

Compare and contrast the structure of the Labour and Conservative Parties.
Which do you consider to be most democratic and why?

The Labour Party has generally always been thought of as the more internally democratic party. This stems from the origins of the two parties. The Tory party was established when the only voters were the land-owning gentry. This meant it never had to anything more than a purely parliamentary party. The Labour Party however was born out of the need for a representative of the newly enfranchised working-class. The trade union part in the party's creation has ensured its place in its running.

These assumptions have been challenged recently however by reforms by both parties in the 1990s and the beginning of the 21st Century.

The structure of the Labour Party has always been a complex maze of different power groups, including its individual membership (currently 350,000), trade unions, affiliated socialist societies and the parliamentary party. Power has traditionally been arranged bottom, the party priding itself on being democratic. In practise however the leadership has always had more power than is made out, and Blair's reforms have increased this power further.

The party is organised at local level through the branch. This is an area based on council election wards. The branch is the place where the ordinary member can become involved, **attending meetings and helping**. Branches are responsible for choosing candidates for council.

Each branch also elects delegates to their local constituency Labour Party. This consists of a number of branches, and is based on the electoral area for electing MPs. The CLP is electing delegates to regional and annual conference. Ordinary members are allowed to attend CLP meetings, but only the elected delegates can vote. In the past the CLP also chose candidates for parliament, but since 1993 and the introduction of 'one member, one vote' (OMOV), the selection process has been opened up to every ordinary member.

The annual party conference supposedly holds ultimate authority over the party. In reality however