

the environment to the city. These urban planners backed by state power are rather like tailors who are not only free to invent whatever suit of clothes they wish but also free to trim the customer so that he fits the measure.

Urban planners who reject "taxidermy," Jacobs claims, must nevertheless invent a kind of planning that encourages novel initiatives and contingencies, foreclosing as few options as possible, and that fosters the circulation and contact out of which such initiatives arise. To illustrate the diversity of urban life, Jacobs lists more than a dozen uses which have been served over the years by the center for the arts in Louisville: stable, school, theater, bar, athletic club, blacksmith's forge, factory, warehouse, artists' studio. She then asks, rhetorically, "Who could anticipate or provide for such a succession of hopes and services?" Her answer is simple: "Only an unimaginative man would think he could; only an arrogant man would want to."¹¹¹

5 The Revolutionary Party: A Plan and a Diagnosis

Feeling, Comrade C, is a mass element, but thought is organization. Comrade Lenin said that organization is the highest of all of us.

—Andrei Platonov, *Chevengur*

Communism was modernity's most devout, vigorous and gallant champion. . . . It was under communist . . . auspices that the audacious dream of modernity, freed from obstacles by the merciless and omnipotent state, was pushed to its radical limits: grand designs, unlimited social engineering, huge and bulky technology, total transformation of nature.

—Zygmunt Bauman, *Living Without an Alternative*

Lenin's design for the construction of the revolution was in many ways comparable to Le Corbusier's design for the construction of the modern city. Both were complex endeavors that had to be entrusted to the professionalism and scientific insight of a trained cadre with full power to see the plan through. And just as Le Corbusier and Lenin shared a broadly comparable high modernism, so Jane Jacobs's perspective was shared by Rosa Luxemburg and Aleksandra Kollontay, who opposed Lenin's politics. Jacobs doubted both the possibility and the desirability of the centrally planned city, and Luxemburg and Kollontay doubted the possibility and desirability of a revolution planned from above by the vanguard party.

Lenin: Architect and Engineer of Revolution

Lenin, if we judge him from his major writings, was a convinced high modernist. The broad lines of his thought were quite consistent; whether he was writing about revolution, industrial planning, agricultural organization, or administration, he focused on a unitary scientific answer that was known to a trained intelligentsia and that ought to be followed. The Lenin of practice was, of course, something else again. His capacity for sensing the popular mood in fashioning Bolshevik propaganda, for beating a tactical retreat when it seemed prudent, and for striking boldly to seize the advantage was more relevant than his high modernism to his success as a revolutionary. It is Lenin as a high modernist, however, with whom we are primarily concerned.

The major text for the elaboration of Lenin's high-modernist views of revolution is *What Is to Be Done?*¹ High modernism was integral to the central purpose of Lenin's argument: to convince the Russian left that only a small, selected, centralized, professional cadre of revolutionaries could bring about a revolution in Russia. Written in 1903, well before the "dress rehearsal" revolution of 1905, this view was never entirely abandoned, even under totally different circumstances in 1917 between the February overthrow of the czar and the Bolshevik seizure of power in October, when he wrote *State and Revolution*. I shall compare Lenin's view in these two works and in his writings on agriculture with Rosa Luxemburg's "Mass-Strike, Party, and Trade Unions," written in reply to *What Is to Be Done?* and with the writings of Aleksandra Kollontay, an important figure in what was called the Workers' Opposition, a group within the Bolshevik party who criticized many of Lenin's policies after the revolution.

The Lenin of What Is to Be Done?

Lenin's choice of the title *What Is to Be Done?* has great significance. It was also the title of an exceptionally popular novel by Nicholas Chernyshevsky, in which a "new man" of the intelligentsia set about destroying the old order and then ruling autocratically to establish a social utopia. It had been the favorite book of Lenin's adored older brother, Alexander, who had been executed in 1887 for a plot against the czar's life. Even after Lenin became a Marxist, it was still his favorite book: "I became acquainted with the works of Marx, Engels, and Plekhanov, but it was only Chernyshevsky who had an overwhelming influence on me."² The idea that superior knowledge, authoritarian instruction, and social design could transform society pervades both works.

Certain metaphors suffuse Lenin's analysis of the link between the vanguard party and the workers in *What Is to Be Done?* They set the tone of the work and limit what can be said within its confines. These metaphors center on the classroom and the barracks.³ The party and its local agitators and propagandists function as schoolteachers capable of raising merely economic complaints to the level of revolutionary political demands, or they function as officers in a revolutionary army who deploy their troops to best advantage. In their roles as teachers, the vanguard party and its newspaper develop a pedagogical style that is decidedly authoritarian. The party analyzes the many and varied popular grievances and, at the right time, "dictate[s] a positive programme of action" that will contribute to a "universal political strug-

gle."⁴ In fact, Lenin complained, the party's activists have been woefully inadequate. It is not enough to call the movement a "vanguard," he insisted. "We must act in such a way that *all other units of the army* shall see us, and be obliged to admit that we are the vanguard." The goal of the vanguard party is to train willing but "backward" proletarians in revolutionary politics so that they may be inducted into an army that will "collect and utilize every grain of even rudimentary protest," thereby creating a disciplined revolutionary army.⁵

In keeping with these metaphors, the "masses" in general and the working class in particular become "the body," while the vanguard party is "the brain." The party is to the working class as intelligence is to brute force, deliberation to confusion, a manager to a worker, a teacher to a student, an administrator to a subordinate, a professional to an amateur, an army to a mob, or a scientist to a layman. A brief explanation of how these metaphors work will help situate Lenin's own version of high-modern, albeit revolutionary, politics.

Lenin realized, of course, that the revolutionary project depended on popular militancy and spontaneous protest. The problem of relying solely on popular action from below, however, was that such action was scattered and sporadic, making easy pickings for the czarist police. If we think of popular action as incendiary political material, the role of the vanguard party was to concentrate and aim this explosive charge so that its detonation could bring down the regime. The vanguard party "merged the *elemental* destructive force of a crowd with the *conscious* destructive force of the organization of revolutionists."⁶ It was the thinking organ of the revolution, ensuring that the otherwise diffuse brute force of the masses was effectively used.

The logic of this perspective led Lenin to think of the vanguard party as a would-be general staff to a vast but undisciplined army of raw recruits already in combat. The more unruly the army, the greater the need for a small, cohesive general staff. To his competitors on the left (the Economists), who argued that ten wise men could easily be grabbed by the police, whereas one hundred fools (the revolutionary crowd) could not be stopped, Lenin replied, "Without the 'dozen' of tried and talented leaders (and talented men are not born by hundreds), professionally trained, schooled by long experience and working in perfect harmony, no class in modern society is capable of conducting a determined struggle."⁷

Lenin's analogies to military organization were not just colorful figures of speech; they were how he thought about most aspects of party organization. He wrote of "tactics" and "strategy" in a straightforwardly military style. Only a general staff is capable of deploying its

revolutionary forces in accord with an overall battle plan. Only a general staff can see the entire battlefield and anticipate enemy movements. Only a general staff would have the "flexibility . . . to adapt itself immediately to the most diverse and rapidly changing conditions of struggle," the "ability to renounce an open fight against overwhelming and concentrated forces, and yet capable of taking advantage of the awkwardness and immobility of the enemy and of attacking at a time and a place where he least expects attack."⁸ The earlier failures of social democrat revolutionaries could, he insisted, be attributed precisely to the absence of organization, planning, and coordination that a general staff could provide. These "young warriors," who had "marched to battle with astonishingly primitive equipment and training," were "like peasants from the plough, snatching up a club." Their "immediate and complete defeat" was a foregone conclusion "because these open conflicts were not the result of a systematic and carefully thought-out and gradually prepared plan for a prolonged and stubborn struggle."⁹

Part of the necessity for strict discipline arose from the fact that the enemies of revolution were better armed and more sophisticated. This explains why "freedom of criticism" among the revolutionary forces could only favor opportunists and the ascendancy of bourgeois values. Once again Lenin seized on a military analogy to drive the point home: "We are marching in a compact group along a precipitous and difficult path, firmly holding each other by the hand. We are surrounded on all sides by enemies, and are under their almost constant fire. We have combined voluntarily, especially for the purpose of fighting the enemy and not to retreat into the adjacent marsh," that is, freedom of criticism.¹⁰

The relationship envisioned by Lenin between the vanguard party and its rank and file is perhaps best exemplified by the terms "mass" or "masses." Although the terms became standard in socialist parlance, they are heavy with implications. Nothing better conveys the impression of mere quantity and number without order than the word "masses." Once the rank and file are so labeled, it is clear that what they chiefly add to the revolutionary process are their weight in numbers and the kind of brute force they can represent if firmly directed. The impression conveyed is of a huge, formless, milling crowd without any cohesion—without a history, without ideas, without a plan of action. Lenin was all too aware, of course, that the working class does have its own history and values, but this history and these values will lead the working class in the wrong direction unless they are replaced by the historical analysis and advanced revolutionary theory of scientific socialism.

