

# ANOTHER CLANGER

IF THERE is anything more embarrassing than Pretoria attempting to cover up a bungle, it is Pretoria making a clean breast of it. When that happens, you know they've been caught with their pants down.

And the exposure could hardly have been more total than it was at Wednesday's hastily summoned Press briefing at which the Foreign Minister made an abject confession of South African double-dealing with Renamo from the signing of the Nkomati Accord with Mozambique in March 1984 right up until a month or two ago.

We have some sympathy for those who have to deal in this shadowy world of international intrigue where nobody comes with clean hands and everyone, from the CIA to the KGB, gets egg on his face sometimes. But having said that, there are few redeeming features about the astonishing and extremely damaging disclosures contained in Renamo documents captured when loyal troops overran the rebel movement's headquarters in Mozambique recently.

'The [Mozambican] allegations, in broad terms, are correct and the Nkomati Accord was violated,' said Mr Pik Botha, concluding his amazing tale of secret radio communications, supply drops by the SAAF, help in the construction of an airstrip, smuggling Renamo offi-

cers in a submarine, and three clandestine visits by Deputy Foreign Minister Louis Nel to a rebel base in the bush, one of which not even Mr Botha himself knew about in advance.

The personal risks the intrepid Mr Nel apparently took to promote peace talks between the rebels and the Frelimo government are stirring stuff. But at the same time one is bound to question the 'Lone Ranger' approach, the strong implication that SADF members who sympathised with Renamo were not under proper control, and above all why all these clandestine dealings were concealed from Frelimo, with whom South Africa had signed a solemn agreement in which mutual trust was paramount.

Once again Government's credibility lies in tatters, particularly in the light of its admission in Parliament earlier this year that it had supported Renamo before the Nkomati Accord but not afterwards.

While attempts to restart top-level talks with an understandably frosty Frelimo continue, the implications of this debacle, with all its James Bond overtones, can only be guessed at. And that goes for what President Machel will be telling President Reagan in Washington this week, too.

Pretoria's word, it seems, is not as good as its Bond.