

THE ANDREW MARR SHOW
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INTERVIEW WITH:
TRISTRAM HUNT MP
SHADOW EDUCATION SECRETARY

ANDREW MARR: Tristram Hunt joins me now. Good morning.

TRISTRAM HUNT: Good morning Andrew.

ANDREW MARR: Can we start by talking about standards because the international comparisons are terrible at the moment. England has come, I think, 20th out of 24 countries in literacy, 22nd in numeracy. These are really pretty atrocious figures. Do you accept that standards have slipped over the last ten or twenty years?

TRISTRAM HUNT: This is a big structural issue for our country. It goes across governments, it goes down generations. You can go right back to the mid 1990s and look at the OECD reports then. I think if you drill down in to the data, what it shows is that the 14 to 19 bracket, we're not achieving what we need to achieve there. So we absolutely, we need to focus on maths and English from 16 to 18, where it needs to be and the standards there are vitally important, because that's what employers say they need.

ANDREW MARR: So you accept that this OECD study is real because in the past, people have said... oh, we've done very well with GCSEs, there was no grade inflation. But you accept that standards have slipped in Britain?

TRISTRAM HUNT: The OECD is a wake up call. You know, we all need to re-double our efforts and the question is how do you achieve improvements in standards and the Labour Party view is you focus on teacher quality. You focus on professionalising our teachers. You look at their continuing professional development. You essentially follow the model that they have in Finland and Finland came second in this, where you have the best graduates going into teaching and you have them going into difficult communities and you have them showing the passion and the capacity and the autonomy ...(interjection)

ANDREW MARR: And you pay them well to do this.

TRISTRAM HUNT: And obviously, you pay them as well as you can in your difficult financial circumstances but it's partly about status. When I go around schools, and I was at the excellent Maybee High School on Friday, what teachers want is respect from politicians that you don't get rid of curriculum half way through the school year. You don't change the examination system half way through the school year...

ANDREW MARR: But...

TRISTRAM HUNT: You listen to their views and you take them with you.

ANDREW MARR: But you do need more rigorous exams. You do need tougher A levels. You need to get rid of AS levels. You would agree with that.

TRISTRAM HUNT: You need to be absolutely clear about standards and I think OFQUAL is doing a very good job. Look, I've got a PhD from the University of Cambridge. I'm very lucky that I don't need to be told about the importance of rigour and standards but it's not just about academic life, it's also about vocational pathways. We have a government obsessed about our GCSE A Level university route and that's absolutely vital (interjection)

ANDREW MARR: Rightly, rightly obsessed perhaps.

TRISTRAM HUNT: Absolutely vital, and I'm determined as anyone else to make sure that ... (interjection)

ANDREW MARR: So you'll be alongside Michael Gove on this...

TRISTRAM HUNT: ...kids from working class communities can get in to the best universities in our country. We're about aspiration and achievement but if you want to get an apprenticeship at JCB or Rolls Royce, if you want to work in the engineering sector, the Labour Party is also determined to make sure you have excellence in those career pathways as well.

ANDREW MARR: Right at the beginning, in the Labour government of 1945 when there was the first ideas of splitting the school system in to grammar schools and comprehensive, there was always going to be a third tier, you may remember, which was going to be technical skills. Are you saying you're going to bring that back? It never happened.

TRISTRAM HUNT: I think the Rab Butler experiment had some down sides. It... We had all sorts of great achievements in the post '45 period but what we haven't had is clearly what they've had in Germany and other countries, is that focus on making sure we have the technicians, making sure we have those vocational pathways and what that means is putting a lot of emphasis into our further education colleges, looking, putting a lot of emphasis in what used to happen in polytechnics. And what's really exciting now is you go to somewhere like the JCB academy in Staffordshire and the head boy there, he had a choice, he could get an apprenticeship with Rolls Royce or he could go to Loughborough University and he went for the apprenticeship at Rolls Royce and I think the terms of the debate are changing at the moment.

ANDREW MARR: Very interesting. I was a bad historian there, it was of course Rab Butler. You're a better historian than me, you've got a PhD. (interjects)

TRISTRAM HUNT: It's cross-party.

ANDREW MARR: Turning to the structure of schools, which has been a huge issue between your parties. What about an extension of free schools because they have been, in many cases, very successful. You used to kind of ... inveigh against yummy mummy schools and so on. Have you changed your mind a bit on that?

TRISTRAM HUNT: Well I've got one message for you this morning and one message for viewers which is that if you are a group of parents, a group of social entrepreneurs, teachers, interested in setting up a school in areas where you need new school places, then the Labour government will be on your side. We are in favour...

ANDREW MARR: That's free schools? You're effecting free schools.