Thus the vanguard party not only is essential to the tactical cohesion of the masses but also must literally do their thinking for them. The party functions as an executive elite whose grasp of history and dialectical materialism allows it to devise the correct "war aims" of the class struggle. Its authority is based on its scientific intelligence. Lenin quoted the "profoundly true and important utterances by Karl Kautsky," who said that the proletariat cannot aspire to "modern socialist consciousness" on its own because it lacks the "profound scientific knowledge" required to do so: "The vehicles of science are not the proletariat, but the *bourgeois intelligentsia*."¹¹

This is the core of Lenin's case against spontaneity. There are only two ideologies: bourgeois and socialist. Given the pervasiveness and historical power of bourgeois ideology, the spontaneous development of the working class will always lead to the triumph of bourgeois ideology. In Lenin's memorable formulation, "the working class, exclusively by its own effort, is able to develop only trade-union consciousness."¹² Social democratic consciousness, in contrast, must come from outside, that is, from the socialist intelligentsia. The vanguard party is depicted as conscious, scientific, and socialist in the full sense and is contrasted with the masses who are, by extension, unconscious, pre-scientific, and in constant danger of absorbing bourgeois values. Lenin's stern admonitions about indiscipline—"to deviate from it [socialist ideology] in the slightest degree means strengthening bourgeois ideology"¹³—leave the impression of a general staff whose tight control is the only counterweight to a force of conscripts who might at any moment disband and wander off.

Another metaphor occasionally replaces those of the army and classroom in Lenin's discourse. It is the image of a bureaucratic or industrial enterprise in which only the executives and engineers can see the larger purposes of the organization. Lenin appeals to something like a division of labor in revolutionary work, where the executive has a monopoly on the advanced theory without which revolution is impossible. Resembling factory owners and engineers who design rational plans for production, the vanguard party possesses a scientific grasp of revolutionary theory that makes it uniquely able to guide the entire proletarian struggle for emancipation. It was a bit too early, in 1903, for Lenin to refer to the assembly lines of mass production to make his point, but he appropriated the next best analogy from the building industry. "Pray tell me," he proposed. "When a brick layer lays bricks in various parts of an *enormous structure*, the like of which has never been seen before, is it a 'paper' line that he uses to help him find the correct place to place each brick, to indicate to him the ultimate goal

of the work as a whole, to enable him to use not only every brick but even every piece of brick, which, joining with the bricks placed before and after it, forms a complete and all embracing line? And are we not now passing through a period in our party life, when we have bricks and bricklayers, but we lack the guiding line, visible to all, by which to guide our movements?"¹⁴ What the party has is the blueprint of the entire new structure, which its scientific insight has made possible. The role of the workers is to follow that part of the blueprint allotted to them in the confidence that the architects of revolution know what they are doing.

The analogy to the division of labor in modern capitalist production has implications roughly parallel to those of the military metaphor. Both, for example, require authoritarian methods and central control. Thus Lenin wrote of the party's need "to distribute the thousand-and-one minute *functions* of their organizational work," complained of "technical defects," and called for the unification of "all these tiny fractions into one whole." As he concluded, "specialization necessarily presupposes centralization, and in its turn imperatively calls for it."¹⁵

It is surely a great paradox of *What Is to Be Done?* that Lenin takes a subject—promoting revolution—that is inseparable from popular anger, violence, and the determination of new political *ends* and transforms it into a discourse on technical specialization, hierarchy, and the efficient and predictable organization of *means*. Politics miraculously disappears from within the revolutionary ranks and is left to the elite of the vanguard party, much as industrial engineers might discuss, among themselves, how to lay out a factory floor. The vanguard party is a machine to produce a revolution. There is no need for politics within the party inasmuch as the science and rationality of the socialist intelligentsia require instead a technically necessary subordination; the party's judgments are not subjective and value laden but objective and logically inevitable.

Lenin extends this line of reasoning to his characterization of the revolutionary elite. They are not mere revolutionaries; they are "professional revolutionists." He insists on the full meaning of the term "professional": someone who is an experienced, full-time, trained revolutionist. This small, secret, disciplined, professional cadre is specifically contrasted to workers' organizations, which are large, public, and established according to trades. The two are never to be confused. Thus, to the analogy of the factory manager vis-à-vis the worker, Lenin adds that of the professional vis-à-vis the apprentice or amateur. It is assumed that those in the second category will defer to those in the first on the basis of their greater technical knowledge and experience.

Just as Le Corbusier imagines that the public will acquiesce to the knowledge and calculations of the master architect, so Lenin is confident that a sensible worker will want to place himself under the authority of professional revolutionists.

Let us return, finally, to the metaphor of the schoolroom where the vanguard party is the teacher and the masses are the pupils. Lenin is hardly unique in his use of this analogy. His was a pedagogical age in general, and reading circles for workers and schools for socialist militants were common, especially in Germany, where Rosa Luxemburg taught at the Socialist Party's school in Berlin. Although the imagery of the schoolroom may have been commonplace, Lenin's particular use of it to characterize socialist training bears emphasis. A tremendous amount of Lenin's thought and prose was devoted to "socialist instruction" broadly understood. He was preoccupied with how militants might be trained, the role of the party newspaper, *Iskra*, and the content of speeches, manifestos, and slogans. But Lenin's socialist schoolroom is fraught with danger. His constant fear is that the teachers will lose control of the students and be swamped by the pervasive influence of narrow economic demands, legislative reforms, and purely local concerns. The classroom metaphor is inherently hierarchical, but Lenin's main worry is that his socialist teachers will succumb and "go native." Lurking near the surface of Lenin's writings is a powerful cultural judgment, which is evident here in a representative passage.

Our very first and most imperative duty is to help to train working-class revolutionists who will be on the same level *in regard to party activity* as intellectual revolutionists (we emphasize the words "in regard to party activity" because although it is necessary, it is not so easy and not so imperative to bring workers up to the level of intellectuals in other respects). Therefore attention must be devoted *principally* to the task of *raising* the workers to the level of revolutionists, but without, in doing so, necessarily *degrading* ourselves to the level of the "labor masses" as the Economists wish to do, or necessarily to the level of the average worker, as [the newspaper] *Svoboda* desires to do.¹⁶

The dilemma for the party is how to train revolutionists who will be close to the workers (and perhaps of worker backgrounds themselves) but who will not be absorbed, contaminated, and weakened by the political and cultural backwardness of the workers. Some of Lenin's worries have to do with his conviction at the time that the Russian working class and most of its socialist intelligentsia were woefully backward compared to their German counterparts. In *What Is to Be Done?* German social democracy and the German trade-union movement function repeatedly as the model, in terms of which Russia is found want-

ing. But the principle behind Lenin's concerns transcends national differences; it stems from the sharply delineated, functional roles that the party and the working class each played. Class consciousness, in the final analysis, is an objective truth carried solely by the ideologically enlightened who direct the vanguard party.¹⁷

However contrary to Newton's first law of motion, the central idea informing Lenin's logic is that the party will be an "unmoved mover." An intimate association with the working class is absolutely necessary to the task of propaganda and agitation, but it must be a closeness that will never threaten the hierarchy of knowledge, influence, and power. If professional revolutionists are to be effective leaders, they require the kind of detailed understanding and knowledge of the workers that successful teachers need of their students, military officers need of their troops, or production managers need of their workforce. It is knowledge for the purpose of achieving goals set by an elite. The relationship depicted is so asymmetrical that one is even tempted to compare it to the relation that a craftsman has to his raw material. A woodworker or a mason must know his inert materials well in order to realize his designs. In Lenin's case, the relative inertness of the material being shaped is implied by the global imagery of "the masses" or "the proletariat." Once these flattened terms are used, it becomes difficult to examine the enormous differences in history, political experience, organizational skills, and ideology (not to mention religion, ethnicity, and language) that exist within the working class.

There is still another contingent and Russia-centered reason why Lenin might have insisted on a small, disciplined, and secret cadre of revolutionists. They were, after all, operating in an autocracy, under the noses of the czarist secret police. After commenting favorably on the openness of competition for office within the German Social Democratic Party, where, owing to certain political and press freedoms, all candidates' public records were known, he exclaimed, "Try to put this picture in the frame of our autocracy!"¹⁸ Where a revolutionary must conceal his identity, under pain of arrest, such openly democratic methods were impossible. The revolutionaries in Russia must, Lenin argued, adapt their tactics to those of their enemy—the political police. If this were the only argument Lenin made for secrecy and iron discipline, then it could be treated as an incidental tactical concession to local conditions. But it was not. The secrecy of the party was designed to prevent contamination from below as much as arrest and exile. There is no other way to interpret passages like the following: "If such an organization [a secret body of 'tried' revolutionists] existed on a firm theoretical basis, and possessed a Social-Democratic journal,

we would have *no reason to fear that the movement will be diverted from its path by the numerous 'outside' elements that will be attracted to it.*"¹⁹

How would the movement be diverted? Lenin had chiefly two potential dangers in mind. The first was the danger of spontaneity, which makes the tactical coordination of revolutionary pressure impossible. The second was, of course, the virtually inevitable ideological diversion of the working class toward trade unionism and legislative reform. Since authentic, revolutionary class consciousness could never develop autonomously within the working class, it followed that the actual political outlook of workers was always a threat to the vanguard party.

