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By COLIN LEGUM

ALTHOUGH sanctions against
South Africa have not yet been
finally lifted, they are crumbling
at a rate that already casts doubt
on their credibility and effective
ness. This development is an un-
doubted triumph for President
FW de Klerk whose promise of
ua new South Africa" has carried
more weight than the anti-apart-
heid movement's warning that
the liquidation of apartheid is
not yet irreversible.

In fact, as has been openly ad-
mitted by ANC leaders. De Klerk
has succeeded in wresling the
initiative in the opening phase ol
the negotiating process over a

democratic non-racial constitution from his opponents.

This goes not only for the success he has had in the international arena. but also at home. One reason for this is the difficulty the ANC has had in establishing itself as a disciplined and coherent political party with a proven mass following. To date. it has succeeded in recruiting only 200000 members in its initial campaign to secure one million members. Moreover. it has failed to produce an effective organisation to service even its 200000 members.

Building a party

Yet. as public opinion pulls show, over 57% of all South Africans give their vote to the ANC. Its failure, so far. has been to convert this massive sympathy vote into an organised political party.

Those who criticise the ANC's failure - and the critics are to be found inside the ANC as well as among its opponents ; underestimate the very real difficulties of building an organised party in the short period of 10 months since the ANC was made legal. it is likely to take at least another year before the ANC is able to create the infrastructure needed to establish its position. Apart from the inevitable difficulties of planting itself firmly on the ground, the ANC's most notable defeat, thus far, has been the crumbling of sanctions.

If the ANC had read the signs correctly it could have gained greater international credibility by taking the initiative in advocating a policy of selectively lifting sanctions are

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being eroded

but investors

need stability

ing sanctions instead of persisting in the hardline advocacy of keeping up economic pressures.

In fact, many of the ANC's leaders - notably Oliver Tambo and Nelson Mandela ; correctly foresaw the irreversible crumbling of sanctions and sought to change the party's hard line, But they failed to persuade key elements in the movement to accept the political wisdom of placing less reliance on international pressures and more on national pressures. The rejection of their advice was overwhelmingly demonstrated by last week's decision of the ANC's advisory conference to pursue the largely lost cause of

pro-sanctions policy

Much of the blame for eroding sanctions is now laid by the ANC at the door of the European Community's decision to begin phasing out sanctions by lifting the ban on foreign investment in South Africa.

But while the West Europeans are a convenient scapegoat, the reality is that the East Europeans, including the Soviet Union, and especially African governments, have done more to erode sanctions over the last six months than the European Community. An exploratory visit which resulted immediately in the placing of an order for prefabricated housing for victims of the Chernobyl disaster, and in inviting South African experts to come and advise on measures of containing the effects of the nuclear fallout.

Far more telling than any of these breaches of sanctions has been the role of African governments. In the last nine months South Africa's trade with the rest of Africa has increased by 40%. A growing number of African governments has openly defied the boycott policy of the Organisation of African Unity by inviting the South African government for talks to develop trade relations. This includes such formerly hardline opponents of Pretoria as Madagascar and the Seychelles, while Kenya broke the ban on air connections by licensing South African Airways to begin a regular weekly service to Nairobi to facilitate both tourism and trade. At least 14 African governments now maintain open trade and other links with South Africa.

There have also been other significant improvements in relations between South Africa and its neighbours. The Southern African Development Cooperation Conference (SADCC) - which was formed to lessen the dependency of South Africa's neighbours on Pretoria - invited Pretoria to send an observer to its last meeting. As did the 14 African governments

Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Rumania were among the first to breach the trade ban.

The Soviet Union sent a trade delegation to South Africa on an

EASTERN BLOC LINKS . . . South African Foreign Minister Mr Pik Botha met Rumanian President Mr Ion Iliescu in November in Rumania, Hungary and Czechoslovakia were the first countries to breach the trade ban.

members of the Preferential Trade Area (PTA)

Even more important is the

agreement by SADCC members to begin integrating their national power grid systems with the Electricity Supply Commission of SA (Eskom). The first stage of this development, which will be financed by the World Bank, will link Eskom with Zimbabwe. The second stage will extend the grid to Zaire and, potentially, as far north as Tanzania. The cost is estimated at tens of millions of rands.

Pretext for West

The opening of links between South Africa and the rest of the continent are potentially far more important than the putative ending of sanctions with Europe. In a very real sense, therefore, it can be argued that the most serious breach in sanctions has been the result of the changing policies of African governments. It would hardly be surprising, therefore, if Europeans and North Americans were to use as their pretext for phasing out sanctions the example set by Africans themselves.

Since the ANC has been unable to dissuade members of the Organisation of African Unity to observe sanctions until the political process is adjudged to be irreversible, it seems unlikely to have more success in preventing the Europeans and North Americans from abandoning sanctions. However, the steady crumbling of sanctions is unlikely to help South Africa's straitened economy in the near future; It is unlikely that the European Community's decision to tilt the ban on foreign investment will result in any meaningful new investment pouring into South Africa. What deters foreign investors is the country's political uncertainty. This will persist so long as there is no positive outcome over the negotiations for new democratic constitution;

This still gives the ANC the whip-hand in the negotiating process. The bottom line is that there can be no meaningful progress towards achieving stability in South Africa without agreement between the government, the ANC and other opponents of apartheid.

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