TRISTRAM HUNT: We are in favour of enterprise and innovation but here's the difference. First of all it's going to be in areas of need because we have a school places crisis going on. Secondly, it's going to have properly qualified teachers in these schools and thirdly, you're going to have systems of financial accountability, transparency because Andrew, what is going on at the Almadina School in Derby, is a terrifying example of the mistakes of Michael Gove's education policy. Where you are having... (interjection)

ANDREW MARR: Explain why you think that. Is it because they were insisting on the hijab and the veil, or what?

TRISTRAM HUNT: Because you have had a system which allows essentially financial irregularities, allegations of extremist curriculum, teaching ideas contrary to British values, because there's no oversight there. And also (interjects)

ANDREW MARR: Right. So you're in favour of free schools but good free schools, as it were?

TRISTRAM HUNT: I'm in favour of parent led academies which are going to be good parent led academies and we will keep the good free schools when we get into government. But have no doubt that what we have seen recently is an ideological experiment with our young people and as a result of that, four hundred kids in Derby have been sent home for the week. They've had no schooling because of an ideological experiment by Michael Gove, and that can't be right.

ANDREW MARR: Right. Did you discuss all this with Ed Miliband when you got the job?

TRISTRAM HUNT: Absolutely.

ANDREW MARR: Because he said to me a couple of weeks ago that he was going to – there would be no more free schools and he was completely against them.

TRISTRAM HUNT: Well our policy was set up by my predecessor, Stephen Twigg, who did huge amounts when he was a schools minister in the last Labour government, for improving standards in London's schools and Stephen said in June that our policy was to keep the good free schools when we're in power, not to set up new free schools along the Michael Gove model, but to have parent academies and that's where we have the innovation, the social enterprise, the creativity. Andrew, the Labour way... wait hold on, hold on... (interjection)

ANDREW MARR: This sounds like a huge change in tone at the very least, from the Labour Party.

TRISTRAM HUNT: Andrew, you are a historian and you know that the history of the Labour movement is about mutualism, co-operatives, the non-conformist tradition, civil society, all of that energy... (interjects)

ANDREW MARR: And you'd put in very, very tough rigorous education, pushing this hard

TRISTRAM HUNT: Absolutely. Absolutely

ANDREW MARR: ... and you are.

TRISTRAM HUNT: Absolutely. We want absolute rigor. But we believe both in vocational rigour and academic rigour.

ANDREW MARR: Do you think in parent led academies for instance, the Teacher's Union should be setting the pay scales? Should they have national pay scales or will they have freedom as they have in free schools to teach... to pay teachers more or less?

TRISTRAM HUNT: This is the interesting thing. I mean, academies have much greater freedoms over pay and conditions, free schools are much better control over pay and conditions, but what they do most of them, the vast majority of them, stick to the national pay scales because those are the most effective mechanisms. If you're a Head, you don't want to be involved in all the minutiae of some of these issues. Actually, you want to stick to a national system and the strikes we've got coming up this week, which are very, very unfortunate and I don't think they should be going ahead, are as a result again of the sort of ideological extremism we see from this government when it comes to talking to teachers and the relationship with teachers.

ANDREW MARR: Do you think that in retrospect, setting a kind of '50% of all kids must go to university target' was foolish? There's been a lot of worry across universities and higher education about falling standards. Kids not able to cope with the three year courses they've been put in to, dropping out early. You must have talked to academics who are very, very worried about this.

TRISTRAM HUNT: Look, when we see what's happening in India and China, the vast number of young people are going to University right around the

world, when we want as many kids from disadvantaged communities to be able to go to university, we can't put a cap on aspiration and it was always about life-long learning as well. But I think if we had the emphasis wrong, it was an over emphasis... (interjects)

ANDREW MARR: ...on numbers.

TRISTRAM HUNT: ...upon that university track. Ed Miliband has made it very clear that he wants us in government to focus on what he's called 'the forgotten 50%'; those for whom the university pathway is not necessarily the right pathway and what we want is equity between them.

ANDREW MARR: Have you thought about bringing back polytechnics.

TRISTRAM HUNT: Well I'm very attracted by the institutions of polytechnics, what polytechnics achieved. In Stoke on Trent we had the North Staffordshire polytechnic, which did brilliant work for the ceramics industry. But you are taking me outside my brief and I've only been in the job a few days and if I trespass onto higher education so soon, I'm going to be in trouble.

ANDREW MARR: You're going to be in trouble.

TRISTRAM HUNT: Exactly.

ANDREW MARR: Tristram Hunt, thank you very much indeed for being so candid and joining us this morning.

TRISTRAM HUNT: Thank you Andrew.

END OF INTERVIEW WITH TRISTRAM HUNT