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PRIME MINISTER

WEEKEND WORLD

Hugh Pile, the Editor, telephoned me this evening to say that he felt that Brian Walden should give you a chance to comment on the Observer's Oman story.

He explained that the Observer's story having appeared, the programme could not ignore it. If they did, they would immediately be accused of at best incompetent journalism and worst of whitewash or of being in the pockets of No.10.

I said I was sure that such a question would not be welcome to you. What would be doubly unwelcome would be any pursuit of the issue, if, as I was sure you would have indicated you had no comment to make beyond what No.10 had said already - namely, that in the public interest you vigorously pursued opportunities for jobs for Britain on every overseas tour; and that you are delighted to say that a large number of contracts, worth many hundreds of millions of pounds, were awarded to Britain in the months that followed the 1981 tour of six countries.

I suggested that if they felt they must mention the Observer story then they might simply say in the introduction that you had indicated you had no comment to make. Not surprisingly, they said they would not wish to do that; they would much prefer you to say it on the programme.

This is a pest, but not surprising. I am satisfied that the programme would feel obliged to mention the Observer's story, if you have no comment to make on it, only to protect itself in the profession.

In these circumstances you may feel we should try to reach agreement with Brian Walden tomorrow that if he feels he must raise the latter, he should get it out of the way at the very beginning

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and that he should not pursue it after you have made clear you  
do not wish to comment further.

I shall be in by 10.00 am tomorrow, or earlier if you would  
like me to do so. I think we should be clear by 10.30 how you  
would like to play it so that I can try to reach some agreement  
with the programme.

BERNARD INGHAM

13 January 1984