ANDREW MARR:  
Now the Labour Party leadership contest has taken an unexpected turn with the left wing candidate Jeremy Corbyn clearly doing pretty well, and that is causing consternation in some of the other camps. The Shadow Education Secretary Tristram Hunt says this morning – and I quote – “The speed and rapidity with which we” (that’s the Labour Party) “are beginning to be regarded as irrelevant is really terrifying.” Well he’s with me now. Welcome.

TRISTRAM HUNT:  
Good morning, Andrew.

ANDREW MARR:  
Terrifying, strong words.

TRISTRAM HUNT:  
Very much so. And this has to be a summer of hard truths for the Labour Party and I think the way in which the Budget has been received only escalates the importance of what we have to do in the Labour Party to seem relevant. There are big questions out there about globalisation, about immigration, about radical Islam. These are the big
issues which the Labour Party should be beginning to answer because right across Europe we’ve seen social democratic parties fall apart and I don’t want that to happen to the Labour Party for the people we came into politics to represent.

**ANDREW MARR:**

We’ve had a very clearly left wing SNP doing spectacularly well in Scotland, we’ve got Podemos in Spain, we’ve got Syriza in Greece – in trouble at the moment but, nonetheless, very electorally successful. A lot of people in the Labour Party would say what we need is some of the old, strong left wing tunes – exactly what Jeremy Corbyn is saying. He is the solution.

**TRISTRAM HUNT:**

Well I think we can learn from some of the emotion of those political parties, some of the energy of those political parties, but we certainly can’t learn from them in terms of economic competence and what we’ve seen in Greece in the last two months shows the dangers of pursuing that route. So we need both economic competence and emotional intelligence. We need to be, Andrew, an alternative government – not a pressure group, not an NGO. We need to be a party which looks like it wants to be in power winning power.

**ANDREW MARR:**

But your party quite likes Jeremy Corbyn. I mean certainly the unions do and a lot of party members. He’s got a lot of party nomina… constituency nominations. He’s doing very well.

**TRISTRAM HUNT:**

Jeremy is a longstanding figure within the party, but what I would say to members and to colleagues is that if we sort of seek a comfort blanket we’re going to be condemned to oblivion because Jeremy is not asking the hard questions about economic competence. One of the areas where we were hammered in the General Election was that people did not trust us with the public finances, people did not trust us in an era of austerity, and I don’t think Jeremy Corbyn has the answers to that and we need these kind of grand questions debated during this summer.
ANDREW MARR:
Do you think things are so serious the Labour Party could simply vanish as a serious electoral force?

TRISTRAM HUNT:
Well, Andrew, I’m a historian, and, as you know, political parties like nations rise and fall; we have no god given right to exist. And what we see in Europe is big political parties – in Spain, in Greece – collapsing, and what I’m saying this morning is that we need both the energy of some of those political parties but the economic competence. And I think one of the ways through … Where we were in trouble I think at the General Election was not having a strong enough sense of national identity, not being proud enough about England. Labour needs to love …

ANDREW MARR:
English national identity, not British?

TRISTRAM HUNT:
Yes. Labour needs to love England much more openly and obviously.

ANDREW MARR:
So do we need, do you think, an English Labour Party as distinct from a British Labour Party?

TRISTRAM HUNT:
I think that should be on the table. We have Scottish Labour, we have Welsh Labour. We need to be much clearer about our …

ANDREW MARR:
So a federation of parties rather than a single party?

TRISTRAM HUNT:
Yes, I think we’re facing such a dramatic situation in terms of the future of the Labour Party that everything should be on the table. And I think when you look at the General Election what we saw was that people in England did not think that the Labour Party
would hold out against the SNP (as they saw it) and people in Scotland thought we were on the side of England, and we had this …

**ANDREW MARR:**

(*over*) Double panic, yeah.

**TRISTRAM HUNT:**

... this double whammy. So we need to be much clearer about how we value the identity, the culture, the traditions, the nature of England.

**ANDREW MARR:**

So without over-personalising this because he’s an affable guy, what would a Jeremy Corbyn led Labour Party, what would its future be?

**TRISTRAM HUNT:**

Well we saw what happened in 1983 when Michael Foot led the Labour Party and we collapsed out. We want to be in power, so that communities such as in Stoke on Trent are not facing the terrifying consequences of what we’ll see from this Conservative government. We need to make sure that people trust us with the public finances and I don’t think a Corbyn Labour Party would do that.

**ANDREW MARR:**

And would be the kind of Labour Party that Tristram Hunt would be serving in?