It is perhaps for these reasons that when Lenin wrote of propaganda and agitation, it was a one-way transmission of information and ideas that he had in mind. His unrelenting emphasis on a party newspaper fit nicely into this context. A newspaper, even more than "agitation" before heckling or sullen crowds, creates a decidedly one-sided relationship.²⁰ The organ is a splendid way to diffuse instructions, explain the party line, and rally the troops. Like its successor, the radio, the newspaper is a medium better suited to sending messages than to receiving them.

On many occasions, Lenin and his colleagues took the threat of contamination more literally and spoke in metaphors drawn from the science of hygiene and the germ theory of disease. Thus it became possible to talk of "petit-bourgeois bacilli" and "infection."²¹ The shift in imagery was not far-fetched, for Lenin did want to keep the party in an environment that was as sterile and germ-free as possible lest the party contract one of the many diseases lurking outside.²²

Lenin's general treatment of the working class in *What Is to Be Done?* is strongly reminiscent of Marx's famous depiction of the smallholding French peasantry as a "sack of potatoes"—just so many "homologous" units lacking any overall structure or cohesion. This premise shapes in turn the role of the vanguard party. The trick is to change a formless, sporadic, fragmented, and localized anger among the masses into an organized force with purpose and direction. Just as the force of a powerful magnet aligns a chaos of thousands of iron filings, so the party's leadership is expected to turn a crowd into a political army. At times it is hard to know what the masses actually bring to the revolutionary project beyond the raw material they represent. Lenin's catalogue of the functional roles that the party assumes is quite comprehensive: "We must go among all classes of people as *theoreticians*, as *propagandists*, as *agitators*, and as *organizers*."²³ The inference to be drawn from this list is that the revolutionists are to provide knowledge, opinion, the

urge and direction to action, and organizational structure. Given this unidirectional flow of intellectual, social, and cultural services from above, it is hard to imagine what role the masses could have had beyond being mustered up.

Lenin conceived of a division of revolutionary labor that resembled what came to be the expectation (if rarely the practice) of Communist parties both in and out of power. The central committee made all the crucial decisions about tactics and strategy, while the mass organizations and trade unions affiliated with the party served as "transmission belts" for instructions. If we consider the vanguard party, as Lenin did, to be a machine for bringing about the revolution, then we see that the vanguard party's relation to the working class is not much different from a capitalist entrepreneur's relation to the working class. The working class is necessary to production; its members must be trained and instructed, and the efficient organization of their work must be left to professional specialists. The ends of the revolutionist and the capitalist are, of course, utterly different, but the problem of *means* that confronts each is similar and is similarly resolved. The problem of the factory manager is how to deploy so many factory "hands" (interchangeable units all) for the purpose of efficient production. The problem of the scientific socialist party is how to efficiently deploy the masses in order to hasten the revolution. Such organizational logic seems more appropriate to factory production, which involves steady routines, known technologies, and daily wages, than to the decidedly nonroutine, high-stakes endeavor of revolution. Nevertheless, it was the model of organization that structured much of Lenin's argument.

To grasp the picture of Lenin's utopian hopes for the vanguard party, one might relate it to the "mass exercises" that were enormously popular among both reactionary (mobilizing) and left-wing movements of the turn of the century. Set in huge stadiums or on parade grounds, they involved thousands of young men and women trained to move in unison. The more complicated their maneuvers, which were often set to rhythmic music, the more impressive the spectacle. In 1891, at the Second National Congress of Sokol, a Czech gymnastic and physical fitness organization promoting nationalism, no fewer than seventeen thousand Czechs gave an elaborate display of coordinated movement.²⁴ The whole idea of mass exercises was to create a striking exhibition of order, training, and discipline from above, one that would awe participants and spectators alike with its display of disciplined power. Such spectacles assumed and required a single centralized authority, which planned and executed the display.²⁵ It is little wonder that the new mass-mobilization parties of all stripes should

have found public exhibitions of this kind compatible with their organizational ideology. Lenin was far too realistic to imagine that the Russian social democrats would ever resemble anything this coherent and disciplined. Nevertheless, it was clearly the model of centralized coordination to which he aspired and thus the yardstick by which he measured his achievements.

Lenin and Le Corbusier, notwithstanding the great disparity in their training and purpose, shared some basic elements of the high-modernist outlook. While the scientific pretensions of each may seem implausible to us, they both believed in the existence of a master science that served as the claim to authority of a small planning elite. Le Corbusier believed that the scientific truths of modern construction and efficient design entitled him to replace the discordant, chaotic historical deposit of urbanism with a utopian city. Lenin believed that the science of dialectical materialism gave the party unique insight into the revolutionary process and entitled it to claim the leadership of an otherwise disorganized and ideologically misled working class. Both were convinced that their scientific knowledge provided correct, unitary answers to how cities should be designed and how revolutions might be brought to fruition. Their confidence in their method meant that neither the science of designing cities nor that of designing revolutions had much to learn from the existing practices and values of their intended beneficiaries. On the contrary, each looked forward to refashioning the human material that came under their purview. Both, of course, had the improvement of the human condition as their ultimate goal, and both attempted to attain it with methods that were profoundly hierarchical and authoritarian. In the writings of both men, metaphors of the military and the machine pervaded; for Le Corbusier, the house and city were machines for living, and for Lenin, the vanguard party was a machine for revolution. Appeals to centralized forms of bureaucratic coordination—especially the factory and the parade ground—creep naturally into their prose.²⁶ They were, to be sure, among the most far-reaching and grandiose figures of high modernism, but they were at the same time representative.

Theory and Practice: The Revolutions of 1917

A detailed account of the two Russian Revolutions of 1917 (February and, above all, October) would take us too far afield. What is possible, however, is to sketch briefly some of the principal ways in which the actual revolutionary process resembled little the organizational doctrines advocated in *What Is to Be Done?* The high-modernist

scheme for revolution was no more borne out in practice than were high-modernist plans for Brasília and Chandigarh borne out in practice.

The most discordant fact about the Russian Revolution was that it was not to any significant degree brought about by the vanguard party, the Bolsheviks. What Lenin did succeed brilliantly in doing was in capturing the revolution once it was an accomplished fact. As Hannah Arendt succinctly put it, "The Bolsheviks found power lying in the street, and picked it up."²⁷ E. H. Carr, who wrote one of the earliest and most complete studies of the revolutionary period, concluded that "the contribution of Lenin and the Bolsheviks to the overthrow of czarism was negligible" and that indeed "Bolshevism succeeded to an empty throne." Nor was Lenin the prescient commander in chief who could see the strategic situation clearly. In January 1917, a month before the February Revolution, he wrote disconsolately, "We of the older generation may not see the decisive battles of the coming revolution."²⁸

The Bolsheviks, on the eve of the revolution, did have a modest working-class base, especially among the unskilled in Moscow and Saint Petersburg, but Social Revolutionaries, Mensheviks, anarchists, and unaffiliated workers predominated. What is more, the workers who were affiliated with the Bolsheviks were rarely amenable to anything like the hierarchical control envisioned in *What Is to Be Done?*

Lenin's aspiration for revolutionary practice was that the Bolsheviks would come to form a tight, disciplined, command-and-control structure. Nothing could have been further from actual experience. In all but one crucial respect, the revolution of 1917 was very much like the miscarried revolution of 1905. Workers in revolt took over the factories and seized municipal power, while in the countryside, the peasantry began seizing land and attacking the gentry and tax officials. Neither of these activities, either in 1905 or in 1917, was brought about by the Bolsheviks or any other revolutionary vanguard. The workers, who spontaneously formed soviets to run each factory in 1917, disregarded at will the instructions of their own Executive Committee of Soviets, not to mention the Bolsheviks. For their part, the peasantry took the opportunity created by a political vacuum at the center to restore communal control over land and enact their local concept of justice. Most of the peasants had not even heard of the Bolsheviks, let alone presumed to act on their orders.

What must forcefully strike any reader of accounts of the detailed events of late October 1917 is the utter confusion and localized spontaneity that prevailed.²⁹ The very idea of centralized coordination in this political environment was implausible. In the course of battle, as military historians and astute observers have always understood, the

command structure typically falters. Generals lose contact with their troops and are unable to follow the rapidly changing tides of battle; the commands the generals do issue are likely to be irrelevant by the time they reach the battlefield.³⁰ In Lenin's case, the command-and-control structure could hardly falter, as it had never existed in the first place. Ironically, Lenin himself was out of step with the party's leadership (many of whom were behind bars) and was criticized on the eve of the Revolution as a reckless putschist.

