

17th Congress of the All - Union *Communist* Party (of *Bolsheviks*): Congress of Victors or Congress of Executed?

By Igor Grigorian



17th Congress of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks), or AUCP (b), took place in Moscow from January 26 to February 10, 1934. 1956 delegates gathered together to approve second 5-year Development Plan of the USSR National Economy.

The USSR Industrial workers and rural laborers took pride in their achievements and considered it an honor to dedicate them to important events. Thus, although the network of trolleybus routes was established in Moscow on November 15, 1933, the first-ever locally manufactured trolleybus was dedicated to the 17th Congress which can be seen on the photo (Fig.1). The writing across the front panel of the bus states A Present to the 17th Congress of of AUCP(b). The later model of trolleybus is depicted on 1958 USSR postage stamp (Fig. 2).



Fig.1



Fig.2

it is not our intention to discuss here the agenda and resolutions of the congress, we will focus on its philatelic aspects. As it was customary at congresses of such a scale, all delegates received as gift a piece of stationery and a stamped envelope (fig. 3 and 4).

The stationery has an inscription "Hello from the Delegate of the 17th Congress of the AUCP(b) with a space for the month and date left for the delegate to fill, between word "Moscow" and year "1934". The envelope is marked *Congressional* (correspondence – IG) and contained only space for address. At the bottom there is an inscription "From the Delegate of the 17th Congress of the AUCP(b) and Moscow, January 25, 1934".

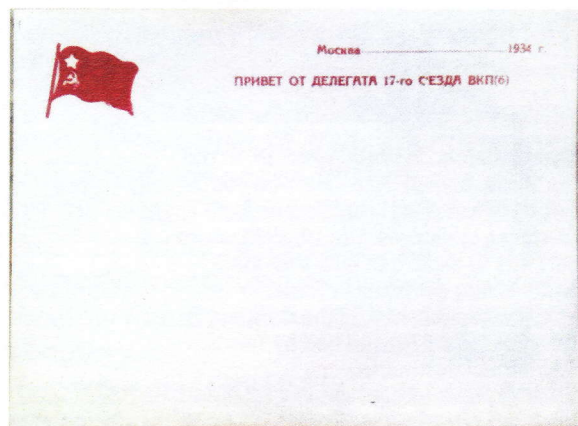


Fig.3



Fig.4

The Peoples Commissariat of Communications of the USSR prepared special stamp souvenir which was also given to the delegates; the cover is shown in Fig. 5 and in the upper corner there is the communist party moto "*Proletarians of All Countries, Unite!*" In the middle of the cover page there is the Coat of Arms of the USSR above an inscription "*To the Delegate of the 17th Congress of the AUCP(b)*". Bottom of the cover features the name of the issuing authority – "*Peoples Commissariat of Communications of the USSR*" and the place and the date of issue – "*Moscow, January 25, 1934*".

The souvenir folder contained seventeen pages with stamps issued by the USSR postal service between 1922 and 1933. Stamps were affixed to the paper and cancelled with a double ring circular date stamp with the date of 01/25/34 between horizontal lines (date is in European format -25 1.34). The text inside the ring is "*17th Congress of the AUCP(b)*" on top, and "*Moscow*" at the bottom (Fig. 6.)

As Armenica collectors, we are interested in stamps that depict Armenians, Armenian motifs and structures were Armenian architects and designers were instrumental in constructing those. Thus, out of 17 pages we would like to draw your attention to those that fall under that category.

First page (Fig. 7) contains stamps commemorating Vladimir Lenin. Four stamps issued in 1925 depict the original wooden cubed construction of the Lenin Mausoleum designed by A. Schusev. Same design was used in 1929 when Konstantin Najarov (Najarian) was invited from Baku to oversee the construction of the current permanent resting place of the Father of Russian Revolution.



Fig.5

Cancellation Postmark
Fig.6



Fig.7

Next page (Fig. 8) contains eight stamps issued in 1933. The bottom set of five stamps is dedicated to the 15th Anniversary of the heroic death of 26 Commissars of Baku including Stepan Shahumian on 4 kopeks brown stamp.