**TRISTRAM HUNT:**

Well I’m a Labour man from beginning to end and I’ll always be within the Labour Party, but …

**ANDREW MARR:**

(*over*) You say …

**TRISTRAM HUNT:**

… but we need to be clear about this summer - because it’s a really big issue – that we are not a pressure group. We’re not Greenpeace. We’re the Labour Party. We need to
be an alternative government looking for power.

ANDREW MARR:
Can you explain to us what kind of different Labour Party you feel is now necessary? You say it needs to be more patriotic, bolder about England, but what about things like the trade union links, what about embracing frankly capitalism or the market? Do you need a left of centre pro-business party that isn’t quite like the Labour Party as it is now?

TRISTRAM HUNT:
We need to be very pro-business, but I would also like to see stronger trade unions in the private sector. I think we have very strong trade unions in the public sector. I would like to see a renaissance of trade unions in businesses and corporations across the country, but we need to get that balance between the private sector ones and the public sector.

ANDREW MARR:
(over) What about the actual trade union link? What about the link inside the Labour Party to the Trade Union Movement? Famously it came out of the bowels of the Trade Union Movement. I can’t remember … It was Ernie Bevan, I suspect, who said that. Do you think that link has now had its time?

TRISTRAM HUNT:
No I think … I think the link is valuable, but I think the trade unions themselves need to update themselves. When we look at some of the legislation surrounding the strike ballots, we had the National Union of Teachers, for example, going on strike on a ballot which had taken place in 2012, and some of the modernising leaders of the Trade Union Movement actually want to update much of this. So there’s a lot of good, forward looking energy there as well.

ANDREW MARR:
What about welfare? A lot of the commentators have said the cleverest thing about George Osborne’s budget was that he pushed the Labour Party into having to choose whether you’re in favour of cutting working tax benefits, in work benefits and so
forth, and if you are not in favour of that you look again like the old welfarist party. What’s your view about his measures?

**TRISTRAM HUNT:**
My view is that I support the principle of businesses paying their employees properly and not being subsidised by the state through a tax credit system. But I think …

**ANDREW MARR:**
That’s the Osborne point of view.

**TRISTRAM HUNT:**
And I agree with that principle, but we need to make sure that we’re getting the pay right first before we strip away the foundations. We’re having three million families lose £1,000 a year under this budget. So I’m absolutely behind the principle of a high wage/low welfare/high productivity economy – that’s a good Labour value – but I think the way in which George Osborne is doing that because he hasn’t dealt with the public finances appropriately … Once again he’s putting back his timetable for getting into surplus, once again all of those promises he made during the election campaign are beginning to slip. So the principle is fine, but the practice is not being delivered.

**ANDREW MARR:**
Andy Burnham has said he wouldn’t give an interview to The Sun newspaper because of his hostility to the Murdoch Group. Do you feel the same way?

**TRISTRAM HUNT:**
No, lots of Sun readers vote Labour. We need to reach out to those voters. I think we’re in a situation in the Labour Party where we need as many friends as possible. We need to bring as many people to the Labour Party as possible. But what I would say is that I think this – as you touched on earlier – some of the assaults which certain newspapers are leading with the Conservative Party against the BBC is really very worrying. And when we think about English identity or indeed British identity, the BBC is a part of that and I think the way in which the government is assaulting the BBC is actually a rather unpatriotic approach to one of our great public institutions.
ANDREW MARR:
What about another great public institution, the Liberal Democrats? *(little laugh)*? Sorry I shouldn’t have laughed there. *(Hunt laughs)* Also had a fair whacking at the election. Do you think the Labour Party should start to turn towards the Lib Dems, some kind of realignment on the left involving both of the parties, or is that a step too far?

TRISTRAM HUNT:
I think where you strip out progressive parties like the Liberal Democrats from the political environment, in the long-run that damages the Labour Party. There are many policies within the Liberal Democrats that I agree with, there are many people of similar mindsets. So there’s the sort of …

ANDREW MARR:
*(over)* So the hand of friendship is extended?

TRISTRAM HUNT:
The hand of friendship should be extended. I certainly think so. That doesn’t mean we’re not going to have political fights and contest for council seats, but where we have similar ideas and approaches … Again I think we’re in this position where you’ve seen the collapse of traditional centre left parties across Europe because they weren’t thinking creatively, because they weren’t making those ties, and I don’t want to see that happen to the party which I love.

ANDREW MARR:
Well, as I said at the beginning of the show, I hope we have Jeremy Corbyn to answer for his point of view in due course, but thank you very much indeed Tristram Hunt for putting your point of view very clearly.

TRISTRAM HUNT:
Thank you.

INTERVIEW ENDS