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Simple commonsense tells one that if sanctions and counter-sanctions become the dominant mode of interaction between South Africa and its neighbours, the neighbours are in for a beating. The most brutal illustration of this was what happened to Lesotho. When the SA Government put its heel on the transport lifeline, Lesotho choked and went into a political convulsion which eventually changed its government.

Perhaps this same kind of thinking informs the decision to repatriate Mozambican mineworkers and to make threatening noises to the Machel Government. It would be too simplistic and self-defeating for the South African government to install its own set of rulers in each of the frontline states, but with enough political and economic destabilization more compliant governments may come to the fore.

The argument that South Africa needs its neighbours more than they need her, gives a primacy to economic thinking in key areas of government which simply is not there. Thus it is pointed out that South Africa enjoys a favourable trade balance with Zimbabwe worth five hundred million rand a year and that this would act as a deterrent against retaliatory sanctions. When it is kept in mind that the recent jump in gold and platinum prices will pour upward of 4 billion Rand into state coffers, and that the state gives primacy to security rather than economic considerations, the favourable trade balance with Zimbabwe becomes a less compelling issue in the sanctions debate. All present indications seem to support the conclusion that as the sanction campaign gathers momentum the South African government is going to fall back more and more on domestic repression and regional destabilization.

The Rambo-logic seems to be : "If the going gets tough, the tough get going! Watch this space !"

Armed with these thoughts, I visited Harare last weekend. I met Cabinet Ministers, business leaders, academics and Prime Minister Mugabe. The one thing they all had in common was a shared history of a period of painful traumatic transition in their own country. Each in their own way could point out some sacrifice or hardship endured for what they believed in and in some cases fought for.

The politicians I met each had a minimum of 10 years imprisonment behind them for their political involvement and were active participants in the armed struggle. The businessmen had come through pre-UDI economic life, the euphoric patriotic boom at the ^{ON}~~out~~set of sanctions, the gradual alienation and disillusionment with the Smith regime and the metamorphosis from a Rhodesian to a Zimbabwean businessman. Some of the academics were now confronted with the practical implications of those radical-liberal paradigms they had propagated so fervently during the struggle. Each one of them, in some way had lost a friend or relative in the sturggle.

In other words, I was not talking to some far-off Scandinavian theorists about the moral ramifications behind their government's stand on sanctions. There was not a trick in the trade you could tell these people about pressure, punitive actions or counteractions. They had first-hand experience of it all, from whichever side of the ideological fence one wish to argue the point. And yet, without exception, they did not question the moral and political wisdom of the Zimbabwe government's decision in favour of sanctions against the South AFrican government. Of course they were aware, even apprehensive about the economic consequences of countersanctions. Alternative trade routes were being explored and the cost in the quality of life calculated.

When one listens to experienced businessmen dispassionately talking about the problems and obstacles in getting the Beira corridor operational, one realizes that psychologically they have already accepted that the sanctions issue involves a much more fundamental problem than "normal" economic relations with Pretoria. Also without exception they would prefer normal economic relations; they dream of Southern Africa being the bread basket of Africa; of the mobility of human resources and skills across borders and into each other's cities. But with no hesitation whatsoever, they accept that this cannot be as long as Apartheid is there. And for them, Apartheid is not just a few discriminatory laws, it is white minority domination, pure and simple.

Hardnosed risk consultants may mock the uneconomic logic of this stance; financiers and corporate leaders may despair at its irrationality from the point of view of profits and growth. The irrefutable political fact of South and Southern Africa is that as long as Apartheid continues, there cannot be any rational economic logic that can inform policy decisions. It remains the malignant tumour that clouds our thoughts and actions.