



Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

14 December 1984

*Dear Tim,*

*GAWABP*  
*als*  
*pe*

Letter from Mr Paddy Ashdown MP

Thank you for your letter of 30 November, enclosing a further letter to the Prime Minister from Mr Ashdown on the subject of COCOM and US activities in Britain. I enclose a draft reply, which is self-explanatory, except for the following points about the CIA and about Systime Computers.

Mr Ashdown asked for an indication that HMG have sought assurances from the US Government that the CIA are not involved in improper activity in the UK in the field of computer technology; and that such an assurance has been given in an unequivocal fashion. As I said in point (a) on page 2 of my letter of 23 November to you, there is an agreement between the British and American agencies (in this case, the relevant agencies are the CIA and the Security Service) that neither will undertake clandestine activities in the country of the other without specific authorisation of the 'home' agency. This amounts to the sort of general assurance which Mr Ashdown is seeking. The Security Service are as confident as they can be (it is not possible to prove a negative) that the CIA are not involved in activities in the UK as suggested by Mr Ashdown: they have sought and received a specific assurance to this effect from the CIA at the end of last year; and this has subsequently been reiterated. However, given the long-established policy of not going into detail on intelligence matters, it would not be right to affirm to Mr Ashdown that the agreement between the Security Service and the CIA existed or that the assurance has been given. The draft reply is therefore intended to meet Mr Ashdown's point without making these revelations. It is suggested that, if Mr Ashdown seeks an elaboration, the Prime Minister should decline to be drawn further.

As to Systime Computers, HM Customs have told us for background information that they have for some time been investigating the affairs of this company. They are

/considering



considering whether there is sufficient evidence to allege offences against the company or individuals and, because of the possibility that criminal proceedings may be ordered, the form of the reply to Mr Ashdown on this point has been carefully worded.

*Yours we,*  
*Len Appleyard*

(L V Appleyard)  
Private Secretary

Timothy Flesher Esq  
10 Downing Street

(revised)

**DRAFT:** ~~XXXXXX~~/letter/~~XXXXXX~~/despatch/~~XXXX~~

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**FROM:** Prime Minister

**Reference**

**DEPARTMENT:**

**TEL. NO:**

**SECURITY CLASSIFICATION**

**TO:** Paddy Ashdown Esq MP  
House of Commons  
LONDON SW1A 0AA

**Your Reference**

- Top Secret
- Secret
- Confidential
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**PRIVACY MARKING**

**SUBJECT:**

.....In Confidence

**CAVEAT**.....

Thank you for your letter of 2 December about COCOM and US extra-territorial activity in Britain. I shall answer your points in the order in which you made them.

As to DEC in Reading, officials from the US Department of Commerce visited the firm earlier this year. They did so after the US authorities had been in touch with the DTI and, as is usual in such cases, the latter had consulted DEC. Officials of other governments of course have no legal powers in the UK to require information of British companies; but we do not in general object to enquiries being pursued on a voluntary basis. We do however expect to be informed in advance and assured that all concerned understand the nature and voluntary character of the enquiries. As to matters discussed with DEC, it would be for the company itself to comment.

**Enclosures—flag(s)**.....


The reference in my letter to the earlier statement that allegations about the involvement of the CIA were

, /unsubstantiated

PM: Paddy Ashdown MP Nov 84.

unsubstantiated meant, quite simply, that no evidence had been produced, so far as I am aware, to the effect that there was CIA involvement. That is still the position. You would not expect me to go into details about any exchanges with the US intelligence authorities which may have taken place, but I can assure you that the British authorities are satisfied that the CIA are not involved in improper activities in this country.

The affairs of Systime Computers are at present under consideration by HM Customs and Excise but they assure me that there has been no lack of cooperation on the part of the US authorities and that they are not aware of any documents which would be of assistance to them being removed from other companies by US Customs.



I consider that, in the light of the foregoing, the matters which you have raised do not require further investigation.



10 DOWNING STREET

*From the Private Secretary*

30 November 1984

I attach a copy of a letter the Prime Minister has received from Paddy Ashdown MP.

BF // I should be grateful if you could provide a draft reply to Mr Ashdown for the Prime Minister's signature, to reach me by Monday 10 December.

(Tim Flesher)

Colin Budd Esq  
Foreign and Commonwealth Office

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