

South Africans asked how Liberals could be 'smeared', colonel says

By Michael Horsnell

Documented evidence which, it is claimed, provides proof of plans by the South African security service to "smear" the Liberal Party, is expected to be disclosed to the House of Commons today by Mr David Steel, the leading contender in the party's leadership race.

The evidence was given to Mr Steel during the weekend by Lieutenant-Colonel Frederick Cheeseman, who describes himself as a former intelligence officer in the United States Air Force. Colonel Cheeseman, aged 48, told Mr Steel that he has seen 15 dossiers on prominent Liberals at the headquarters of the Bureau of State Security (BOSS) in Pretoria.

They included a mass of detail about Mr Jeremy Thorpe, Mr Cyril Smith and Mr Richard Wainwright, and possibly Mr Steel, according to a prominent Liberal Party official last night.

Colonel Cheeseman said he was briefed in Pretoria recently on the potential use of the documents. He was asked how they could be used to disrupt the Liberal Party.

Colonel Cheeseman said in a statement to the Press Associa-

tion last night that he served in the RAF, the Royal Canadian Air Force and then the USAF until his retirement. In 1974 he was asked by the South African Embassy to go to South Africa. "The purpose of the visit was to offer me a job at 16,800 rands to work for BOSS."

He had now come forward "as a matter of conscience".



Col Cheeseman (BBC Television News photograph)

Colonel Cheeseman said on BBC television last night that although he had seen the names of the MPs on dossiers in Pretoria he had not seen inside the documents. But he was assured that they contained background information.

He said he had made his statement now because "I believe that it is the right time to bring forth all available material with which to nullify the attack of the South African Government in this manner sufficiently so that they will not do it any further".

Asked why the South African security service might want to discredit the Liberals, the colonel said a split in the party would have repercussions both left and right.

A senior Liberal Party official said last night that Colonel Cheeseman telephoned to Mr Steel last Thursday and a meeting was hurriedly arranged. His information is regarded as reliable.

Mr Steel is to send the documented evidence he has received to Mr Jenkins, Home Secretary, and Mr Crosland, Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs.