

# Contexts: the cruiser *Aurora*

*Xavier Edwards begins a new occasional series which places a monument or building in its historical context*

MILITARY HARDWARE, ships, planes or tanks, which are vulnerable to technological innovation, have a limited shelf life but the Communists never scrapped the cruiser *Aurora* because of its part in the 1917 October Revolution. The picture shows the *Aurora* in 1968 in Leningrad.

The decision by the Central Committee of the Bolsheviks, led by Lenin, to seize power having been taken on 10 October (dates are in old style), the revolution was planned by the Military Revolutionary Committee, set up by the Petrograd Soviet, which the Bolsheviks

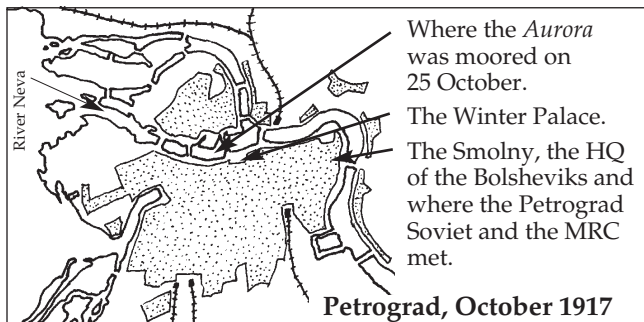
dominated and whose President was Trotsky. The Military Revolutionary Committee met in the Smolny Institute, formerly a girls' convent school, as did the Petrograd Soviet and the same building was the headquarters of the Bolsheviks. Although aware of the Military Revolutionary Committee, the Provisional Government, led by Kerensky, initially took no action but on 23 October they ordered the arrest of its members, shut down Bolshevik newspapers and cut the telephone lines to the Smolny. Loyal troops were posted to strategic positions in Petrograd.

On the night of 25/26 October, Military Revolutionary Committee soldiers took



key points in Petrograd - railway stations, bridges, telephone exchanges and the State Bank - and the *Aurora*, whose crew supported the Soviets, moved into the River Neva and moored near the Nicholai Bridge. During 26 October government buildings were occupied until only the huge Winter Palace, in which the Provisional Government met and which was guarded by Cossacks, officer cadets (called Junkers) and a women's battalion, remained untaken. At 7 pm the *Aurora* fired a shot from the gun seen in the bow of the ship, a signal for the revolutionary troops who had gathered outside the Winter Palace to attack the building. After a short exchange of small arms fire, the only

real fighting during the October Revolution, the Palace was entered and the Red Guards began to make their way through the long corridors and huge rooms, engaged in small scuffles from loyal troops, in search of the Provisional Government ministers. Eventually, they burst into the room where the ministers sheltered (but Kerensky had earlier escaped) and Antonov Ovseyenko announced: 'I declare you, members of the Provisional Government, that you are under arrest. I am a member of the Military Revolutionary Committee.' On 27 October the All-Russian Congress of Soviets handed power to the Soviet Council of People's Commissars. Soviet rule had begun.



## Errors in Volume 4, Number 1: A note from the production team.

Readers will be aware of the difficulty with the map, which was rectified, on page 9. In addition, the last three words of the timeline, which should have read 'Taxes on Knowledge' were omitted. We apologise to the author and readers.

## Illustration acknowledgements, Volume 4, Number 2, December 1998

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