ANDREW MARR:
Since he took over as Chair of the Commission for Equality since expanding to include other minority rights, Trevor Phillips has never been very far from the headlines. He’s upset some of the Left over multiculturalism. But the new body, the Equalities and Human Rights Commission, has also run into a bit of trouble of its own. Equality rows never disappear of course. There’s the current one over the sexual exploitation of children by some Pakistani men that we were talking about just now; and of course gay marriage we were talking about as well. Trevor Phillips joins me now. Welcome.

TREVOR PHILLIPS:
Good morning.

ANDREW MARR:
Let’s start off, since we’re on an Olympics theme today, your organisation was involved in the Olympics bid as well, wasn’t it?

TREVOR PHILLIPS:
Yes we’ve worked with Seb and his team, and of course the Olympic bid was sold on London’s diversity: most diverse city in the world and most welcoming city in the world. And everyone may say Seb and his team have done pretty well on this and I think we can look forward to a good summer.

**ANDREW MARR:**
You’ve had the best part of, what, ten years almost at the top of this organisation. Do you think Britain’s changed much in that time?

**TREVOR PHILLIPS:**
I think there’s been an enormous degree of change. There’s been a whole sea change. I mean we could talk about the fact that we have the most advanced equality laws in the world; people come from China to talk to us about how we work. We’ve got a single institution in that my commission’s not going anywhere soon. The BNP decimated a couple of weeks ago in the local elections while the Right is advancing across the continent. But I think the most important thing is change in public sentiment. You know we do or I have a work, rest and play test. You know we ask people would you mind having a woman boss, would you mind having a neighbour of a different race, would you mind if your daughter married somebody of a different religion or same sex. The numbers now are dramatically different to ten, fifteen years ago. You struggle to find anybody who has worries about any of those issues.

**ANDREW MARR:**
You’re stepping down as head of this body. Looking back, what’s your greatest regret?

**TREVOR PHILLIPS:**
I think you know no public official would say that everything’s gone perfectly and they’ve been fantastic. You learn. I suppose if I had to pinpoint one single thing, I would say that I wish when I took over at CRE ten years ago, I had been more aggressive on the issue of transracial adoption. If I at that point had ordered an inquiry, an investigation - which I think would have shown pretty clearly that the life chances of children would have been much, much better in a family of any race compared to staying in care - we would have then been able essentially to change the
policy in local authorities ten years ago, and my personal regret is that I think maybe hundreds of children, maybe thousands of children would now be in families who got stuck in the care system. And if I had to go back and do something different, I would do something about that.

ANDREW MARR:
And to be clear, these are very often black or Asian children who weren’t adopted by white families because there was a sort of hostility to white families taking children of a different cultural background, and because they’re stuck in the care system, they’re left in the care homes, they’re likelier to stay institutionalised and run into trouble later on?

TREVOR PHILLIPS:
Well I did my first film on this thirty years ago, and what it showed is what is true now; that being in the care system is the surest indicator that you will end up in crime, in drugs, that you will be unemployed, and that your children will repeat your experience. I think that if we had been more aggressive on this issue, we could have transformed the lives of many, many children. But of course these are the kind of things you know in hindsight.

ANDREW MARR:
(over) Well that’s a big regret. That’s obviously a big regret. I can see that.

TREVOR PHILLIPS:
Yes.

ANDREW MARR:
What about the criticisms that have been made of the commission itself - most recently by the Home Secretary saying it hasn’t made best use of money; that you know you set up an advice line - not that many people have used it; it's been very expensive; and you’ve come into a bit of criticism for being too domineering a boss?

TREVOR PHILLIPS:
(laughs) Well look, you know, as you said, this work is a conflict zone. You know we don’t sit around singing Kumbaya every Friday. This is an area in which there are
strong opinions, where there are passionate issues, where frankly there are life and death issues both in the race and also in the disability field, so it wouldn’t be surprising if you know one didn’t sort of collect enemies and so on. I mean show me somebody who hasn’t got any enemies, and I’ll show you somebody who’s never made a decision or made a difference. But you know I talked to Theresa on Friday. I have to tell you peace has broken out. We all believe that we’re going in the right direction. We have solved some of the problems that the commission had to be begin with.

**ANDREW MARR:**
And what would you say to those who say well to be honest with you, you know it’s all about public mood; you don’t really need a commission, you don’t need a public body. These are tough times, you know public money is short. Why have the organisation at all?

**TREVOR PHILLIPS:**
Well let me just deal with one very practical point. There’s only one thing that matters in Britain today: the economy; can we fix it? There’s some interesting research that’s come from the United States in the last couple of weeks which shows that anti-discrimination legislation properly enforced has made a 17 per cent difference positively in America’s GDP over the last fifty years. The priority for my successor, I think, has to be that; that at a time when we need everybody’s shoulder to the wheel, what we can’t have is discrimination shutting people out of the labour market, shutting people out of contributing.

**ANDREW MARR:**
Let’s talk, if we may, about two subjects which have been in the newspaper review. The first is this grooming case.

**TREVOR PHILLIPS:**
Yuh.

**ANDREW MARR:**
Where do you stand on the argument between those who say actually we should be straightforward, say there is a cultural problem in part of the Pakistani Muslim community about the way men regard women, white women from other backgrounds and so on as fair game?

**TREVOR PHILLIPS:**
Well the Children’s Commissioner’s going to review this, but let’s remember the most important thing about this is that these men are criminals, these children are street kids. However, I think anybody who says that the fact that most of the men are Asian and most of the children are white is not relevant. I mean that’s just fatuous. I think when the Children’s Commissioner does her report, I will be looking to see answers to two questions. First of all, these are closed communities essentially and I worry that in those communities there are people who knew what was going on and didn’t say anything either because they’re frightened or because they’re so separated from the rest of the communities that they think oh that’s just how white people let their children carry on; we don’t need to do anything. And the other issue would be if anybody in any of the agencies that are supposed to be caring for these children - schools, social services and so on - took the view that being aggressively interventionist to save these children would lead to the demonisation of some group because of the ethnicity. If either of those things is true, then it is a national scandal and something that we would need to deal with urgently.

**ANDREW MARR:**
With some more plain speaking. Finally, what about the gay marriage issue because of course you know you cover the whole range of equality. It’s quite clear that a lot of people inside the government, particularly the Conservatives, just think this is one issue too far.

**TREVOR PHILLIPS:**
Well I think the point is they’re saying it’s one issue too far because it’ll take up time and all the rest of it. It’ll only take up time if they make a fuss about it. Actually they’ve lost this one. The country as a whole thinks what’s the big fuss; get on with it. I mean you know a lot of the people who are making a big deal of this and some of
the Christian groups, I have to say for religious folk - of whom I’m one, by the way - there are many more important things to object to. If we want to campaign to make this country a better country, campaigning against gay marriage is not top of the agenda. It isn’t even important. And by the way, the people who say oh marriage has been this way for many centuries, let’s remember I was born into a world where in some American states a marriage between somebody like me and somebody of a different colour was regarded as not a marriage.

ANDREW MARR:
So your message to David Cameron and friends is you press ahead with this, get it done?

TREVOR PHILLIPS:
Yeah my marriage … my message to David Cameron and friends is get on with it. And my message to other people is you know get over it. Get on with something that really matters and the country absolutely cares about. This is not the ground on which to fight the battle for the place of religion in public society - which is an important battle, but this is not the place to fight it.

ANDREW MARR:
Alright. Trevor Phillips, thank you very much indeed for joining us this morning.

TREVOR PHILLIPS:
My pleasure.

ANDREW MARR:
Thank you.

INTERVIEW ENDS