

# Preface

At the European Social Forum in Florence 2002, the symbols of the left are on display everywhere: the Hammer and sickle, Che Guevara, guerrillas with Kalashnikovs, Cuban flags and British Trotskyites chanting 'one solution, revolution'. I feel as if I have been catapulted back in time, to the 1960s and 1970s when the left was in the ascendant: a time which, for about two years, I have tried to define as history, a phenomenon of the past. Now it imposes itself as something very present.

The idea for this book was formulated in 1999. At that point, the radical left belonged to history. Small groups were visible, particularly in my Copenhagen neighbourhood, but they were hardly anything more than just another youth subculture. The left belonged mainly to historical debates, not to the political agenda.

Then came Florence, in the 'Red Tuscany'; five years later, Gothenburg; Genoa; 11 September; the 'War on Terror'; the Afghanistan War; and the War in Iraq, the result of which still seems open-ended. Suddenly the language of the radical left reappeared as a political force. The old images of American imperialism, the North-South conflict, and the latent oppression of the capitalist system have got a face and they have to be taken seriously.

This book will end with the collapse of the left. It is written almost as a tragedy where the left is doomed to defeat, fighting against the tide of the times. Nevertheless, the brief period during which it was written has proved that the language of the left was strong, that it managed to be saved from the dustbin of history to reappear 20 years later in a new political environment. I cannot deny that the interpretations of the left have regained their plausibility, and that they can mobilise considerable political power. Any teleological aspects of this book have been proven wrong: the left did not collapse irreparably to be assigned the role of a historical relic.

There is no philosophy of history that can identify what definitely belongs to the past and what are the directions of the future. For this reason, the following must be read as a chapter in history, not the beginning and the end, but one beginning and one end.

Florence, February 2004