Preface

Labour and the left in the 1980s is the product of the Labour History Research Unit at Anglia Ruskin University. We are very proud of Anglia Ruskin and its role in hosting discussions and events that explore the great issues of our time. The aim of the Unit is to develop new ways of thinking about the British Labour Party and progressive politics by employing the insights of historians as well as scholars in other disciplines. The present volume is one of the first to reassess the experience of the political left in the crucial decade of Thatcherism. It is based on a conference held at Anglia Ruskin in November 2014 in association with the Society for the Study of Labour History. It was a great day of exploration which really opened up a new subject. There were a number of excellent papers delivered that we were unable to use but we remain very grateful to the speakers. Some of the issues in this book have been explored in dialogue with members of the Cambridge Labour Party, whom we also thank.

Apart from the contributors, there have been many others who have assisted in making this book through direct input, support or just inspiration. The following list is far from exhaustive but we would like to thank Peter Ackers (who wondered aloud at our conference whether his generation in the 1980s was 'too full of politics'), Alison Ainley, Tim Bale, Lucy Bland, Kelly Boyd, Marlene Buick, Anne Campbell, Luke Cooper, Paul Corthorn, Jon Cruddas MP, Nina Davis, Sharon Davis, Susan Flavin, Sean Lang, Keith Laybourn, Julia Long, the team at Manchester University Press, Daisy Payling, Emily Robinson, Sasha Roseneil, Robert Saunders, John Shepherd, Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, Tony Taylor, Ian Thatcher, Nathalie Thompson and Michael Ward. Special thanks must also go to Anglia Ruskin University for granting Jonathan Davis a sabbatical which allowed him to work on this book,

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As this book goes to press, the future of the Labour Party looks uncertain (just as it has done at many points in its history). Clearly, this is the right time to re-examine a comparable moment in Labour's past when it was in the wilderness. We do not claim that simple lessons can be learned, as the historical record is too complex, but we hope to prompt reflection on a decisive moment in the party's development. What we do believe is that histories of different forms of Labour and left-wing politics have a role to play in the ongoing search for social justice. This book is not exhaustive. We are very aware that we have not had space to consider many key issues. Tony Benn, the peace movement, environmentalism, grass-roots activism, the GLC, feminism and the issue of unemployment (to name just a few topics) need extensive treatment. The book lacks enough voices of working people themselves. We hope, however, that this book will kick-start a much-needed reconsideration of a formative moment in the history of the left.

Jonathan Davis
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