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Interview with the Minister for Foreign Affairs,

Mr. G. Collins, T.D., RTE, "Today Tonight", 20 April, 1982

Brian Farrell : So far the Irish Government has not spelled out its position on the Falklands/Malvinas issue. We've gone along with the temporary trade embargo proposed by our EEC partners just as we supported the U.N. resolution condemning the invasion, but there have been mumbles, most noticeably perhaps from Neil Blaney that we should support the Argentinian case and there is a substantial case reflected in the latest trade figures for 1981. In that year we imported £6 million worth of goods from the Argentine, we exported £9.5 million, a very healthy, favourable balance of trade. The Minister for Foreign Affairs, Gerry Collins, just now returned from an EEC Ministers meeting in Brussels. Minister, today was there any weakening of the solidarity of the EEC partners?

Minister : No, there hasn't been any weakening there but firstly let me say if I can, please, that our stand has been made clear. Our stand in this crisis is known and our overriding concern in this crisis is to prevent a greater conflict than exists at the present time, to prevent a war, to prevent bloodshed and to see that this dispute, this historic dispute which exists between two countries whose friendship we value

can be settled peacefully. We have, in the Security Council of the United Nations, made our presence felt there in that we supported the President of the United Nations Security Council on 1 April in the statement which he issued calling on the Argentinians not to resort to violence, not to resort to armed intervention in this dispute. On the following day there was a resolution which is now known as Resolution 502 discussed by the Security Council of the United Nations and we are one of fifteen members on that Security Council and we are one of ten nations who voted in favour of that resolution calling on the Argentinians to withdraw their armed forces from the islands so that the problem could be solved diplomatically.

Brian Farrell : Minister, you would accept though in the immediate aftermath of that event there was a certain segment of opinion in this country, including indeed people in your own party, who seemed to think that we should have just taken an anti-British line and supported the Argentinians.

Minister : I think those who know what our stand has been in the past and is presently will know that we have always supported the rule of law. That we are doing right now and that we are doing in supporting the resolution of the Security Council. We don't support things unless things must be supported.

It's a question of principle here and the United Nations Security Council has an exceptionally important role to play in peacekeeping throughout the world as a whole and we either support that or we do not. I am quite satisfied that we made our stand very clear and we are supporting here the rule of law and diplomacy.

Brian Farrell : What about your former colleague Neil Blaney who makes the case of saying, look there are four hundred thousand people of Irish descent in Argentina, they are people who believe in their case for sovereignty, shouldn't we be listening to them?

Minister : But, of course there are something like four or five hundred thousand Irish-Argentiniens who are supporting the Argentiniens in this crisis right now, but let me say that we have not become involved in the issue of sovereignty at all at all. We haven't, and we have carefully refrained from becoming involved in this. In the past in the United Nations in 1965 and 1973 we did support resolutions sponsored on behalf of Argentina asking that the question of sovereignty would be discussed by the United Nations. In recent times we have slackened off somewhat in our support for this because of the regime that exists in Argentina and because of their disregard for human rights. Now, we have not become involved, and I want to make this very clear because there is a misunderstanding about it, we have not become involved in the issue of sovereignty. We want the withdrawal

from the islands as is outlined in the United Nations Security Council resolution and we want peace there, we want diplomacy, diplomatic moves there to bring about a solution to this very dangerous dispute which could result in perhaps another world war.

Brian Farrell : But isn't there a case for saying in our circumstances where after all we are in dispute with Britain on an issue of sovereignty in regard to our territory, that anything that appears to give support to the view that because Britain made a claim centuries ago that claim is good?

Minister : No, that may very well be so if we wanted to bargain our support, if we wanted to horsetrade our support, but I think on a question of principle there can be no question of bargaining or horsetrading. We support something if it is right and proper to support it and this we have done now.

Brian Farrell : Of course the issue of horsetrading came up when it was suggested, and indeed suggested by Ministerial colleagues of yours, that we were trading political support on this expecting that Britain would give concessions on the Common Agricultural Policy.

Minister : We supported the United Nations Security Council resolution because it's a question of principle, it's an issue of principle and that was the only reason why we supported that. Now we are, of course, as you

know, involved in farm price negotiations with the Agricultural Ministers in Europe and naturally we want the best deal we possibly can but that did not influence us in any way with regard to our decision at the United Nations.

Brian Farrell : Let's put it this way, Minister, do you think the British have become more understanding on the Common Agricultural Policy?

Minister : I would hope for the sake of our community here, our agricultural community, that the farm Ministers who are meeting for three days this week - today, tomorrow and the day after - in Luxembourg, that they can get a certain measure of agreement on prices. There are difficulties, not just as far as Britain and Ireland are concerned, but also as far as the Mediterranean agricultural package is concerned and I believe that was the issue today, the Mediterranean one. I would hope that our prices can be fixed, particularly because of the fact that our agricultural season starts before the others.

Brian Farrell : But isn't there a real case for saying, after all we are sovereign states, we are not children - I think this was said recently by the Taoiseach in regard to Northern Ireland - and that we should be prepared to trade, that if our vote is worth something we should be asking for something back?

Minister : In normal circumstances, yes, but on an issue like this I think we have to be guided by what is right and what is wrong. As I say it's a serious question of principle here, it's a serious issue - do we support the rule of law or do we not? I say we do and this is what we have done. If there is an indirect spin-off to us, if there is goodwill shown to us by the United Kingdom or any other country in the EEC at negotiations that are going on any front, well then we accept that but we do not bargain for it.

Brian Farrell : There are people of course who have always been suspicious about our notions of neutrality, people who've challenged whether or not we are really a sovereign independent state and they would perhaps look at this episode and say once again Ireland finds itself in the Western camp, that when the big boys, when London and Washington and Paris and Bonn say do this, we jump and do it.

Minister : No, we found ourselves as a member of the Security Council supported by many small nations who are members of the Security Council. Indeed the only country who voted against this resolution was Panama. Russia abstained and by abstaining, it having a veto, well then in reality it supported it. Spain abstained because the Spanish have this very very personal relationship with Argentina for many many years but we were one of ten, as I say, who supported the resolution and we were very right

and correct in doing what we did.

Brian Farrell : Finally, Minister, if the awful thing did happen, if this did come to a war and a major war, and there's always that danger of spin over, would our traditional neutrality be affected, would we be drawn in?

Minister : No, our neutrality will not be affected. I sincerely hope the day you talk about doesn't come about but then that's something that we will have to examine very closely and our neutrality is sacred to us..

Brian Farrell : And do you think, on the basis of your meetings today, do you think the British will be prepared to become more reasonable, to move to a point of compromise?

Minister : The British are trying desperately to seek a diplomatic solution to an extremely dangerous problem. This you already know and you've talked to people from London on your programme here this evening, the British are striving very hard to achieve a diplomatic solution. I hope they can. If Mr. Haig fails in succeeding in his initiative, well then I sincerely hope that the British will resort to the United Nations and already we have instructed our Ambassador at the United Nations to help as best he can with his colleagues in the Security Council.

to get the United Nations involved in a
peacemaking and a peacekeeping effort.

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