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Men accused of plotting to kidnap ANC officials

LONDON — Three men appeared in a top security court yesterday accused of plotting with others to kidnap high-ranking members of the African National Congress' (ANC) mission here.

The Anti-Terrorist Squad, in charge of the case, alleged that the conspiracy was planned between October 1, 1986 and July 10 this year and was to have been sprung in central London.

In a statement, the ANC mission expressed "grave concern" for the "wellfare and safety of our members" and sought police protection.

The mission's members also claimed that there had been a recent "alarming incident" involving the wife of a senior member which had raised suspicions that "something serious was underway."

Armed officers guarded Lambeth court as the three men, who had been held for five days under Britain's Prevention of Terrorism Act, made a surprise seven minute appearance.

Mr Frank Lynge Larsen, 53, described as a psychologist, his son, Mr John Terence Larsen, 27, a computer technician, both believed to be Zimbabweans who travelled frequently to South Africa, and Mr John Richard Wheatley, 28, who is British, had nothing to say as they were remanded in custody for a week.

The men wore prison uniforms.

They stood silently as the prosecutor, Mr Michael Bippy said Mr Frank Larsen had been in possession of forged police warrants when arrested.

Searches of an abode he and his son used in Aldershot, Hampshire, and Mr Wheatley's abode in Guildford, Surrey, uncovered a list of ANC members' bogus passports and other forged identity documents.

Mr Bippy said when interviewed by detectives, Mr John Larsen said he was unaware of the documents, but he was "going along with the kidnap plan."

Because of the forged documents, it was not established for certain if the

Larsens were Zimbabwean.

Mr Bippy said it had not yet been established if the ANC names on the found list were the kidnap targets.

He objected to bail on the grounds of police fears that the men might interfere with the witnesses.

He said the case would take some time to prepare because there was "2 000 pages of documentation to be read, extensive further inquiries and scientific investigations to be made."

One of the men, understood to be Mr Frank Larsen, was arrested in central London recently in what Anti-Terrorist Squad sources describe as an "unrelated incident" although it is understood a surveillance operation had been underway.

Anti-Terrorist Squad senior officers then took charge of the case and raided the addresses in Guildford and Aldershot, arresting Mr John Larsen and Mr Wheatley, who is understood to have had associations with private detectives.

Scotland Yard is regarding the case as extremely grave and not as a crank, the police sources said.

According to sources, the kidnap was to have been aimed at the head of the ANC mission, Mr Solly Smith, and others including the ANC's executive member, Mr Francis Melley.

An ANC official said: "We have reason to believe the main target was Mr Solly Smith. Just days before these arrests there was an incident which terrified his wife and set off the alarm."

"We obviously suspect a South African plot. It was Mr P. W. Botha who said he would strike at us wherever we were, even in London."

The mission's premises were partially destroyed by a bomb blast in the mid-1970's and the bomber was never found.

Five years ago a former Zimbabwean pilot and a London petty thief were jailed for robbing the ANC and Swapo offices at the instigation of a South African Embassy official, who was ordered to leave Britain.