

Badge for Technical Improvement Proposals, 1932-1935.

Silver-plated and copper-plated steel, enamels; measures 47.6 mm in height, 36.4 mm in width; weighs 21.7 g not including the screw plate. Hollow two-piece construction, characteristic of very early Soviet awards such as Type 1 Order of Lenin. Very elaborate artwork depicts a piece of industrial machinery on the emerald-green field in the center, detailed factory buildings and smokestacks in the upper portion, and a large red star in the background.

Fine to very fine overall condition. The obverse is very fine to excellent. The enamel in particular is nicely preserved showing very attractive luster throughout. The red star has a few minor scratches; several tiny flakes, mostly near the top; and a couple of miniscule internal hairlines that resulted in slightly darker areas - none of it really glaring or very detractive. The green enamel in the center and blue enamel along the edge are essentially perfect having only some microscopic contact marks, no wear visible to the naked eye. The silver plating is well preserved showing just a minimal amount of wear to the highest points of the artwork. The raised details are perfect and crisp.

On the reverse, there is evidence of a presentation engraving that was ground off, apparently a long time ago (Could it be that the recipient got prosecuted a few years after the badge was issued and his name became politically incorrect? It is completely possible that the badge was confiscated and then issued again to someone else: the practice was not uncommon at the time of Stalin's Great Purge.) The screw post was replaced with an addition of a flat square plate serving as its base. The mint-marked screw plate is of the period and although not original to this particular badge, fits the screw perfectly.

This badge is from the small series of early- to mid-1930s awards for inventions and technological improvements, a field considered crucial during the industrialization period. At the time, well-qualified and talented engineers were badly needed to master the industrial machinery recently acquired abroad. The policy of fostering home-grown specialists was emphasized by the catchphrase of the day "(Professional) Cadres Are a Key to Everything!" Although the slogan was announced by Stalin in his May 1935 speech to the graduates of military academies, it was widely understood to equally refer to civilian professionals. Of course, even the best professional "cadres" were frequently reminded that "there were no indispensable people" (a slogan from Woodrow Wilson's and FDR's campaign speeches borrowed and paraphrased by Stalin in 1934; it was applied by the ever-paranoid Soviet dictator with gusto first to his suspected political enemies, then to high-ranking military officers, and eventually to engineers and scientists as well.)

/See Breast Badges of the USSR of the Era of Labor Victories, 1920-1940 by A. Zsak, I. Kalistratov, V. Voronchenko, page 113 fig. 161; Early Soviet Labor Badges, Ural Photo Catalog of Soviet Phaleristic. Part 1 by A. Kalistratov and V. Voronchenko, page 107, fig. IV-2/.

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