The new element in 1917 that made a revolutionary outcome far more likely than it had been in 1905 was World War I—specifically, the military collapse of the Russian offensive in Austria. Soldiers by the thousands threw down their weapons to return to the cities or to seize land in the countryside. The provisional government of Aleksandr Kerensky had little or nothing in the way of coercive resources to deploy in its defense. It is in this sense that the Bolsheviks "succeeded to an empty throne," although Lenin's small military uprising of October 24 proved a crucial stroke. What followed in the years until 1921 is best described as the *reconquest*, now by the fledgling Bolshevik state, of Russia. The reconquest was not simply a civil war against the "Whites"; it was also a war against the autonomous forces that had seized local power in the revolution.³¹ It involved, first and foremost, a long struggle to destroy the independent power of the soviets and to impose piecework, labor control, and the abrogation of the right to strike on the workers. In the countryside, the Bolshevik state gradually imposed political control (in place of communal power), grain deliveries, and, eventually, collectivization on the peasantry.³² The process of Bolshevik state making entailed a great deal of violence against its erstwhile beneficiaries, as the uprisings of Kronstadt, Tambov, and the Maknovchina in the Ukraine attested.

The model for the vanguard party depicted so sharply in *What Is to Be Done?* is an impressive example of executive command and control. Applied to the actual revolutionary process, however, it is a pipe dream, bearing hardly any relation to the facts. Where the model is descriptively accurate, alas, is in the exercise of state authority after the revolutionary seizure of power. As it turned out, the structure of power that Lenin hoped would characterize the making of the revolution was more closely approximated by the long-lived "dictatorship of the proletariat." And in this case, of course, the workers and peasants did not consent to the structure of power; the state imposed it as a matter of imperative coordination.

Since the revolutionary victors get to write the official history of how they achieved power, it matters little, in one sense, how snugly

their account fits the historical facts. Because most citizens come to believe the neatly packaged account, whether or not it is accurate, it further enhances their confidence in the clairvoyance, determination, and power of their revolutionary leaders. The standard “just so” story of the revolutionary process is perhaps the ultimate state simplification. It serves a variety of political and aesthetic purposes, which in turn help to account for the form it assumes. Surely, in the first instance, the inheritors of the revolutionary state have a vested interest in representing themselves as the prime animators of the historical outcome. Such an account emphasizes their indispensable role as leaders and missionaries, and in the case of Lenin, it accorded best with the stated organizational ideology of the Bolsheviks. The authorized histories of revolutions, as Milovan Djilas points out, “describe the revolution as if it were the fruit of the previously planned action of its leaders.”³³ No cynicism or mendacity need be involved. It is perfectly natural for leaders and generals to exaggerate their influence on events; that is the way the world looks from where they sit, and it is rarely in the interest of their subordinates to contradict their picture.

After seizing state power, the victors have a powerful interest in moving the revolution out of the streets and into the museums and schoolbooks as quickly as possible, lest the people decide to repeat the experience.³⁴ A schematic account highlighting the decisiveness of a handful of leaders reinforces their legitimacy; its emphasis on cohesion, uniformity, and central purpose makes it seem inevitable and therefore, it is to be hoped, permanent. The slighting of autonomous popular action serves the additional purpose of implying that the working class is incapable of acting on its own without outside leadership.³⁵ The account is likely to take the opportunity to identify enemies outside and inside the revolution, singling out appropriate targets of hatred and suppression.

The standard account promoted by revolutionary elites is buttressed by the way in which the historical process itself “naturalizes” the world, erasing evidence of its contingency. Those who fought in “The Russian Revolution” discovered this fact about themselves only later, when the revolution was an accomplished fact. In the same way, none of the historical participants in, say, World War I or the Battle of the Bulge, not to mention the Reformation or the Renaissance, knew at the time that they were participating in anything that could be so summarily described. And because things *do* turn out in a certain way after all, with certain patterns or causes that are clear in retrospect, it is not surprising that the outcome should sometimes seem inevitable. Everyone forgets that it might all have turned out quite differently.³⁶ In that

forgetting, another step in naturalizing the revolutionary triumph has been taken.³⁷

When victors such as Lenin get to impose their theories of revolution, not so much on the revolutionary events themselves, but on the postrevolutionary official story, the narrative typically stresses the agency, purpose, and genius of the revolutionary leadership and minimizes contingency.³⁸ The final irony, then, was that the official story of the Bolshevik Revolution was made, for more than sixty years, to conform closely to the utopian directions outlined in *What Is to Be Done?*

The Lenin of State and Revolution

The later Lenin of *State and Revolution* is often juxtaposed to the Lenin of *What Is to Be Done?* to demonstrate a substantial shift in his view of the relationship between the vanguard party and the masses. Without a doubt, much of Lenin’s tone in the pamphlet, written at breakneck speed in August and September of 1917—after the February Revolution and just before the October Revolution—is difficult to square with the text of 1903. There were important tactical reasons why, in 1917, Lenin might have wanted to encourage as much autonomous popular revolutionary action as possible. He and other Bolsheviks were concerned that many workers, now masters of their factories, and many Russian urbanites would lose their revolutionary ardor, allowing Kerensky’s provisional government to gain control and block the Bolsheviks. For Lenin’s revolutionaries, everything depended on destabilizing the Kerensky regime, even if the crowds were not at all under Bolshevik discipline. No wonder that, even in early November, before the Bolsheviks had consolidated power, Lenin sounded very much like the anarchists: “Socialism is not created by orders from above. State bureaucratic automatism is alien to its spirit; socialism is alive, creative—the creation of the popular masses themselves.”³⁹

While *State and Revolution* has an egalitarian and utopian tone that echoes Marx’s picture of Communism, what is striking for our purpose is the degree to which Lenin’s high-modernist convictions still pervade the text. First, Lenin leaves no doubt that the application of state coercive power is the only way to build socialism. He openly avows the need for violence after the seizure of power: “The proletariat needs state power, the centralized organization of force, the organization of violence, . . . for the purpose of *guiding* the great mass of the population—the peasantry, the petite bourgeoisie, the semi-proletarians—in the work of organizing Socialist economy.”⁴⁰ Once again Marxism provides the ideas and training that alone create a brain for the working

masses: "By educating a workers' party, Marxism educates the vanguard of the proletariat, capable of assuming power and leading the whole people to Socialism, of directing and organizing the new order, of being teacher, guide and leader of all the toiling and exploited in the task of building up their social life without the bourgeoisie and against the bourgeoisie."⁴¹ The assumption is that the social life of the working class will be organized either by the bourgeoisie or by the vanguard party, but never by members of the working class themselves.

At the same time, Lenin waxes eloquent about a new society in which politics will have disappeared and in which virtually anyone could be entrusted with the administration of things. The models for Lenin's optimism were precisely the great human machines of his time: industrial organizations and large bureaucracies. In his picture, the growth of capitalism has built a nonpolitical technostructure that rolls along of its accord: "Capitalist culture has *created* large-scale production, factories, railways, the postal service, telephones, etc., and *on this basis* the great majority of functions of the old 'state power' have become so simplified and can be reduced to such simple operations of registration, filing, and checking that they would be quite within the reach of every literate person, and it will be possible to perform them for working men's wages, which circumstance can (and must) strip those functions of every shadow of privilege and every appearance of official grandeur."⁴² Lenin conjures up a vision of the perfect technical rationality of modern production. Once the "simple operations" appropriate to each niche in the established division of labor are mastered, there is quite literally nothing more to discuss. The revolution ousts the bourgeoisie from the bridge of this "ocean liner," installs the vanguard party, and sets a new course, but the jobs of the vast crew are unchanged. Lenin's picture of the technical structure, it should be noted, is entirely static. The forms of production are either set or, if they do change, the changes cannot require skills of a different order.

