

# Sanctions Will Prolong Agony -

John Kane-Berman



**For the outside world to perpetuate the myth that it could end apartheid would simply prolong the agony of the people in South Africa by offering false hopes and empty promises.**

**T**his was the thrust of the message delivered in March in Washington by Mr John Kane-Berman, Executive Director of the South African Institute of Race Relations, to the United States congressional sub-committees who considered the new proposals to introduce tougher sanctions against South Africa. In evidence before the sub-committees, which asked him to give evidence they appear to have totally ignored, Mr Kane-Berman said sanctions involved great risks and very uncertain gains. There were strategic and moral arguments against sanctions, he said. The single most important strategic objection to economic sanctions was that they would slow down the pace at which the balance of economic power would shift in favour of black people. The moral objection was that if, for example, South Africa was no longer able to export coal, thousands of people, most of them black, would be out of work. "Sanctions would certainly inflict costs on whites too, but their generally higher level of saving gives them a safety net which quite simply does not exist for blacks," he said. He pointed out that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights said everyone had the right to life, that no one should be subject to inhuman treatment, that everyone had the right to work

and the right to an adequate standard of living. To his mind international action that put people out of work was a violation of these clauses of the declaration. Mr Kane-Berman said that as long as the illusion persisted (that the outside world could end apartheid) it strengthened one of the greatest obstructions for action for changes - "the belief that black people are powerless and that they must therefore rely on others to bring about changes on their behalf." He added that there was "no doubt" that sanctions, if effectively imposed, would mean more black people out of work and an increase in the incidence of malnutrition and black infant mortality - already eleven times that among whites. Noting that there was a school of thought that said that starving blacks would rise up in revolt, Mr Kane-Berman suggested that this was doubtful. Nevertheless, even if they did, "they would face a security apparatus already immeasurably strengthened by sanctions because they forced it to become self-sufficient in every item of armament it needs to suppress internal revolt, not to mention its capacity to inflict enormous costs elsewhere on the sub-continent. No real threat to the security of the State, these youngsters would certainly pose a threat to a black trade union movement already worried that the growing reserve army of unemployed can undermine the bargaining power that it has won against heavy odds." Mr Kane-Berman said that there was substantial evidence garnered during the past 15 years which demonstrated that a growing economy generated forces which

blacks could harness to empower themselves to do the job of dismantling apartheid. Foreign influence could help them in this task - but only if it did nothing to undermine black empowerment. "The most striking development in South Africa is indeed how ordinary black people are taking matters into their own hands, and the very parliament from which they are excluded is having to catch up behind them," he said. The crucial ingredients of black empowerment were:

- Rising wages enabling people to move out of overcrowded townships into the usually more expensive accommodation in white suburbs;
- Increasing levels of education and skills shown to have forced a policy change with regard to black unions;
- The availability of more jobs and better incomes in urban as compared with rural areas, and
- Action and organisation.

He argued that fully-fledged imposition of sanctions by the UN Security Council were not a realistic possibility in the foreseeable future. They would have to be backed by a complete naval blockade of the coastline to bring about the desired objective. Conceding that most black people favoured pressure against apartheid, Mr Kane-Berman pointed out that a steady stream of different opinion surveys strongly suggested that the

majority of black people rejected pressure which threatened their own jobs. He suggested that the reluctance of most blacks to sacrifice their jobs should be respected. "Not only because it is their standpoint, but also because

there is a great risk that damage to the economy will retard the process of black empowerment." Mr Kane-Berman said that from a strategic point of view the most im-

***"Great risks... and very uncertain gains"***

portant argument against sanctions was that they will undermine the most important non-violent weapon that black people had at their disposal, which was their labour

power. He reminded the subcommittees that black people constituted 65 percent of the economically active population and an increasing proportion of the national workforce's skilled component. He also reminded them that by the year 2000 blacks will account for 44 percent of private consumption expenditure, against 20 percent in 1970.

**"The Universal Declaration of Human Rights says that everyone has the right to life, that no one should be subject to inhuman treatment, that everyone has the right to work and the right to an adequate standard of living. To my mind, international action that puts people out of work is a violation of these clauses of the Declaration." - John Kane-Berman, Executive Director of the SA Institute of Race Relations.**