Fia.8

Another page (Fig. 9) shows part of the 1933 set depicting peoples of the USSR. Brown 15 kop. stamp depicts ethnicities of Transcaucasia - Georgians, Armenians and Turks (as stated on the stamp), which later became known as Azerbaijanis.



Fig.9

The last Armenian-related page (Fig. 10) contains 1927 set of seven stamps commemorating the 10th Anniversary of the Great October Revolution. Three of these stamps (5 kop., 18 kop., and 28 kop.) have the inscription "Post" written in Armenian Language. ~~CCPUS~~ along with Russian and Georgian (on 18 kop. and 28 kop. and Ukrainian on 28 kop.).



Fig.10

Our impatient reader, you are wondering what's in the name of the article, *The Congress of Victors or Congress of the Executed*.

We will reveal the mystery now.

We mentioned that the Congress attended 1,956 delegates, who elected 139 Central Committee Members and Member-Candidates. 97 out of 139 (70 %) were "illegally repressed" while 93 of them were executed either in groups or individually. More than half of them were killed during short 8 day period. Five more committed suicide just before they were being arrested. From total number of delegates 1,108 (56.6 %) were also charged with counter-revolutionary activity, arrested, exiled or executed. Thus, Victors became Losers. 60% of the delegates were industrial workers, 8% were agricultural workers (peasants).

People were arrested, exiled and executed for various reasons during the era of Stalin's repressions. There is a very dark anecdote about that period. While Stalin is delivering in the dead silence his speech to the delegates of the congress someone loudly sneezes. Stalin stops and looks at Beria. The latter jumps out of his seat and yells: "Who sneezed?" Dead silence in the hall. He yells again: "Who sneezed?" Dead silence again. "OK, - says Beria. - First row - march out of the hall." The delegates in the first row leaves the hall in an orderly fashion which is followed by the sounds of shots delivered by shooting squad. Beria asks the question again.

Dead silence again. "Second row – march out", - he orders. Second row marches out and another series of shots follow. "Who sneezed? – asked Beria again. One of the delegates stands up and says, "It was me, comrade Beria, just stop the shootings!" Everybody utters a sign of relief. Beria looks at Stalin, and Stalin says with a smile, - "Bless you, comrade, good health!"

Examining the list of delegates, we found 34 delegates with Armenian last names, who represented the following - Armenia (7), Azerbaijan (3), Transcaucasia (2), Black Sea-Azov (3), Georgia (3), Gorkovskaya Oblast (2), Kharkovskaya Oblast (1), Donetskaya Oblast (2), Saratovskaya Oblast (1), Moskovskaya (3), and party apparatus officials (3). We were able to confirm that 12 of them were executed, two killed themselves prior to the arrest, three died naturally; we were unable to find any data on the remaining 17. Two Armenians were elected to become Central Committee Members (Anastas Mikoyan and Levon Mirzoyan). Mirzoyan, who was born in Shushi, was executed in 1939, while he was the 1st Secretary of the Central Committee of the Kazakhstan Communist Party (of Bolsheviks). Mikoyan somehow survived the terror and served under several 1st Secretaries during the course of his life.

Philately was not well-developed in the USSR at that time. Hardly any of the industrial workers and peasants which were among the delegates of the 17th Congress took seriously the postal souvenirs they were given at the Congress. As not many of the delegates and newly elected members of the Central Committee survived Stalin's repressions, arrests, exile, executions, this souvenir turned into philatelic rarity. How many of them survived is undetermined, but we can say one thing – since 1971, we have seen this folder only once, and separate sheets from the folder surface from time to time. It is rumored that the complete folder with the stamps may sell as high as \$5,000.

We would like to thank Ashot Manukyan, prominent philatelist from Armenia, for providing photos of the folder pages.



*Armenian Related Stamps that
was Mentioned in the Article*