The utopian promise of this capitalist-created state of affairs is that anyone could take part in the administration of the state. The development of capitalism had produced massive, socialized, bureaucratic apparatuses as well as the "training and *disciplining* of millions of workers."⁴³ Taken together, these huge, centralized bureaucracies were the key to the new world. Lenin had seen them at work in the wartime mobilization of Germany under Rathenau's guiding hand. Science and the division of labor had spawned an institutional order of technical expertise in which politics and quarrels were beside the point. Modern production provided the basis of a technically necessary dictatorship. "In regard to . . . the importance of individual dictatorial powers,"

Lenin observed, "it must be said that large-scale machine industry—which is precisely . . . the foundation of socialism[—] . . . calls for absolute and strict *unity of will*, which directs the joint labours of hundreds, thousands and tens of thousands of people. . . . But how can strict unity of will be ensured? By thousands subordinating their will to the will of one. . . . We must learn to combine the public-meeting democracy of the working people—turbulent, surging, overflowing its banks like a spring flood—with iron discipline while at work, with *unquestioning obedience* to the will of a single person, the Soviet leader, while at work."⁴⁴

In this respect, Lenin joins many of his capitalist contemporaries in his enthusiasm for Fordist and Taylorist production technology. What was rejected by Western trade unions of the time as a "de-skilling" of an artisanal workforce was embraced by Lenin as the key to rational state planning.⁴⁵ There is, for Lenin, a single, objectively correct, efficient answer to all questions of how to rationally design production or administration.⁴⁶

Lenin goes on to imagine, in a Fourierist vein, a vast national syndicate that will virtually run itself. He sees it as a technical net whose mesh will confine workers to the appropriate routines by its rationality and the discipline of habit. In a chillingly Orwellian passage—a warning, perhaps, to anarchist or lumpen elements who might resist its logic—Lenin indicates how remorseless the system will be: "Escape from this national accounting will inevitably become increasingly difficult . . . and will probably be accompanied by such swift and severe punishment (for the armed workers are men of practical life, not sentimental intellectuals and they will scarcely allow anyone to trifle with them), that very soon the *necessity* of observing the simple, fundamental rules of social life in common will have become a *habit*."⁴⁷

Except for the fact that Lenin's utopia is more egalitarian and is set in the context of the dictatorship of the proletariat, the parallels with Le Corbusier's high modernism are conspicuous. The social order is conceived as a vast factory or office—a "smoothly humming machine," as Le Corbusier would have put it, in which "each man would live in an ordered relation to the whole." Neither Lenin nor Le Corbusier were unique in sharing this vision, although they were exceptionally influential. The parallels serve as a reminder of the extent to which much of the socialist left as well as the right were in thrall to the template of modern industrial organization. Comparable utopias, a "dream of authoritarian, military, egalitarian, bureaucratic socialism which was openly admiring of Prussian values," could be found in Marx, in Saint-Simon, and in the science fiction that was widely popular in Rus-

sia at the time, especially a translation of Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward*.⁴⁸ High modernism was politically polymorphous; it could appear in any political disguise, even an anarchist one.

The Lenin of The Agrarian Question

In order to clinch the argument for Lenin's consistently high-modernist stance, we need only turn to his writings on agriculture, a field in which high-modernist views were hotly contested. Most of our evidence can be drawn from a single work, *The Agrarian Question*, written between 1901 and 1907.⁴⁹

This text was an unremitting condemnation of small-scale family farming and a celebration of the gigantic, highly mechanized forms of modern agriculture. For Lenin it was not just a question of aesthetics of scale but a question of historical inevitability. The difference between low-technology family farming and large-scale, mechanized farming was precisely the difference between the hand-operated looms of cottage-industry weavers on one hand and the mechanized looms of large textile factories on the other. The first mode of production was simply doomed. Lenin's analogy was borrowed from Marx, who frequently used it as a way of saying that the hand loom gives you feudalism and the power loom gives you capitalism. So suggestive was this imagery that Lenin fell back on it in other contexts, claiming, for example, in *What Is to Be Done?* that his opponents, the Economists, were using "handicraft methods," whereas the Bolsheviks operated as professional (modern, trained) revolutionaries.

Peasant forms of production—not to mention the peasants themselves—were, for Lenin, hopelessly backward. They were mere historical vestiges that would undoubtedly be swept away, as the cottage-industry weavers had been, by the agrarian equivalent of large-scale machine industry. "Two decades have passed," he wrote, "and machinery has driven the small producer from still another of his last refuges, as if telling those who have ears to hear and eyes to see that the economist must always look forward, towards technical progress, or else be left behind at once, for he who will not look ahead turns his back on history; there is not and there cannot be any middle path."⁵⁰ Here and in other writings Lenin denounced all the cultivation and social practices associated with the customary, communal, three-field system of land allotments that still pertained in much of Russia. In this case, the idea of common property prevented the full development of capitalism, which, in turn, was a condition of revolution. "Modern agricultural technique," he concluded, "demands that *all* the conditions of the

ancient, conservative, barbarous, ignorant, and pauper methods of economy on peasant allotments be transformed. The three-field system, the primitive implements, the patriarchal impecuniosity of the tiller, the routine methods of stock breeding and crass naive ignorance of the conditions and requirements of the market must all be thrown overboard."⁵¹

The suitability of a logic drawn from manufacturing and applied to agriculture, however, was very much contested. Any number of economists had carried out detailed studies of labor allocation, production, and expenditures for rural producer households. While some were perhaps ideologically committed to developing a case for the productive efficiency of small property, they had a wealth of empirical evidence that had to be confronted.⁵² They argued that the nature of much agricultural production meant that the economic returns of mechanization were minimal when compared to the returns of intensification (which focused on manuring, careful breeding, and so on). The returns to scale as well, they argued, were minimal or negative beyond the average acreage of the family farm. Lenin might have taken these arguments less seriously had they all been based on Russian data, where the backwardness of rural infrastructure impeded mechanization and commercial production. But most of the data came from Germany and Austria, comparatively developed countries, where the small farmers in question were highly commercialized and responsive to market forces.⁵³

Lenin set out to refute the data purporting to show the efficiency or competitiveness of family agriculture. He exploited the inconsistencies of their empirical evidence and introduced data from other scholars, both Russian and German, to make the case against them. Where the evidence seemed unassailable, Lenin claimed that the small farmers who did survive managed to do so only by starving and overworking themselves, their wives and children, their cows, and their plow animals. Whatever profits the small farms produced were the consequence of overwork and underconsumption. Although such patterns of "auto-exploitation" were not uncommon within peasant families, Lenin's evidence was not completely convincing. For his (and Marx's) understanding of modes of production, the survival of artisanal handiwork and small farming had to be an incidental anachronism. We have since learned how efficient and tenacious small-scale production can be, but Lenin was in no doubt about what the future held. "This inquiry demonstrates the technical superiority of large-scale production in agriculture . . . [and] the overwork and underconsumption of the small peasant and his transformation into a regular or day-labourer for the

landlord. . . . The facts prove incontestably that under the capitalist system the position of the small peasant in agriculture is in every way analogous to that of the handicraftsman in industry."⁵⁴

The Agrarian Question also allows us to appreciate an additional facet of Lenin's high modernism: his celebration of the most modern technology and, above all, electricity.⁵⁵ He was famous for claiming that "Communism is Soviet Power plus the Electrification of the whole countryside." Electricity had, for him and for most other high modernists, a nearly mythical appeal. That appeal had to do, I think, with the unique qualities of electricity as a form of power. Unlike the mechanisms of steam power, direct waterpower, and the internal combustion engine, electricity was *silent*, precise, and well-nigh invisible. For Lenin and many others, electricity was magical. Its great promise for the modernization of rural life was that, once transmission lines were laid down, power could be delivered over long distances and was instantly available wherever it was needed and in the quantity required. Lenin imagined, incorrectly, that it would replace the internal combustion engine in most farm operations. "Machinery powered by electricity runs more smoothly and precisely, and for that reason it is more convenient to use in thrashing, ploughing, milking, cutting fodder."⁵⁶ By placing power within reach of an entire people, the state could eliminate what Marx termed the "idiocy of rural life."

Electrification was, for Lenin, the key to breaking the pattern of petit-bourgeois landholding and hence the only way to extirpate "the roots of capitalism" in the countryside, which was "the foundation, the basis, of the internal enemy." The enemy "depends on small-scale production, and there is only one way of undermining it, namely, to place the economy of the country, including agriculture, on a new technical basis, that of modern large-scale production. Only electricity provides that basis."⁵⁷

Much of the attraction of electricity for Lenin had to do with its perfection, its mathematical precision. Man's work and even the work of the steam-driven plow or threshing machine were imperfect; the operation of an electric machine, in contrast, seemed certain, precise, and continuous. Electricity was also, it should be added, centralizing.⁵⁸ It produced a visible network of transmission lines emanating from a central power station from which the flow of power was generated, distributed, and controlled. The nature of electricity suited Lenin's utopian, centralizing vision perfectly. A map of electric lines from the generating plant would look like the spokes of a centralized transportation hub like Paris (see chapter 1), except that the direction of flow was one way. Transmission lines blanketed the nation with power

in a way that overcame geography. Electricity equalized access to an essential part of the modern world and, not incidentally, brought light—both literally and culturally—to the *narod* (literally, the "dark people").⁵⁹ Finally, electricity allowed and indeed required planning and calculation. The way that electricity worked was very much the way that Lenin hoped the power of the socialist state would work.

