

INTERVIEW WITH THE RT HON DENIS HEALEY MP BY GORDON CLOUGH,  
BBC RADIO FOUR WORLD THIS WEEKEND, ON 13 APRIL 1982

The Falkland Islands

Interviewer: Well, the main thrust of the Opposition's policy in these dangerous times has been to offer its support to the Government but to stress that support does not come in the form of a blank cheque. In his speech in last Wednesday's debate in the House of Commons, the Shadow Foreign Secretary, Denis Healey, warned against the danger of reaching a settlement inconsistent with our responsibilities to the Falkland Islanders and of the danger of an all out assault on the Islands at a time when the Argentine forces would have time to build up their strength and their stores. There have been unconfirmed reports today that the airlift of men and materials to the Islands has been accelerated to the point where it is estimated there could be many thousands of Argentine troops in the Falklands. Or of course we have had those reports today that the naval strength has been run down. Mr Healey has been listening with me to that interview with Francis Pym and to another interview Mr Pym gave to Commercial Television. In the light of what you have heard Mr Healey, do you think that the Opposition can still offer the Government its support, not in blank cheque form.

Mr Healey: I think that if the Government follows the line which Mr Pym appeared to put this morning, yes, they would get our support because his position is very, very close, even in detail, to ours. First of all we want a peaceful solution. He stressed that again and again, although we agree with the Government that we shan't get that unless it is encouraged by the wise and prudent deployment of armed strength. I think two other things emerged from the interview he gave on Commercial Television. The first is that it is possible that the Argentine withdrawal could be succeeded not by a British administration but by some form of United Nations presence. And you may recall I suggested in my speech on Wednesday that an United Nations administrator backed by a peace-keeping force might be what was required to do that trick. The other thing

is the long-term answer to the problem and that does require once the troops are withdrawn negotiation which is bound to cover the question of sovereignty. And Mr Pym made it very, very clear that this is a question he is prepared to discuss providing that the Falkland Islanders will accept a solution. And he indicated many many times, as I did in my speech on Wednesday, that the attitude of the Falkland Islanders to their future is bound to have been influenced by the events of the last few weeks.

Interviewer: Did you get the impression that he felt that the opinion of the Falkland Islanders expressed after a period of time should be paramount though?

Mr Healey: Yes and that is our view too. I stressed that very strongly. I think the important thing is not sovereignty over a bit of soil but the right of British subjects to determine their own future, which is absolutely paramount. If we forfeit that then of course there is the risk of Belize being attacked, Gibraltar perhaps being attacked and so on and so forth all over the world. But as he said, and I said, the attitude of the Falkland Islanders is bound to have been influenced by what has happened in the last few weeks, although so far it is not easy to guess in what direction.

Interviewer: What about the position of President Galtieri now? I mean, if the UN peace-keeping force is accepted as an idea and the Argentine forces have to withdraw as a precondition of that, doesn't that weaken his own position very much?

Mr Healey: Oh it does. But of course diplomatic solution does require compromise by both sides. Mr Pym suggested on Commercial Television that once the Argentines undertook to withdraw, we would consider ordering the taskforce back to Britain and that would be a concession if you like ..

I don't think

Interviewer: Well, /he said there was no need for it to go on. I think he actually said to turn it round.

/Mr Healey:

Mr Healey: Well, he did more or less say that, yes, because that was the question put to him and they can't hang around in the middle of the Atlantic whatever, in any case; they have to go somewhere. I think the important thing really is that the opportunity of a diplomatic settlement has been opened. I think the readiness of Britain to back negotiation by strength has been a major factor. It has certainly been a major factor in persuading the Americans to play a leading role in trying to find a solution. And my own view is that in the end it is going to depend on the Americans recognising that a conflict in the South Atlantic would be disastrous to their foreign policy and that of the West and the only way of avoiding it is a settlement of the Falkland Islands problem which is acceptable to all sides.

Interviewer: So that you personally and speaking for the Shadow Cabinet on the whole would say that the Government is on the whole playing it right?

Mr Healey: On the whole so far, though I have been worried by some of the things that Mr Nott has said. Not in Parliament. What he said there was impeccable, but one or two things he has said on the television later. But I think what Mr Pym said, and this is very important, is absolutely critical. He really, if you like, gave support to the line which the Opposition has taken in saying that if force in the end had to be used Britain would support<sup>it</sup> only if the British people had confidence in the way in which the Government had managed the situation. And I think the primacy of diplomacy at this moment and if force has to be used, the minimum force used with immense prudence, that is the sort of thing which will get support. But the sort of gung-ho jingoism we saw too much of a week ago I think would not only repel British opinion but would rob us of the support of the bulk of the world, which we now have.

Interviewer: Do you think that the Government position as now stated by Mr Pym is going to be sufficiently moderate to pacify,

if you like, the pacifists in the Labour Party, the ones who have been saying we should turn the fleet round tomorrow?

Mr Healey: Well, the pacifists in the Labour Party like pacifists everywhere are not in favour of the use of force under any circumstances and it's not possible to meet their needs. But the important thing is the position which Michael Foot and I have taken in Parliament has been supported not only by the overwhelming bulk of the Labour Members of Parliament but also by the overwhelming majority, in fact there was no opposition to it, in the International Committee of the National Executive Committee.

Interviewer: But you weren't at all worried then by the speeches that were made by Mr Benn, Mr Powell yesterday warning us of the danger of this spreading to nuclear conflict and so on? You didn't feel there was a danger of a major split in the Party?

Mr Healey: No, I don't. I'm no longer surprised or worried by anything that individuals you mention say.

Interviewer: So when you go back to the House of Commons in due course, you may indeed be recalled, who knows, you feel at the moment the Opposition including not only yourselves but the SDP/Liberal Alliance can give the Government all the support it gets?

Mr Healey: Well, everything will depend on what happens within the next few days. It seems to me that we are probably at the most critical moment in the whole affair. Mr Haig is coming back to London with some ideas, not I gather proposals; Mr Pym's answers to questions today suggest that the concept of an United Nations force would not be rejected. If the Government goes for that and hasn't taken unwise action in the meantime, then they will get our support. But I think what has become clearer and clearer is that the case for Parliament having a progress report on this has become a very very strong one indeed and I think probably we shall need to have a recall next week.



113 APR 1982

