

# Sanctions

As noted at the start of this study, the primary aim of South African propaganda abroad is to maintain the American and British vetoes in the United Nations Security Council against mandatory economic sanctions aimed at Pretoria. While both countries remained committed to rejection of anti-Pretoria sanctions in principle and as a matter of repeatedly-stated policy, Pretoria's task was relatively easy. In August, however, this principle was abandoned by President Reagan as a result of Congressional pressures, and Pretoria began looking increasingly to Britain for maintenance of its protection.

During September 1985 there was a proliferation of radio, television and newspaper arguments in Britain against sanctions, many advanced by the South African embassy in London, and the main claims put forward were:

1. That sanctions would not work.
2. That sanctions would harm the blacks more than the whites.
3. That most South Africans oppose sanctions.
4. That sanctions would make Pretoria more obdurate (the 'laager' argument).
5. That sanctions would be against the interests of the neighbouring frontline states, which would not welcome them.

## **That sanctions would not work.**

This is usually preceded by the claim that sanctions 'have never worked'. But the following examples, published in *The Guardian* on September 12, 1985, dispute this claim:

- ☐ The United States successfully stopped South Korea in 1974, and Taiwan in 1976, from pursuing nuclear military projects by embargoing export shipments of trade goods;
- ☐ The United States used threats of tariff concession reductions against Rumania and Hungary to remove restrictions on Jewish emigration from those countries;
- ☐ In 1970 American denial of loans to Allende's Chile was instrumental in weakening the Allende government;
- ☐ The Carter administration's sanctions against the Somoza regime in Nicaragua significantly weakened that government's capacity to survive.
- ☐ Ironically, one of the most recent examples of successful sanctions was South Africa's threatened embargo on Lesotho to prevent sanctuary there for guerrillas of the African National Congress, and the success of similar economic pressures on Swaziland and Mozambique for the same purpose.

These are among about 30 examples of successful sanctions listed by the Washington-based Institute for International Economics, examined in detail by G.G. Hufbauer and J.J. Schott in their study: 'Economic Sanctions Reconsidered'.

On the subject of whether sanctions would work against South Africa, most opponents of such sanctions cite the case of Rhodesia as an example of sanctions failure. This, however, ignores the fact that sanctions were never comprehensively applied against Smith's Rhodesia, which was supplied throughout with strategic goods by the South African government. Yet the high cost to the Smith regime of such sanctions-busting, involving as it did the rerouting of shipments and the disguising of export sources, considerably undermined and ultimately eliminated Rhodesia's foreign currency reserves, weakening its capacity to withstand the Zimbabwean liberation movements.

**That sanctions would harm the blacks more than the whites.**

**That most South Africans reject sanctions.**

Those who make these claims ignore the persistent appeals of South Africa's most representative black leaders, who state in turn:

(a) That the impact of sanctions would be far greater on whites than on blacks, because it is the whites who benefit most by trade and foreign investment, owning as they do all the export and import companies and controlling as they do all the commerce and industry in the country;

(b) That even if they were to be harder hit by sanctions, most blacks would be prepared to suffer this to hasten the end of their greatest hardship — apartheid;

(c) That there has been complete unanimity for more than a quarter-century among all representative black leaders in South Africa on the subject of sanctions, including Chief Albert Luthuli, Nelson Mandela and Oliver Tambo of the African National Congress; Robert Sobukwe, Nyati Pokela and Zeph Mothopeng of the Pan-Africanist Congress; Steve Biko, Barney Pityana and Hlaku Rachidi of the Black Consciousness Movement; Bishop Desmond Tutu, Dr Nthato Motlana and Rev. Allan Boesak of the United Democratic Front and many other black leaders less well-known internationally.

The only prominent South Africans who have opposed sanctions have been whites, who cannot speak for the black majority, or blacks who hold governmental posts created and funded by Pretoria, and therefore have little credibility among blacks.

As recently as August 1985 a Sunday Times poll among black South Africans reflected a 49% choice of Nelson Mandela as their leader, Bishop Desmond Tutu coming second with 24%. Chief Gatsha Buthelezi, often cited by British Government spokespersons as a major black leader, polled only 6%, and even in his home base in Natal polled barely half the votes of the locals for Mandela.

Recent polls also reflect majority black support for sanctions, despite laws in South Africa prescribing severe penalties for those expressing such support.

**That sanctions would make Pretoria more intransigent (the laager argument).**

The claim that South African whites would 'retreat into the laager' (a reference to the ring of ox-waggons the trekking Boers used to draw around themselves for battle) is not borne out by historical precedent. The only comparable examples from the past are:

(a) The embargoes aimed by the British at the Boer republic of Transvaal under President Paul Kruger, who in response did not, as threatened, stiffen his resistance to shortening the franchise-qualification period for the 'Uitlanders' (non-Afrikaner whites) but cut them progressively from 14 years, to six years, to four and ultimately two, by which time the British were already committed to war.

(b) The sports boycott, which many predicted would lead to even sterner laws against black participation in 'white' sport. The opposite happened, and by admission of Sports Minister P.J. Koornhof in 1977 it was the sports boycott which directly led to even the limited reforms allowing some degree of multiracial sport.

(c) The arms embargo of 1977 did not force the South African government 'into the laager', nor did the partial oil embargo. In fact both led directly to some of the limited reforms to the apartheid policy which, while inadequate, were nevertheless anything but intransigent responses to sanctions.

**That sanctions would be against the interests of the neighbouring frontline states, which would not welcome them.**

This claim is denied by those best qualified to deny it — leaders of the frontline states themselves. In a statement issued in Maputo, Mozambique, on September 15, 1985, they welcomed the escalation of international pressures for sanctions, called for application of sanctions and affirmed that they were prepared

to endure the consequences for the wider interests of the people of Southern Africa. They held that those consequences would be a relatively marginal additional cost to what they are already bearing as a result of Pretoria's military and economic destabilisation of the region, pointing out that such destabilisation over the past five years had already cost their countries ten billion dollars, taking into account some two billion dollars in lost economic growth resulting from direct and indirect South African action against them.