

PRIME MINISTER

Seen by the Prime Minister.

WJ

2 ii

Panorama Programme on Intelligence and Security

I do not suppose that Brian Walden will raise this subject with you; but in case he does, I thought that I should let you have this advance notice of the way in which I should like to suggest that you deal with any questions about this in the House of Commons on Tuesday: I see that Mr. Winnick has said that he intends to raise the matter.

The Press have been after the No. 10 Press Office and after the BBC. Bernard Ingham has said, I understand, that we never comment on intelligence and security matters. Sir Ian Trethowan has told the Press that no-one (from the Government) has seen the film, and that there has been no pressure from the Government on the BBC. In the stories that I have seen the main attack is on him; and he is content to take it. He is expecting to have something of a showdown with his editors next week.

If you are questioned, I think that the line for you to take might be as follows:

"In July we learned that the BBC were approaching a number of people concerned with security matters to give interviews for a proposed Panorama programme on intelligence and security. The BBC were told that, in view of the risks to national security inherent in such a programme, people in Government service would be instructed not to give interviews or co-operate with those making the programme. But the BBC has, under its Charter, complete editorial freedom, and it was, and is, entirely within the responsibility of the BBC to decide whether to show such a programme and what to put in it."

I think that this is a line on which you could stand, and I hope that you will be able to avoid being drawn further into the subject than this. We should not, for instance, wish to be drawn on the channels by which or the levels at which the Government communicated with the BBC on these matters.

/If you are

If you are asked to say whether the BBC were asked to pay regard to D-notices, you would say that there was no need for that: the BBC is represented (by the Director of News and Current Affairs, Mr. Richard Francis) on the Defence Press and Broadcasting Committee which is responsible for D-notices and can be assumed to be fully aware of their contents.

Robert Armstrong

31 January 1981