

1st October 1992

**PRESS STATEMENT ON
VICTIMISATION OF THE JANSEN FAMILY
AND VILLIERSDORP COMMUNITY**

The latest outrageous attempt to harrass and intimidate the Villiersdorp community and Chairperson of the local Civic Association, Mr Thomas Jansen and his wife Ellen, Publicity Secretary, is cause for grave public concern.

Mr and Mrs Jansen, who represent a large community spanning Neeuwedorp and Goniwe Park, appear to have been targetted by the Municipality and the local police in their attempts to victimise a community that is struggling to survive in a desperately poor economic environment where unemployment is extremely high.

The plight of a poor community

For some months now, the Civic Association, together with the local ANC branch, has been trying to negotiate an agreement with the municipality on the payment of arrears and rents. The municipality has, however, persistently refused to enter into bona fide negotiations on a collective basis and has insisted on members of the community making individual representations. When they do so, they are informed that they must pay amounts way above their means and are forced to sign agreements which they sometimes do not understand fully. The last meeting between the Civic Association and the Municipality ended in deadlock when the Municipality refused to accept a neutral chair. The Mayor both chaired the meeting and delivered a 30 minute input.

The failure to pay arrears in Neeuwedorp is purely a result of economic circumstance and there has been no rent boycott in this area. Most of the residents are seasonal workers who are unable to obtain permanent employment in a harsh economic climate. In neighbouring Goniwe Park, the rent boycott began as a result of the failure of the municipality to repair essential services, such as lights and sewage, despite frequent requests to do so.

The victimisation of Mr Thomas Jansen

With regard to Mr Jansen, the community is enormously angered by what appears to be an ongoing campaign of victimisation. A few months ago, he was arrested for malicious damage to property when he rescued two children who had been tied to a lamppost by a local shopkeeper by cutting the ropes. Soon afterwards, he was charged with intimidation while,

handing out leaflets calling on people to boycott the shop in question. The leaflets were the result of a community decision to act against the Rio Store.

On another occasion, Mr Jansen was charged with spreading disinformation about the conduct of the police.

Mr Jansen has also been charged with erecting a shed without permission. In fact, Mr Jansen had permission but as his shed did not meet the exact specifications required, he began negotiating a new building plan. While he was doing this, the municipality brought a charge against him.

Only last week, he and others were charged with attempted murder. Although the case is sub judice, we strongly believe that the charges are bogus and represent another attempt by the police to harrass Mr Jansen.

The day before yesterday, police evicted Mr Jansen and his family from their house, despite the fact (although he has arrears which he is paying to the best of his ability). He had at this stage paid his full monthly rental up until and including September, except for a reduced amount paid in July. Both he and his wife have been unemployed for most of this year. In fact, when Mr Jansen finally found permanent employment at the end of July, he informed the Villiersdorp Town Treasurer that he would now be in a position to meet his rent obligations and pay his arrears.

Broadly speaking, the yesterday's events are as follows and further clarity is being sought about the details.

Early yesterday morning, there was a heavy police presence around Neeuwedorp. Alarmed by this, Mr Jansen's sister ran to her brother's house and found police and municipal officials moving the furniture out of the house.

At about 10.30am, Mr Jansen arrived from work and drove towards the house. As he approached, there was an accident when a police cameraman collided with his vehicle and a scuffle ensued. Police then grabbed Mr Jansen and put him in a police van. At this stage, enraged onlookers began stoning the police van to which the police responded with teargas. They then released Mr Jansen from the vehicle.

Mr Jansen then proceeded to the police station to report the accident in which the man was knocked down. While he was there, he was arrested for attempted murder, assaulting a police officer, evading arrest and for failing to pay his rent.

Because his bail order prohibits him from entering his property and all his goods are locked up in a shed in the garden, Mr Jansen and his family are unable to retrieve their clothes or other possessions. His car is being held by the police. In addition, the bail order prohibits him from making contact with certain municipal officials which will make further negotiations with the Municipality almost impossible.

ANC comment

We are deeply concerned about the safety of Mr Jansen. It has become clear that the police and municipality are engaged in a campaign to intimidate him from doing his work as Chair of the Civic Association. Mr Jansen is a highly respected man in his community and there is great danger that the intransigence of the municipality in meeting the perfectly reasonable demands of the community, together with the continued persecution of Mr Jansen, could result in further outbreaks of violence.

We demand that the Villiersdorp Municipality take immediate steps to set up a forum, under neutral arbitration, to negotiate the rents issue with the local Civic and ANC. We also demand the municipality and the police cease their apparent persecution of Mr Thomas Jansen and the community at large. This persistent harrassment of a community that has made all appropriate efforts to set up a negotiating structure in the area is unreasonable, inhumane and totally unacceptable.

We also demand that a moratorium be placed on all evictions until bona fide negotiations have taken place.

We will also be referring the matter to the Regional Dispute Resolution Committee and the Goldstone Commission.

Issued by Willie Hofmeyr, Assistant Secretary

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