

Adversary and consensus politics are opposite terms and refer to the political, ideological and policy differences (or lack of) between the major parties.

Adversarial politics refers to the ongoing relationship between HM Government and HM Opposition.

1. Adversary politics is opposing another party's view when there is something to honestly oppose, whereas adversarial politics is the act of opposing unthinkingly and automatically due to being an opposing and enemy party and wishing to hold the governing party to account.
2. Problems of a confrontational style of politics:
 - voter engagement is lost
 - politicians follow their party and don't say what they think
 - so, they are in danger of losing their own opinions
 - intolerant
 - opposing ideas for the sake of it
 - so, the general public will not know exactly where a party stands if they oppose automatically and unthinkingly without believing the opposing point and therefore being sincere about it
 - unconstructive and spiteful
 - voters are lacking in confidence because of this
3. The key features of consensus politics are that two parties are in agreement over the majority of policies and do not oppose many, if any policies. Consensus politics is usually used in times of crisis, such as in World War II.
4. The current UK political system is very much adversarial. In some ways, such as within the Coalition, it is consensual, though only because it has to be—not through any real wish.

Political parties do promote the democratic process by:

- representativeness—multiple views
- a group of officials (govt) can be held accountable because they believe in the same core values and stick together
- they can campaign around election time
- people vote for parties, so direct their frustration at the party as a whole, not just at one person
- party speeches around elections—groups, not just individuals
- group policies and manifestos
- political training; organised hierarchy; administration for potential promotion
- vote of no confidence—legitimacy
- effective decision making
- party discipline—people within the party who do wrong can be kicked out or shunned if the party so chooses

Political parties do not promote the democratic process by:

- the main three parties are very similar
- contemporary politics involves appealing to the middle ground, the masses; party politics is too consensus-based
- party voting limits constituency representation—people vote for parties in their heads, not MPs
- party makes complex ideas into one amorphous (mud pie [of a]) whole
- parties limit individual expression—party line
- representativeness issues
- party leaders not necessarily representative of the grass roots of the party
- we do not get a say over who is the party leader, just over which party gets elected and governs
- power of PM and Executive makes it difficult for us to scrutinize internal party workings

The Labour Party; from 'old' to 'new' Labour

Founding of the party

The Labour Party's origins lie in the late 19th century numeric increase of the urban proletariat and the extension of the franchise to working-class males, when it became apparent that there was a need for a political party to represent the interests and needs of those groups. Some members of the trade union movement became interested in moving into the political field, and after the extensions of the franchise in 1867 and 1885, the Liberal Party endorsed some trade-union sponsored candidates. In addition, several small socialist groups had formed around this time with the intention of linking the movement to political policies. Among these were the Independent Labour Party, the intellectual and largely middle-class Fabian Society, the Social Democratic Federation and the Scottish Labour Party.

In the 1895 General Election the Independent Labour Party put up 28 candidates but won only 44,325 votes. Keir Hardie, the leader of the party believed that to obtain success in parliamentary elections, it would be necessary to join with other left-wing groups.

The Labour Party grew out of the trade union movement and socialist political parties of the 19th century, and surpassed the Liberal Party as the main opposition to the Conservatives in the early 1920s. It has had several spells in government, first as minority governments under Ramsay MacDonald in 1924 and 1929–31, then as a junior partner in the wartime coalition from 1940–1945, and then as a majority government, under Clement Attlee in 1945–51 and under Harold Wilson in 1964–70. Labour was in government again in 1974–79, under Wilson and then James Callaghan, though with a precarious and declining majority.

Party ideology

Throughout its history, the Labour Party has usually been thought of as being left wing or centre-left in its politics. Officially, it has maintained the stance of being a socialist party ever since its inception, currently describing itself as a "democratic socialist party". The party has been described as a broad church, containing a diversity of ideological trends from strongly socialist, to more moderately social democratic, and in recent years pro-market tendencies. Throughout its history, it has been criticised by other leftist commentators and historians for not being truly

socialist in its policies, instead supporting anti-socialist stances such as capitalism and neo-colonialism and has been described as a "capitalist workers' party".

Historically the party was broadly in favour of socialism, as set out in Clause Four of the original party constitution, and advocated socialist policies such as public ownership of key industries, government intervention in the economy, redistribution of wealth, increased rights for workers, the welfare state, publicly-funded healthcare and education. Beginning in the late-1980s continuing to the current day the party has adopted free market policies, leading many observers to describe the Labour Party as Social Democratic or Third Way, rather than democratic socialist.

Party electoral manifestos have not contained the term *socialism* since 1992, and in 1995 the original Clause Four (below) was abolished.

CLAUSE FOUR

To secure for the workers by hand or by brain the full fruits of their industry and the most equitable distribution thereof that may be possible upon the basis of the common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange, and the best obtainable system of popular administration and control of each industry or service.

