South Africa: Why More Sanctions Now
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South Africa's rulers are continuing the apartheid system of white domination.

South African propaganda insists that prospective reforms are abolishing apartheid. This claim is false. Instead of opening good-faith negotiations with representatives of the majority population, the Pretoria regime has imposed stringent repression. It has banned almost all the major anti-apartheid organizations, kept thousands in prison without trial and gagged hundreds of opponents with restrictions on their movement and speech. Death squads and vigilantes linked to the regime have killed dozens of activists in exile and in South Africa.

As the ruling National Party plans for yet another whites-only election, President-designate F. W. de Klerk has pledged not to abandon white control over the country's political system. Despite his image of flexibility, he has repeatedly declared his opposition to "majority rule."

Although the regime has been forced to sign a peace settlement in Namibia, it continues with efforts to install a client government there through fraud and coercion. The South African military is also continuing its deadly proxy war against Mozambique, despite public denials.

Existing sanctions - despite limits and loopholes - have had some effect.

South Africa lost over $10 billion through capital flight between 1984 and 1989, largely due to sanctions, according to South African Reserve Bank president Gerrit de Kock. U.S. trade sanctions cost South Africa more than $450 million in only nine months in 1987. And despite foreign banks' agreements to reschedule old loans, the regime's planners acknowledge they can not raise new long-term loans abroad.

More and more white South Africans are realizing, as the Cape Town daily Argus put it, that "the only way of getting the economy back on track is by getting the political situation sorted out." The pressures, created in part by sanctions, are forcing the white community to question the system.

With a low gold price adding to other economic woes, the regime is finding it harder to pay for guns and butter. "It was economic considerations, most analysts here believe, wrote the South African correspondent for the conservative Washington Times, that compelled South Africa to pull its troops out of Angola and enter into peace talks" [on Angola and Namibia].

Now is the time to step up pressure, not to relax it.

With repression and censorship limiting the impact of anti-apartheid resistance inside South Africa, many in the regime feel they have bought time. They
are using the peace agreement on Angola and Namibia to argue for new international credits, and hoping good public relations will be enough to block new pressures. In the past, without continuing pressure, South Africa has retreated from or simply not implemented agreements. That could easily happen again.

Anti-apartheid activists, such as the recent delegation headed by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, have called for intensified sanctions, emphasizing such key areas as tightening financial sanctions, blocking oil imports, and imposing mandatory multilateral sanctions. They stress that recent polls sponsored by such groups as the Chamber of Mines have used leading questions to produce distorted results opposed to sanctions.

The apartheid system itself causes massive black unemployment, estimated at as much as 30% in the mid-1980s, before the 1986 sanctions. In comparison, unemployment that can be traced to sanctions is very small.

Recognizing that some sanctions may lead to short-term difficulties for blacks, black unions have called for comprehensive measures that can act quickly to bring about the end of apartheid. “Dissinvestment” by companies which arrange other ways of doing business is not enough, since these actions may disadvantage black workers without blocking the flow of goods and technology to the regime.

New stronger sanctions can have major effects, and correct gaps in existing measures.

The comprehensive measures introduced by Representative Ron Dellums and Senator Paul Simon would dramatically heighten the impact of sanctions, imposing substantial new penalties and sending an unequivocal signal to Pretoria. Their bill would close loopholes in the 1986 Anti-Apartheid Act. These loopholes include: Although imports of uranium ore and oxide are banned, the Reagan administration permitted imports of uranium “hexafluoride.” And while new investment is banned, reinvestment of profits and re-negotiation of bank loans continue to provide capital for apartheid.

A comprehensive ban on investment and exports of both goods and technology would require that U.S. companies really stop business with South Africa rather than arranging paper disinvestment deals. As unions have demanded (in the recent Mobil deal, for example), the act would require companies to negotiate the terms of withdrawal with their black workers.

The act would also require the administration to work for multilateral sanctions, and would impose penalties on foreign companies profiting by sanctions busting. As in 1986, the U.S. example would further sap international business confidence in South Africa.

Stronger sanctions are essential to the effectiveness of other measures, such as negotiations and support for anti-apartheid organizations.

Sanctions are an aid to diplomacy. Although other anti-apartheid pressures are also important, stronger sanctions are indispensable for ensuring that the regime talks seriously with the majority anti-apartheid forces.

By reducing the resources available to the apartheid regime, sanctions make Pretoria pay a price for intransigence. The stronger the sanctions, the higher the price. White politicians may claim that they will not be swayed, but history shows this is not true.

In the past, the South African regime has shown signs of wavering only when under intense pressure, such as when bank loans were suspended in September 1985. When the pressure lightened up, so did the impetus for change.

The stronger the sanctions, the greater the incentive for the regime to alleviate the pressure by concessions to anti-apartheid forces. In the short term, this can give internal opponents greater leverage and outside critics can gain more credibility. And it can shorten the time of suffering before the regime finally decides to negotiate a genuine end to apartheid.