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BRITISH POLITICAL PARTIES

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PREFACE

Political parties are an established feature of British democracy. They are also an essential one and play a role in many aspects of political life. However, studying parties can be a difficult process. Some parties are more widely studied than others. Inevitably, there is relatively little academic work on the Liberal Democrats given their comparative youth. Yet the Labour Party has generated an enormous literature, whilst its elder rival the Conservative Party, has not been studied to anything like the same extent, though in the past few years this imbalance has been partially redressed. Moreover, some essential aspects of political parties have been examined more closely than others. Party finance is one area that has attracted comparatively little work, whilst party members were virtually ignored before the beginning of this decade.

My aim in this book is to bring together the main features of the political parties and examine them in a way which allows for both study of one party, comparisons with others and analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of political parties in Britain. In a book of this type, one cannot develop great detail on every topic. However, I hope that I have covered most of the principal considerations as well as providing a pointer to the wider literature.

The preparation of this book has left me indebted to many people. Firstly, I am grateful to Avebury Publishing Ltd, Faber & Faber Ltd, Macmillan Press Ltd, Oxford University Press, American Enterprise Institute Press, Patrick Seyd and Pippa Norris for permission to reproduce material. Secondly, I am grateful to the

ESRC Data Archive at the University of Essex for supplying data from the *British Election Survey 1992*. Thirdly, I am indebted to the following for their advice and help: David Broughton, David Denver, Bob Self and Paul Webb. Their advice has been sound and always constructive, though I alone am responsible for any errors of interpretation. Fourthly, I am grateful to Clare Grist, Ruth Pratten and Ian MacQuarrie at Prentice Hall for their drive, calm efficiency and patience. Finally, there are many personal debts and acknowledgements: to Jackie, a woman who is always loving and supportive, my step-daughter Anja, our child-minder Beryl and my colleagues in the Department of Politics & Modern History at London Guildhall University who have provided such a convivial atmosphere in which to work.

The course of writing this book has been a very happy one. I have watched our son, Lewis, learn to walk, begin to talk and love his favourite football team – Brentford. I have also had the pleasure (but not the pain!) of the birth of our daughter, Edie – also a Brentford fan. To them, I dedicate this book.

Justin Fisher
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