For Lenin, much the same developmental logic applied to the top elite of the vanguard party, the factory, and the farm. Professionals, technicians, and engineers would replace amateurs as leaders. Centralized authority based on science would prevail. As with Le Corbusier, the degree of functional specificity within the organization, the degree of order provided by routines and the substitutability of units, and the extent of mechanization were all yardsticks of superior efficiency and rationality. In the case of farms and factories, the larger and more capital intensive they were, the better. One can already glimpse in Lenin's conception of agriculture the mania for machine-tractor stations, the establishment of large state farms and eventual collectivization (after Lenin's death), and even the high-modernist spirit that would lead to such vast colonization schemes as Khrushchev's Virgin Lands initiative. At the same time, Lenin's views have a strong Russian lineage. They bear a family resemblance to Peter the Great's project for Saint Petersburg and to the huge model military colonies set up by Alexei Arakcheev with the patronage of Alexander I in the early nineteenth century—both designed to drag Russia into the modern world.

By focusing on Lenin's high-modernist side, we risk simplifying an exceptionally complex thinker whose ideas *and* actions were rich with crosscurrents. During the revolution he was capable of encouraging the communal seizure of land, autonomous action, and the desire of rural Soviets "to learn from their own mistakes."⁶⁰ He decided, at the end of a devastating civil war and a grain-procurement crisis, to shelve collectivization and encourage small-scale production and petty trade. Some have suggested that in his last writings he was more favorably disposed to peasant farming and, it is speculated, would not have forced through the brutal collectivization that Stalin ordered in 1929.

Despite the force of these qualifications, there is little reason, I think, to believe that Lenin ever abandoned the core of his high-modernist convictions.⁶¹ This is apparent even in how he phrases his tactical retreat following the Kronstadt uprising in 1921 and the continuing urban food crisis: "Until we have remolded the peasant, . . . *until large-scale machinery has recast him*, we must assure him of the possibility of running his economy without restrictions. We must find forms of co-

existence with the small farmer, . . . *since the remaking of the small farmer*, the reshaping of his whole psychology and all his habits, is a task requiring generations."⁶² If this is a tactical retreat, the acknowledgment that the transformation of the peasants will take generations does not exactly sound like the words of a general who expects to resume the offensive soon. On the other hand, Lenin's faith in mechanization as the key to the transformation of a recalcitrant human nature is undiminished. There is a new modesty—the fruit of effective peasant resistance—about how tortuous and long the path to a modern, socialized agriculture will be, but the vista, once the journey is made, looks the same.

Luxemburg: Physician and Midwife to the Revolution

Rosa Luxemburg was more than merely a contemporary of Lenin. She was an equally committed revolutionary and Marxist who was assassinated, along with Karl Liebknecht, in Berlin in 1919 at the behest of her less revolutionary allies on the left. Although Jane Jacobs was a critic of Le Corbusier and high-modernist urban planning in general, Le Corbusier had almost certainly never heard of Jacobs before he died. Lenin, on the other hand, had met Luxemburg. They wrote largely for the same audience and in the knowledge of each other's opinions, and indeed Luxemburg specifically refuted Lenin's arguments about the vanguard party and its relation to the proletariat in a revolutionary setting. We will chiefly be concerned with the essays in which Luxemburg most directly confronts Lenin's high-modernist views: "Organizational Questions of Russian Social Democracy" (1904), "Mass-Strike, Party, and Trade Unions" (1906), and her posthumously published "The Russian Revolution" (written in 1918, first published in 1921, after the Kronstadt uprising).

Luxemburg differed most sharply with Lenin in her relative faith in the autonomous creativity of the working class. Her optimism in "Mass-Strike, Party, and Trade Unions" is partly due to the fact that it was written, unlike *What Is to Be Done?* after the object lesson of worker militancy provided by the 1905 revolution. Luxemburg was especially struck by the massive response of the Warsaw proletariat to the revolution of 1905. On the other hand, "Organizational Questions of Russian Social Democracy" was written before the events of 1905 and in direct reply to *What Is to Be Done?* This essay was a key text in the refusal of the Polish party to place itself under the central discipline of the Russian Social Democratic Party.⁶³

In emphasizing the differences between Lenin and Luxemburg,

we must not overlook the ideological common ground they took for granted. They shared, for example, Marxist assumptions about the contradictions of capitalist development and the inevitability of revolution. They were both enemies of gradualism and of anything more than tactical compromises with nonrevolutionary parties. Even at the strategic level, they both argued for the importance of a vanguard party on the grounds that the vanguard party was more likely to see the whole situation (the "totality"), whereas most workers were more likely to see only their local situation and their particular interests. Neither Lenin nor Luxemburg had what might be called a sociology of the party. That is, it did not occur to them that the intelligentsia of the party might have interests that did not coincide with the workers' interests, however defined. They were quick to see a sociology of trade-union bureaucracies but not a sociology of the revolutionary Marxist party.

Luxemburg, in fact, was not above using the metaphor of the factory manager, as did Lenin, to explain why the worker might be wise to follow instructions in order to contribute to a larger result not immediately apparent from where he stood. Where the difference arises, however, is in the lengths to which this logic is pursued. For Lenin, the totality was exclusively in the hands of the vanguard party, which had a virtual monopoly of knowledge. He imagined an all-seeing center—an eye in the sky, as it were—which formed the basis for strictly hierarchical operations in which the proletariat became mere foot soldiers or pawns. For Luxemburg, the party might well be more farsighted than the workers, but it would nevertheless be constantly surprised and taught new lessons by those whom it presumed to lead.

Luxemburg viewed the revolutionary process as being far more complex and unpredictable than did Lenin, just as Jacobs saw the creation of successful urban neighborhoods as being far more complex and mysterious than did Le Corbusier. The metaphors Luxemburg used, as we shall see, were indicative. Eschewing military, engineering, and factory parallels, she wrote more frequently of growth, development, experience, and learning.⁶⁴

The idea that the vanguard party could either order or prohibit a mass strike, the way a commander might order his soldiers to the front or confine them to barracks, struck Luxemburg as ludicrous. Any attempt to so engineer a strike was both unrealistic and morally inadmissible. She rejected the instrumentalism that underlay this view. "Both tendencies [ordering or prohibiting a mass strike] proceed from the same, pure anarchist [*sic*] notion that the mass strike is merely a technical means of struggle which can be 'decided' or 'for-

bidden' at pleasure, according to one's knowledge and conscience, a kind of pocket-knife which one keeps clasped in his packet, 'ready for all emergencies,' or decides to unclasp and use."⁶⁵ A general strike, or a revolution for that matter, was a complex social event involving the wills and knowledge of many human agents, of which the vanguard party was only one element.

Revolution as a Living Process

Luxemburg looked on strikes and political struggles as dialectical, historical processes. The structure of the economy and the workforce helped to shape, but never determine, the options available. Thus, if industry was small scale and geographically scattered, strikes would typically be small and scattered as well. Each set of strikes, however, forced changes in the structure of capital. If workers won higher wages, for example, the increases might provoke consolidations in the industry, mechanization, and new patterns of supervision, all of which would influence the character of the next round of strikes. A strike would also, of course, teach the workforce new lessons and alter the character of its cohesion and leadership.⁶⁶ This insistence on process and human agency served Luxemburg as a warning against a narrow view of tactics. A strike or a revolution was not simply an end toward which tactics and command ought to be directed; the process leading to it was at the same time shaping the character of the proletariat. *How* the revolution was made mattered as much as whether it was made at all, for the process itself had heavy consequences.

Luxemburg found Lenin's desire to turn the vanguard party into a military general staff for the working class to be both utterly unrealistic and morally distasteful. His hierarchical logic ignored the inevitable autonomy of the working class (singly and in groups), whose own interests and actions could never be machine-tooled into strict conformity. What is more, even if such discipline were conceivable, by imposing it the party would deprive itself of the independent, creative force of a proletariat that was, after all, the subject of the revolution. Against Lenin's aspiration for control and order Luxemburg juxtaposed the inevitably disorderly, tumultuous, and living tableau of large-scale social action. "Instead of a fixed and hollow scheme of sober political action executed with a prudent plan decided by the highest committees," she wrote, in what was a clear reference to Lenin, "we see a vibrant part of life in flesh and blood which cannot be cut out of the larger frame of the revolution: The mass strike is bound by a thousand veins to all parts of the revolution."⁶⁷ When contrasting her under-

standing to Lenin's, she consistently reached for metaphors from complex, organic processes, which cannot be arbitrarily carved up without threatening the vitality of the organism itself. The idea that a rational, hierarchical executive committee might deploy its proletarian troops as it wished not only was irrelevant to real political life but was also dead and hollow.⁶⁸

In her refutation of *What Is to Be Done?* Luxemburg made clear that the cost of centralized hierarchy lay in the loss of creativity and initiative from below: "The 'discipline' Lenin has in mind is by no means only implanted in the proletariat by the factory, but equally by the barracks, by the modern bureaucracy, by the entire mechanism of the centralized bourgeois state apparatus. . . . The ultracentrism advocated by Lenin is permeated in its very essence by the sterile spirit of a *nightwatchman* (*Nachtwachtergeist*) rather than by a positive and creative spirit. He concentrated mostly on *controlling* the party, not on *fertilizing* it, on *narrowing* it down, not *developing* it, on *regimenting* and not *unifying* it."⁶⁹

The core of the disagreement between Lenin and Luxemburg is caught best in the figures of speech they each use. Lenin comes across as a rigid schoolmaster with quite definite lessons to convey—a schoolmaster who senses the unruliness of his pupils and wants desperately to keep them in line for their own good. Luxemburg sees that unruliness as well, but she takes it for a sign of vitality, a potentially valuable resource; she fears that an overly strict schoolmaster will destroy the pupils' enthusiasm and leave a sullen, dispirited classroom where nothing is really learned. She argues elsewhere, in fact, that the German Social Democrats, by their constant efforts at close control and discipline, have demoralized the German working class.⁷⁰ Lenin sees the possibility that the pupils might influence a weak, timorous teacher and deplors it as a dangerous counterrevolutionary step. Luxemburg, for whom the classroom bespeaks a genuine collaboration, implicitly allows for the possibility that the teacher might just learn some valuable lessons from the pupils.

