

“Policy Is Now Made In A More Democratic Manner” To  
What Extent Do You Agree With This Statement?

The 1997 general election in Britain changed the way that policies were made in both of the leading political parties. The Labour Party is composed of three major institutions: The NEC (National Executive Committee) -the administrative authority of the party, the PLP (Parliamentary Labour Party) which consists of all elected Labour Party MP s and the Annual Party Conference. The Annual Party Conference is the supreme decision-making body within the Party. Ordinary members of the party are given the opportunity to publicly articulate their views and for cabinet members (or shadow cabinet members if the party is not in government) to deliver set-speeches directed towards the party or the public. The Conservative Party had a system where power rested entirely in the hands of parliamentarians with little or no organisation outside of parliament. It also consisted of three main institutions: The Parliamentary Conservative Party, the National Union Of Conservative and Unionist Associations and The Conservative Central Office. The ultimate decision making body in the Party is the leader himself. He or she may be advised however this advice does not have to be taken.

Before 1997, any member of the Labour party could raise a topic to be debated. However after the 1997 election, in an attempt by Tony Blair to meet the demands of party unity and discipline, the Labour Party changed its structure to include the NPF (National Policy Forum). The job of the National Policy Forum was to set our the agenda to be discussed at the annual party conference. Members could no longer bring up issues during the conference. Instead, members could make an application to the forum for a debate on a particular topic although the ultimate decision would be made by the forum. Although members were still free to convey their views at the annual conference. The Conservatives adopted a similar system to the Labour Party. The Conservative Party also underwent structural changes after the 1997 election. In a bid to make the party more democratic, William Hague introduced ‘the Fresh Future’. This included the creation of two new bodies, the ‘National Conservative Convention’ and the ‘Conservative Policy Forum’ (although these act as advisory bodies only, the final decision rests with the leader).

In conclusion, the Labour Party certainly makes policy in a less democratic way. From an open conference where members could freely bring up topics for debate to a forum where only a select few have the ultimate decision in deciding party policies. This reform has decreased the number of members who can participate in making policies and reduced the range of views that the policies represent. Although the Conservative Party has made an attempt to make its policy making more democratic by introducing the ‘Fresh Future’ and the new Conservative Policy Forum, the leader still holds the ultimate decision when deciding on policy and although it increases the number of people who can attempt to advise the leader although the leader still has ultimate power when making decisions so it means nothing. It is therefore concluded that party policy is not now made in a more democratic manner.