

The Catholic Position

Last year the SA Catholic Bishops' Conference confused just about everybody when excerpts of a special commission which the Bishops appointed to examine sanctions were released. One newspaper reported "Catholics do U-turn on sanctions." Another said: "No U-turn on sanctions." However, the following are parts of the report that were published:

■ The economy of southern Africa is very precariously balanced. The application, therefore, of economic pressures against the country is only going to exacerbate an existing serious situation, so that despite optimistic observations by certain business commentators that the economy of the country is starting to recover tentatively, it

is reasonable to assume that as sanctions become more and more effective, the tentative recovery heralded by these commentators is likely to be destroyed.

■ It seems that an effective trade boycott is likely to be more detrimental than any disinvestment action. Export orientated sectors which would be most vulnerable to trade boycotts, are also the main employers of black labour, for example the mining and mineral industries. Measures leading to a decline in commercial agricultural output will also have serious implications for employment, particularly in those sub-sectors where labour in-put is relatively high to capital, and which are largely export orientated, for example maize, sugar, wool, deciduous and citrus fruits. An effective boycott of imports to South Africa would

result in denying foreign in-puts to local industries which will then curtail the scope for development in the South African manufacturing sector and a resulting increase in the rate of unemployment. It is estimated that should all exports of coal be banned, it could be expected that about 25 000 coalmine workers will be retrenched, with approximately 100 000 people depending on these incomes being affected. A total embargo against exports of agricultural products could lead to the retrenchment of approximately 100 000 workers in the western Cape and northern and eastern Transvaal. Workers in Natal are also threatened. The recent rejection by USA of some 500 000 tons of sugar is an indicator of the magnitude of trade boycotts in force. It is not known if an alternative market has been found, but the sugar industry is going to be considerably prejudiced a move that will inevitably lead to loss of farm work for agricultural workers. Most importantly the agricultural sector also provides accommodation to farmworkers and their families, for example housing facilities and farm schools. During 1984 nearly 460 000 pupils were enrolled in 5 477 primary farm schools. This represented about 30% of total black school enrolment in RSA. Adverse economic conditions which would arise in the event of total fruit embargoes could have a major impact on these communities.

■ As anticipated the whole issue of economic pressures has clearly had a totally counter-productive effect on government thinking. The whole sanctions issue has consolidated government in its retreat from meaningful and indeed, any, reform. What was anticipated by the pro-sanctions lobby early in 1986, namely an early change in government policy with expectations of imminent meaningful black participation in a regime overcome by the pressures of economic boycotts, is not likely to materialise, and will probably only emerge, but in an unpredictable manner, a long time ahead.

■ Sanctions are likely to continue to pre-





surprise business attitudes into applying their minds to the problems not only which have given rise to sanctions, but at possibilities of overcoming those possibilities ... there is no doubt that the economic decline in the country and the various pressures brought to bear have played a positive role in forcing businessmen and leaders to apply their minds to the whole subject.

■ The consensus amongst black people appears to swing like a pendulum depending on surveys, the questions asked, and who has reported on those surveys. In summary it seems logical that black people desperately want an end to the oppression of apartheid, and are willing to endure some hardship to see this happen. It seems, however, that if the policy is likely to produce a loss of their vitally needed jobs, most blacks prove to be tentative about pressing the issue.

The commission concludes from this report that it cannot be said that blacks overall favour sanctions and are prepared to endure the hardship, a view apparently held by a

minority only, for when the stark reality of loss of jobs is presented, then quite humanly this spectre forces the preference for sanctions into the background.

■ There is a growing awareness of social responsibility in the private sector and in the business sector. Notwithstanding that

believe that a statement which says that because black South Africans are denied political rights, efforts to improve their economic, educational and social status are cosmetic or trivial, is a fallacy. Efforts are being made by numerous companies not only to play an identifiable role in the

upliftment of their workers, but also to contribute substantially towards the education and development of black leadership. Whilst the issue of 'constructive engagement' is dead as an official American policy, nevertheless there are still many companies working hard to promote the policies and the commission has been able to identify numerous corporations within the country making considerable contributions towards the upliftment of education and economic facilities to black people. The greater the economic power in-

cluding trade union power, and the educational and economic levels of the black community, the more successful they will be in making their political voice heard.



the whole issue of so-called 'constructive engagement' has been damned by certain forces and is criticised for example by COSATU as being cosmetic only, we be-