

BLACKS AND THE WEST PAY THE HEAVY PRICE FOR SOUTH AFRICAN SANCTIONS

As Congress once again prepares to consider new economic sanctions against South Africa, it first should evaluate the effect of the sanctions already in place. Contrary to the predictions of their advocates, the sanctions enacted against Pretoria seventeen months ago have not forced the South African government to relax its discriminatory apartheid laws, nor have the sanctions increased United States influence. Rather, sanctions have prompted a government crackdown on organized dissent, a shelving of the reform program, and reduced U.S. influence. Instead of enacting new sanctions, Congress should be lifting the old ones if it wants to encourage reform in South Africa.

Four events in South Africa, all in the past fortnight, demonstrate the counterproductive effect of U.S. sanctions. On February 24, Pretoria effectively "banned" seventeen leading opposition groups in South Africa, including the 1.5-million member United Democratic Front (UDF) and the 600,000-strong Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), South Africa's largest union. While the new regulations do not outlaw the affected organizations, they are prohibited from "carrying on or performing any activity or acts whatsoever," except for keeping their books and records up to date and performing certain administrative functions. The measures are the harshest taken by Pretoria since the crackdown on dissent following the 1976 Soweto riots. The message: since the U.S. in essence has washed its hands of South Africa, Pretoria no longer is concerned with its image in the U.S.

Hard-Liner Victory. On March 1, Pretoria cracked down further. The South African government introduced legislation prohibiting political parties and organizations from receiving foreign funding. Called "The Promotion of Orderly Internal Politics Bill," the statute will have the practical effect of terminating the current U.S. assistance program targeted at "victims of apartheid," as mandated in the 1986 Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act.

This crackdown in part has been an attempt by the ruling National Party to appease South Africa's hard-line Afrikaner community. Yet even these tough measures have not been enough. The National Party saw both of its candidates defeated in parliamentary by-elections on March 2 by candidates from the far-right Conservative Party (CP). Though these victories did not increase CP representation in the Parliament since both seats already had been controlled by the CP, the victory margins were three to five times as large as in the 1987 elections. This signals a further loss of Afrikaner support for the National Party government. This growing strength for the pro-apartheid CP, first demonstrated in the 1987 elections, is a direct result of U.S. sanctions: Afrikaners, many of whom had been wary of the NP government's attempt to

placate Washington by adopting reforms, defected from the National Party in droves as sanctions were imposed.

Flirting with Moscow. Most alarmingly, on March 5 South African Defense Minister Magnus Malan announced that Pretoria would deal with Moscow to establish a neutral government in Angola. This completely by-passes the U.S., which has sought for a decade to find a solution for the Angolan conflict. Why is Pretoria considering turning to Moscow? According to Malan, it was the U.S. sanctions against South Africa. He said: "The Soviets had clearly taken note of the weakening of influence of the United States in southern Africa....The vacuum left by the U.S. has provided greater scope for Soviet activities in Angola." South Africa's apparent desire for a rapprochement with the Soviet Union follows low-level contacts between the two governments over the last eleven months, and was initiated by South Africa following a reassessment of its traditional alliance with the West. Christopher Coker of the London School of Economics, a close observer of diplomatic developments regarding South Africa, observes that Pretoria "had logically flawless arguments against continued alignment with the West — from which it now derives very little and can expect even less...What [the South Africans] have to offer [the Soviets] is the exclusion of the United States from a region of the world which Washington has always taken for granted as a Western sphere of interest."

U.S. Obstacles to Reform. U.S. sanctions against South Africa thus not only have not done what they were supposed to do (speed the reform process), they have worked against further reform. The South African government today has instituted its harshest crackdown on anti-government dissent in a decade, has seen its natural conservative Afrikaner constituency switch allegiance to the pro-apartheid Conservative Party, and even is considering a realignment of its international position — all as a result of U.S. sanctions. The message is clear: further U.S. sanctions will only make the situation worse. The other message is that the U.S. State Department strategy for southern Africa, designed and executed by Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Chester Crocker, has failed completely.

What can Washington do next? It is not enough merely to offer a plan for bringing down the white government of South Africa. This has been tried, and it has failed. Instead, the U.S. should seek to build up the power that black South Africans currently have, by further strengthening the black trade unions, black educational efforts, and black health-care programs. This offers the best chance for a peaceful transition to a multiracial South African democracy. This is not achieved by sanctions. And the U.S. must restore the leverage that it once had with the South African government. To do this, sanctions should be abandoned. In their place, the U.S. must launch a positive policy for South Africa that would encourage and reward internal reform and give Pretoria a reason to remain strategically aligned with the West.

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For further information:

William Pascoe, "U.S. Sanctions on South Africa: The Results Are In," Heritage Foundation *Background* No. 584, June 5, 1987.

William Pascoe, "South Africa Sanctions: Blacks Would Suffer the Most," Heritage Foundation *Background Update* No. 24, September 24, 1986.