

28th August 2016, *The Times*, <http://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/may-mania-surge-in-tory-members-hjpwch7t2>

'May mania' surge in Tory members

Tim Shipman, Political Editor

Nearly 50,000 people have joined the Conservative Party since Theresa May became leader, swelling the ranks of grassroots Tories by nearly 40% in just six weeks.

Party bosses say they have also had "a record-breaking number of registrations" for the Tories' conference in Birmingham in October, where May will make the first set-piece rallying cry by a female prime minister since Margaret Thatcher's in 1990.

The news will be a welcome boost to the new prime minister as she returns to work this week and to activists, since membership is understood to have halved during David Cameron's 11-year leadership.

Recent estimates indicate Tory membership had slumped to as low as 130,000, far below the peak membership of about 3m in the party's 1950s heyday. Tens of thousands are believed to have quit over Cameron's support for gay marriage.

But the Conservative correspondence unit has been inundated with letters from lapsed members returning to the fold saying they are delighted that May has become leader, prompting claims that "May mania" has broken out.

The prime minister will use a cabinet meeting on Wednesday, at her grace-and-favour home of Chequers, to discuss the conference, where she will flesh out her plans for social reform and a new interventionist industrial strategy.

Conservative Party membership is far behind that of Labour, where a surge of applications ahead of the leadership election has boosted numbers to more than 500,000. But a senior Tory source said: "While Labour tears itself apart, the Conservative Party is more united than ever and ready to get on with the work of governing for the whole country."