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Activists Raise Jolly Roger Over Legendary Warship

By Jonathan Earle

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Activists climbing up the mast of the 108-year-old Aurora cruiser, famous for its role in the Bolshevik Revolution. **Alexander Demianchuk**

Local activists have claimed responsibility for raising a pirate flag over the Aurora cruiser, a national relic and tourist attraction docked in downtown St. Petersburg.

The group — Narodnaya Dolya, or The People's Share — wrote on their LiveJournal blog that three of their activists performed the stunt on Sunday to raise awareness of poverty in Russia.

"Today, Russia's poverty rate is 16.1 percent — that is, 23 million Russians live below the poverty line and more than 3 million are homeless," the group said. "Meanwhile, the number of billionaires in Russia last year rose 1.5 times, from 62 to 101."

The group's Jolly Roger-esque logo features a skull and crossbones, with a slice of pie — likely "the people's share" — extracted from the skull. On their LiveJournal blog, they call for

a "share of oil and gas" revenue to go to people.

Narodnaya Dolya noted that the stunt — dubbed "Historic October, or Aurora Sunday," references to Communist revolutions — was performed in collaboration with Food Not Bombs, a U.S.-based NGO, on the United Nations-recognized International Day for the Eradication of Poverty.

The activists were removed by police from the Aurora's mast after Emergency Situations Ministry officials failed to talk them down, Interfax reported.

The group states on LiveJournal that its "main goal is to unite the citizens of Russia ... to defend social rights, freedoms and guarantees of the peoples who live in the Russian Federation from the encroachments of the authorities usurping and enslaving our country."

According to Bolshevik lore, a shot fired from the Aurora marked the beginning of the assault on the Winter Palace on Oct. 25, 1917, and the subsequent dissolution of the Provisional Government.

More than 28 million people have visited the Aurora since it was turned into a museum in 1956, its web site says. The ship is one of St. Petersburg's top tourist attractions.

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