

THE CITIZEN COMMENT

Spy farce

PRESIDENT MACHEL is making himself quite ridiculous with the farce he is staging in Maputo.

He has not only expelled so-called CIA agents, souring relations with the US and having prospective American aid withdrawn, but has now paraded before newspapermen some of the Mozambicans allegedly involved.

Anyone who saw the TV news film of the conference would have laughed himself sick at the appearance of the men.

Far from being spies who were in fear and trembling because of their transgression, they looked remarkably composed and well.

Two Mozambicans were exhibited "to show how the CIA worked" and another man was put on show to say how he had "uncovered this nest of imperialist spies."

It was fine theatre, one observer is reported to have said, but he wondered what the Frelimo Government hoped to achieve by it.

American journalists asked for concrete evidence about the spying, but were told that it was not possible to give it to them.

Another journalist asked why foreigners arrested as collaborators had not been brought forward. He was not given an answer.

Our impression is that President Machel was in such a funk after the successful South African raid on ANC headquarters near Maputo that he not only called on Russia for aid (hence the presence of Soviet naval ships off his coast) but also tried to put the blame on the US (how could the nasty South Africans have done it on their own?) by staging a spy scare.

It is all backfiring on President Machel, because nobody believes his spy stories — and all he has achieved by involving the US is the alienation of the new American administration of President Reagan.

What is more, the South African raid so near his capital has demonstrated not only how ill-prepared Mozambique is to ward off such an attack, but how poor its defences are.

Hence President Machel's frantic efforts to restore his and his country's self-esteem by turning the raid into a major plot by the Americans as well as the South Africans against his regime.

He hopes this will explain his own failure to prevent or cope with the attack.

All it shows, instead, is that he is far from being the tough and capable leader his propagandists have tried to make him out to be.

And if he has launched his anti-American spy scare at the instigation of his Cuban allies, then he is not only a weak head of State but very much a puppet on a Red string.