

## Editorials

# Mixed messages on South Africa

After four years of pledging reform, South Africa's promises to dismantle apartheid strain credulity. Unfortunately, the same can now be said of Canada's record in battling South Africa's racist policies.

In 1985, Prime Minister Brian Mulroney vowed to sever all economic and diplomatic links with South Africa if the situation did not improve. With that declaration, Canada assumed a global lead in the campaign to pressure Pretoria.

But with Mulroney's enthusiasm waning, External Affairs Minister Joe Clark's more cautious approach to apartheid has prevailed. Chairing a meeting of eight Commonwealth foreign ministers in Australia this week, Clark discouraged talk of fresh trade sanctions. In so doing, he steered the group away from solidarity, and toward stalemate.

Yet, as the final communique acknowledged, sanctions do work. Recent signs of a softer line in Pretoria suggest that "sanctions are having an increasing economic and political impact." Feverish public relations campaigns mounted by South African embassies abroad are further proof of their effect. At the same time, a state of emergency has been renewed by Pretoria for the fourth year, underscoring the need for continued pressure.

But Clark argued that financial measures would be more effective. Targeting South Africa's \$21 (U.S.) billion foreign debt, he is asking banks to impose stringent terms when two-thirds of it comes due for rescheduling next summer.

But questions of implementation remain unanswered: Financial pressure can only be applied by international banks voluntarily; any leverage is limited by the relatively modest size of the debt; and Pretoria wields the trump card — it can threaten to default on its loans.

There is, of course, a place for voluntary financial sanctions. But since they depend on "moral suasion," they are no substitute for the additional trade sanctions which Canada has previously promised.

Yet Clark continues to stall, arguing that the Commonwealth only has leverage when it acts in unison. He still clings to the hope that Britain, which opted out of the last round of Commonwealth sanctions, will come on line with the rest of the group. But in light of Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's repeated rejections of Commonwealth solidarity, it is a naive, outdated strategy.

Now, the gaps in Canada's position are matched only by the leakage in its own sanctions. In the first five months of this year, Canadian imports from South Africa rose 80 per cent over the same period in 1988. Little wonder that Clark was on the defensive this week in Australia, and at the last Commonwealth meeting on sanctions in Toronto.

As Clark and Mulroney prepare for the upcoming summit of Commonwealth leaders in Malaysia in October, they should reflect on Canada's credibility with as much care as they scrutinize South Africa's performance.