Once Luxemburg began thinking of the revolution as analogous to a complex natural process, she concluded that the role of a vanguard party was inevitably limited. Such processes are far too complicated to be well understood, let alone directed or planned in advance. She was deeply impressed by the autonomous popular initiatives taken all over Russia after the shooting of the crowd before the Winter Palace in 1905. Her description, which I quote at length, invokes metaphors from nature to convey her conviction that centralized control is an illusion.

As the Russian Revolution [1905] shows to us, the mass strike is such a changeable phenomenon that it reflects in itself all phases of political and economic struggle, all stages and moments of the revolution. Its applicability, its effectiveness, and the moments of its origin change continually. It suddenly opens new, broad perspectives of revolution just where it seemed to have come to a narrow pass; and it disappoints where one thought he could reckon on it in full certitude. Now it flows like a broad billow over the whole land, now it divides itself into a gigantic net of thin streams; now it bubbles forth from under the ground like a fresh spring, now it trickles flat along the ground. . . . All [forms of popular struggle] run through one another, next to each other, across one another, flow in and over one another; it is an eternal, moving, changing sea of appearances.⁷¹

The mass strike, then, was not a tactical invention of the vanguard party to be used at the appropriate moment. It was, rather, the "living pulse-beat of the revolution and at the same time its most powerful driving-wheel, . . . the phenomenal form of the proletarian struggle in the revolution."⁷² From Luxemburg's perspective, Lenin must have seemed like an engineer with hopes of damming a wild river in order to release it at a single stroke in a massive flood that would be the revolution. She believed that the "flood" of the mass strike could not be predicted or controlled; its course could not be much affected by professional revolutionists, although they could, as Lenin actually did, ride that flood to power. Luxemburg's understanding of the revolutionary process, curiously enough, provided a better description of how Lenin and the Bolsheviks came to power than did the utopian scenario in *What Is to Be Done?*

A grasp of political conflict as process allowed Luxemburg to see well beyond what Lenin considered to be failures and dead ends. Writing of 1905, she emphasized that "after every foaming wave of political action a fructifying deposit remains from which a thousand stalks of economic struggle shoot forth."⁷³ The analogy she drew to organic processes conveyed both their autonomy and their vulnerability. To extract from the living tissue of the proletarian movement a particular kind of strike for instrumental use would threaten the whole organism. With Lenin in mind she wrote, "If the contemplative theory proposes the artificial dissection of the mass strike to get at the 'pure political mass strike,' then by this dissection, as with any other, it will not perceive the phenomenon in its living essence, but will kill it all together."⁷⁴ Luxemburg, then, saw the workers' movement in much the same light as Jacobs saw the city: as an intricate social organism whose origin, dynamics, and future were but dimly understood. To nevertheless intervene and dissect the workers' movement was to kill it, just as carving

up the city along strict functional lines produced a lifeless, taxidermist's city.

If Lenin approached the proletariat as an engineer approached his raw materials, with a view toward shaping them to his purposes, Luxemburg approached the proletariat as a physician would. Like any patient, the proletariat had its own constitution, which limited the kind of interventions that could be made. The physician needed to respect the patient's constitution and assist according to its potential strengths and weaknesses. Finally, the autonomy and history of the patient would inevitably influence the outcome. The proletariat could not be reshaped from the ground up and fitted neatly into a predetermined design.

But the major, recurrent theme of Luxemburg's criticism of Lenin and the Bolsheviks generally was that their dictatorial methods and their mistrust of the proletariat made for bad educational policy. It thwarted the development of the mature, independent working class that was necessary to the revolution and to the creation of socialism. Thus she attacked both the German and Russian revolutionists for substituting the ego of the vanguard party for the ego of the proletariat—a substitution that ignored the fact that the objective was to *create* a self-conscious workers' movement, not just to use the proletariat as instruments. Like a confident and sympathetic guardian, she anticipated false steps as part of the learning process. "However, the nimble acrobat," she charged, referring to the Social Democratic Party, "fails to see that the true subject to whom this role of director falls is the collective ego of the working class which insists on its right to make its own mistakes and learn the historical dialectic by itself. Finally, we must frankly admit to ourselves that the errors made by a truly revolutionary labor movement are historically infinitely more fruitful and valuable than the infallibility of the best of all possible 'central committees.'" ⁷⁵

Nearly fifteen years later, a year after the October 1917 Bolshevik seizure of power, Luxemburg was attacking Lenin in precisely the same terms. Her warnings, so soon after the revolution, about the direction in which the dictatorship of the proletariat was headed seem prophetic.

She believed that Lenin and Trotsky had completely corrupted a proper understanding of the dictatorship of the proletariat. To her, it meant rule by the *whole* proletariat, which required the broadest political freedoms for all workers (though not for enemy classes) so that they could bring their influence and wisdom to bear on the building of socialism. It did not mean, as Lenin and Trotsky assumed, that a small

circle of party leaders would exercise dictatorial power merely in the name of the proletariat. Trotsky's proposal that the constituent assembly not convene because circumstances had changed since its election struck Luxemburg as a cure that was worse than the disease. Only an active public life could remedy the shortcomings of representative bodies. By concentrating absolute power in so few hands, the Bolsheviks had "blocked up the fountain of political experience and the source of this rising development [the attaining of higher stages of socialism] by their suppression of public life."⁷⁶

Beneath this dispute was not just a difference in tactics but a fundamental disagreement about the nature of socialism. Lenin proceeded as if the road to socialism were already mapped out in detail and the task of the party were to use the iron discipline of the party apparatus to make sure that the revolutionary movement kept to that road. Luxemburg, on the contrary, believed that the future of socialism was to be discovered and worked out in a genuine collaboration between workers and their revolutionary state. There were no "ready-made prescriptions" for the realization of socialism, nor was there "a key in any socialist party program or textbook."⁷⁷ The openness that characterized a socialist future was not a shortcoming but rather a sign of its superiority, as a dialectical process, over the cut-and-dried formulas of utopian socialism. The creation of socialism was "new territory. A thousand problems—only experience is capable of correcting and opening new ways. Only unobstructed, effervescent life falls into a thousand new forms and *improvisations*, brings to light creative force, itself corrects all mistaken attempts."⁷⁸ Lenin's use of decrees and terror and what Luxemburg called the "dictatorial force of the factory overseer" deprived the revolution of this popular creative force and experience. Unless the working class as a whole participated in the political process, she added ominously, "socialism will be decreed from behind a few official desks by a dozen intellectuals."⁷⁹

Looking ahead, so soon after the revolution, to the closed and authoritarian political order Lenin was constructing, Luxemburg's predictions were chilling but accurate: "But with the repression of political life in the land as a whole, life in the soviets must also become crippled. Without general elections, without unrestricted freedom of the press and assembly, without a free struggle of opinion, life dies out in every public institution. . . . Public life gradually falls asleep. . . . In reality only a dozen outstanding heads [party leaders] do the leading and an elite of the working class is invited to applaud the speeches of the leaders, and to approve proposed resolutions unanimously—at bottom then, a clique affair, . . . a dictatorship in the bourgeois sense."⁸⁰

Aleksandra Kollontay and the Workers' Opposition to Lenin

Aleksandra Kollontay was in effect the local voice of a Luxemburgian critique among the Bolsheviks after the revolution. A revolutionary activist, the head of the women's section of the Central Committee (Zhenotdel), and, by early 1921, closely associated with the Workers' Opposition, Kollontay was a thorn in Lenin's side. He regarded the sharply critical pamphlet she wrote just before the Tenth Party Congress in 1921 as a nearly treasonous act. The Tenth Party Congress opened just as the suppression of the workers' and sailors' revolt in Kronstadt was being organized and in the midst of the Makno uprising in the Ukraine. To attack the party leadership at such a perilous moment was a treacherous appeal to "the base instincts of the masses."

