

c.c. Mr. J. E. Pateman

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22nd January, 1986

Prime Minister

Lord Weinstock

partially wanted you

to see this letter

which he wrote

last

January

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16/12

Dear Secretary of State,

NIMROD - A E W

The front page of this morning's Financial Times marks a further stage in the continual public harassment to which our people have been subjected as a result of controlled leaks to the press by MOD. We have hitherto been prevented from defending ourselves publicly from the accusations made against us, and we really cannot go on any longer like this.

The Nimrod AEW project has been carried out under a contract in which GEC Avionics is paid by MOD to do what it is told, and that is what we have done.

Ever since the start of this programme, we have been obliged to work on MOD's interpretations of the requirement, and have repeatedly been refused the funding necessary to do things which are now required by MOD to guarantee the performance.

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To take just two examples:-

- (1) MOD now requires the radar to track aircraft flying (a) over the UK, and (b) in the region between the AEW aircraft and the coast. In conformity with the directions given to us, this radar will see targets travelling at 20 mph and above. It will therefore see every motor car moving at this speed and faster in the UK. This number of observations overloads the capacity of the fastest digital computer which we were authorised to use at the time, and, perhaps, the fastest we or anyone else could make now.

Proposals to overcome this problem were made in 1977. They were rejected not on technical grounds, but because overland performance was not then a firm requirement, which, again, is not the case now,

- (ii) since Nimrod AEW has only half the number of operators as AWACS, MOD now says that

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It must have greater automaticity to keep down the operator work-load. But this is impossible at the level of computer capacity upon which MOD has always insisted. And here I am bound to tell you that the potential problem of insufficient computing capacity was known and recognised from the beginning of 1977.

GEC Avionics does not claim to be blameless in this matter, but the truth is that MOD has consistently failed to exercise the minimum level of technical, financial and management judgement necessary to bring the programme to a satisfactory conclusion. I myself wrote to Controller Aircraft in October, 1984 to draw attention to the computing and other problems, nothing has been done to enable these problems to be solved.

Continual denigratory press comment emanating, I am afraid, from MOD is doing damage to our reputation here and abroad, and it would be irresponsible to let the position drift any more. Accordingly, I suggest that unless we can resolve the matter by the end of February,

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the programme should be cancelled and the people working on it either transferred to other suitable work, if it is available, or be made redundant.

After so much has been promised, so much public money spent, so much effort made and so much odium endured, even to make such a suggestion is agonising. And this agony is intensified by the realisation that what has already been produced is incomparably superior (and so it should be!) to the existing Shackletons, and could be further improved in a reasonable time and at reasonable cost if it were put in service and followed a similar development route to AWACS.

I assure you of our strong motivation to solve the problems associated with Nimrod AEW because we want to serve the RAF and because abandonment implies the end of our prospects of exporting this radar.

Despite the adverse publicity, we have so far been able to maintain the interest of several friendly countries because this equipment installed in a C130

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aircraft offers a technical performance close to AWACS for a much lower price. Indeed, our people are going to Australia next week with Lockheed for discussions with the Australian Government.

Lord Weinstock

The Rt. Hon. George Younger, MP,
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