anniversary" - "Gifts to the soviet leaders. Catalogue of the exhibition"(Moscow 2006)

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### Remark of the Organizing Committee:

Despite the visa-application in time the German embassy in Moscow did not issue a visa to Mrs. Nezgovorova and other Russian vexillologists, so they could not attend the XXII. ICV "FlagBerlin 2007". The author agreed to insert her planned lecture into these proceedings of the congress.