There was a direct connection between Luxemburg and her Russian colleague. Kollontay had been deeply impressed by reading Luxemburg's *Social Reform or Revolution* early in the century and had actually met Luxemburg at a socialist meeting in Germany. While Kollontay's pamphlet echoed most of Luxemburg's criticisms of centralized, authoritarian socialist practice, its historical context was distinctive. Kollontay was making her case as part of the Workers' Opposition argument for an all-Russian congress of producers, freely elected from the trade unions, which would direct production and industrial planning. Alexander Shlyapnikov, a close ally of Kollontay, and other trade unionists were alarmed at the increasingly dominant role of technical specialists, the bureaucracy, and the party center and the exclusion of workers' organizations. During the civil war, martial-law techniques of management were perhaps understandable. But now that the civil war was largely won, the direction of socialist construction seemed at stake. Kollontay brought to her case for trade-union co-management of industry a wealth of practical experience acquired in the frustrating job of negotiating with state organs on behalf of working women who had organized creches and canteens. In the end, the Workers' Opposition was outlawed and Kollontay was silenced, but not before leaving behind a prophetic legacy of criticism.⁸¹

Kollontay's pamphlet attacked the party state, which she compared to an authoritarian schoolteacher, in much the same terms used by Luxemburg. She complained, above all, that the relationship between the central committee and the workers had become a stark one-way relationship of command. The trade unions were seen as a mere "connecting link" or transmission belt of the party's instructions to the workers; unions were expected to "bring up the masses" in exactly the way a schoolteacher whose curriculum and lesson plans are mandated

from above passes those lessons on to pupils. She castigated the party for its out-of-date pedagogical theory, which left no room for the potential originality of the students. "When one begins to turn over the pages of the stenographic minutes and speeches made by our prominent leaders, one is astonished by the unexpected manifestation of their pedagogical activities. Every author of the thesis proposes the most perfect system of bringing up the masses. But all these systems of 'education' lack provisions for freedom of experiment, for training and for expression of creative abilities by those who are to be taught. In this respect also all our pedagogues are behind the times."⁸²

There is some evidence that Kollontay's work on behalf of women had a direct bearing on her case for the Workers' Opposition. Just as Jacobs was afforded a different view of how the city functioned by virtue of her additional roles as housewife and mother, so Kollontay saw the party from the vantage point of an advocate for women whose work was rarely taken seriously. She accused the party of denying women opportunities in organization of "creative tasks in the sphere of production and development of creative abilities" and of confining them to the "restricted tasks of home economics, household duties, etc."⁸³ Her experience of being patronized and condescended to as a representative of the women's section seems directly tied to her accusation that the party was also treating the workers as infants rather than as autonomous, creative adults. In the same passage as her charge that the party thought women fit only for home economics, she mocked Trotsky's praise for the workers at a miner's congress, who had voluntarily replaced shop windows, as showing that he wanted to limit them to mere janitorial tasks.

Like Luxemburg, Kollontay believed that the building of socialism could not be accomplished by the Central Committee alone, however farseeing it might be. The unions were not mere instruments or transmission belts in the building of socialism; they were to a great extent the subjects and the creators of a socialist mode of production. Kollontay put the fundamental difference succinctly: "*The Workers' Opposition sees in the unions the managers and creators of the communist economy, whereas Bukharin, together with Lenin and Trotsky, leave to them only the role of schools of communism and no more.*"⁸⁴

Kollontay shared Luxemburg's conviction that the practical experience of industrial workers on the factory floor was indispensable knowledge that the experts and technicians needed. She did not want to minimize the role of specialists and officials; they were vital, but they could do their job effectively only in a genuine collaboration with the trade unions and workers. Her vision of the form this collaboration might

take closely resembles that of an agricultural extension service and farmers to whose needs the service is closely tied. That is, technical centers concerned with industrial production would be established throughout Russia, but the tasks they addressed and the services they provided would be directly responsive to the demands of the producers.⁸⁵ The experts would serve the producers rather than dictating to them. To this end Kollontay proposed that a host of specialists and officials, who had no practical factory experience and who had joined the party after 1919, be dismissed—at least until they had done some manual labor.

She clearly saw, as did Luxemburg, the social and psychological consequences of frustrating the independent initiatives of workers. Arguing from concrete examples—workers procuring firewood, establishing a dining hall, and opening a nursery—she explained how they were thwarted at every turn by bureaucratic delay and pettifoggery: "Every independent thought or initiative is treated as a 'heresy,' as a violation of party discipline, as an attempt to infringe on the prerogatives of the center, which must 'foresee' everything and 'decree' everything and anything." The harm done came not just from the fact that the specialists and bureaucrats were more likely to make bad decisions. The attitude had two other consequences. First, it reflected a "distrust towards the creative abilities of the workers," which was unworthy of the "professed ideals of our party." Second, and most important, it smothered the morale and creative spirit of the working class. In their frustration at the specialists and officials, "the workers became cynical and said, 'let [the] officials themselves take care of us.'" The end result was an arbitrary, myopic layer of officials presiding over a dispirited workforce putting in a "bad-faith" day on the factory floor.⁸⁶

Kollontay's point of departure, like Luxemburg's, is an assumption about what *kinds* of tasks are the making of revolutions and the creating of new forms of production. For both of them, such tasks are voyages in uncharted waters. There may be some rules of thumb, but there can be no blueprints or battle plans drawn up in advance; the numerous unknowns in the equation make a one-step solution inconceivable. In more technical language, such goals can be approached only by a stochastic process of successive approximations, trial and error, experiment, and learning through experience. The kind of knowledge required in such endeavors is not deductive knowledge from first principles but rather what Greeks of the classical period called *mētis*, a concept to which we shall return. Usually translated, inadequately, as "cunning," *mētis* is better understood as the kind of knowledge that can be acquired only by long practice at similar but rarely identical tasks,

which requires constant adaptation to changing circumstances. It is to this kind of knowledge that Luxemburg appealed when she characterized the building of socialism as “new territory” demanding “improvisation” and “creativity.” It is to this kind of knowledge that Kollontay appealed when she insisted that the party leaders were not infallible, that they needed the “everyday experience” and “practical work of the basic class collectives” of those “who actually produce and organize production at the same time.”⁸⁷ In an analogy that any Marxist would recognize, Kollontay asked whether it was conceivable that the cleverest feudal estate managers could have invented early capitalism by themselves. Of course not, she answered, because their knowledge and skills were directly tied to feudal production, just as the technical specialists of her day had learned their lessons within a capitalist framework. There was simply no precedent for the future now being forged.

Echoing, for rhetorical effect, a sentiment that both Luxemburg and Lenin had uttered, Kollontay claimed that “it is impossible to decree communism. It can be created only in the process of practical research, through mistakes, perhaps, but only by the creative powers of the working class itself.” While specialists and officials had a collaborative role of vital importance, “only those who are directly bound to industry can introduce into it animating innovations.”⁸⁸

For Lenin, the vanguard party is a machine for making a revolution and then for building socialism—tasks whose main lines have, it is assumed, already been worked out. For Le Corbusier, the house is a machine for living, and the city planner is a specialist whose knowledge shows him how a city must be built. For Le Corbusier, the people are irrelevant to *the process* of city planning, although the result is designed with their well-being and productivity in mind. Lenin cannot make the revolution without the proletariat, but they are seen largely as troops to be deployed. The goals of revolution and scientific socialism are, of course, also for the benefit of the working class. Each of these schemes implies a single, unitary answer discoverable by specialists and hence a command center, which can, or ought to, impose the correct solution.

Kollontay and Luxemburg, in contrast, take the tasks at hand to be unknowable in advance. Given the uncertainty of the endeavor, a plurality of experiments and initiatives will best reveal which lines of attack are fruitful and which are barren. The revolution and socialism will fare best, as will Jacobs’s city, when they are joint productions between technicians and gifted, experienced amateurs. Above all, there is no strict distinction between means and ends. Luxemburg’s and

Kollontay’s vanguard party is not producing a revolution or socialism in the straightforward sense that a factory produces, say, axles. Thus the vanguard party cannot be adequately judged, as a factory might, by its output—by how many axles of a certain quality it makes with a given labor force, capitalization, and so on—no matter how it goes about producing that result. Also, the vanguard party of Luxemburg and Kollontay is at the same time producing a certain kind of working class—a creative, conscious, competent, and empowered working class—that is the precondition of its achieving any of its other goals. Put positively, the way the trip is made matters at least as much as the destination. Put negatively, a vanguard party can achieve its revolutionary results in ways that defeat its central purpose.