The new version states: The Labour Party is a democratic socialist party. It believes that by the strength of our common endeavour we achieve more than we achieve alone, so as to create for each of us the means to realise our true potential and for all of us a community in which power, wealth and opportunity are in the hands of the many, not the few, where the rights we enjoy reflect the duties we owe, and where we live together, freely, in a spirit of solidarity, tolerance and respect.

"New Labour" – in government (1997–2010)

Tony Blair continued to move the party further to the centre, abandoning the largely symbolic Clause Four at the 1995 mini-conference in a strategy to increase the party's appeal to "middle England". More than a simple re-branding, however, the project would draw upon a new political third way, particularly informed by the thought of the British sociologist Anthony Giddens.

"New Labour" was first termed as an alternative branding for the Labour Party, dating from a conference slogan first used by the Labour Party in 1994, which was later seen in a draft manifesto published by the party in 1996, called *New Labour, New Life For Britain*. It was a continuation of the trend that had begun under the leadership of Neil Kinnock. "New Labour" as a name has no official status, but remains in common use to distinguish modernisers from those holding to more traditional positions, normally referred to as "Old Labour".

'New Labour is a party of ideas and ideals but not of outdated ideology. What counts is what works. The objectives are radical. The means will be modern.'

The Labour Party won the 1997 general election with a landslide majority of 179; it was the largest Labour majority ever, and the largest swing to a political party achieved since 1945. Over the next decade, a wide range of progressive social reforms were enacted, with millions lifted out of poverty during Labour's time in office largely as a result of various tax and benefit reforms.

Among the early acts of Tony Blair's government were the establishment of the national minimum wage, the devolution of power to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, and the re-creation of a city-wide government body for London, the Greater London Authority, with its own elected-Mayor. Combined with a Conservative opposition that had yet to organise effectively under William Hague, and the continuing popularity of Blair, Labour went on to win the 2001 election with a similar majority, dubbed the "quiet landslide" by the media.

A perceived turning point was when Tony Blair controversially allied himself with US President George W. Bush in supporting the Iraq War, which caused him to lose much of his political support. The UN Secretary-General, among many, considered the war illegal. The Iraq War was deeply unpopular in most western countries, with Western governments divided in their support and under pressure from worldwide popular protests. At the 2005 election, Labour was re-elected for a third term, but with a reduced majority of 66. The decisions that led up to the Iraq war and its subsequent conduct are currently the subject of Sir John Chilcot's Iraq Inquiry.

Tony Blair announced in September 2006 that he would quit as leader within the year, though he had been under pressure to quit earlier than May 2007 in order to get a new leader in place before the May elections which were expected to be disastrous for Labour. In the event, the party did lose power in Scotland to a minority Scottish National Party government at the 2007 elections and, shortly after this, Tony Blair resigned as Prime Minister and was replaced by his Chancellor, Gordon Brown.

Although the party experienced a brief rise in the polls after this, its popularity soon slumped to its lowest level since the days of Michael Foot. During May 2008, Labour suffered heavy defeats in the London mayoral election, local elections and the loss in the Crewe and Nantwich by-election, culminating in the party registering its worst ever opinion poll result since records began in 1943, of 23%, with many citing Brown's leadership as a key factor.

Finance proved a major problem for the Labour Party during this period; a "cash for peerages" scandal under Tony Blair resulted in the drying up of many major sources of donations. Declining party membership, partially due to the reduction of activists' influence upon policy-making under the reforms of Neil Kinnock and Tony Blair, also contributed to financial problems. Between January and March 2008, the Labour Party received just over £3 million in donations and were £17 million in debt; compared to the Conservatives' £6 million in donations and £12 million in debt.

In the 2010 general election on 6 May that year, Labour with 29.0% of the vote won the second largest number of seats (258). The Conservatives with 36.5% of the vote won the largest number of seats (307), but no party had an overall majority, meaning that Labour could still remain in power if they managed to form a coalition with at least one smaller party. However, the Labour Party would have had to form a coalition with more than one other smaller party to gain an overall majority; anything less would result in a minority government. On 10 May 2010, after talks to form a coalition with the Liberal Democrats broke down, Gordon Brown announced his intention to stand down as Leader before the Labour Party Conference but a day later resigned as both Prime Minister and party leader.

What you need to do to understand the key points above:

1. Contrast the old and new versions of 'Clause Four'. What do they tell you about the difference between 'old' and 'new' Labour?
2. Which policies of new Labour (i) reflected the founding principles of the Labour Party (ii) show the new position of 'new' Labour?
3. Why did the Labour Party make the changes it did?

Extension reading: How 'new Labour' are the Labour Party today?