



"Students must organise around their common grievances"
Tshediso Matona, Cosas organiser



"We must support trade union and community struggles."
Toiva Mokgoja, Cosas secretary.



"Our broad aims can only be realised in a non-racial society"
Shepard Mati, Cosas president

Cosas: an organising force in the classrooms

'We've come a long way since '76', says the Cosas executive. Here Saspu National speaks to the executive about Cosas' development, its aims today and the tasks and problems it faces.



The Cosas executive. The 1982 theme is Student-Worker Action

Q: How does the new executive see the role of Cosas?

A: Our general objective is to fight for compulsory, free and democratic education in a democratic society.

To achieve these aims one has to work towards improving relations between parents, teachers and students.

Our broader aims can only be realised within the context of a non-racial society.

We aim to help our communities achieve awareness of society. It is important to perceive Cosas as playing a meaningful role in society as a legitimate and effective force in a broad democratic alliance.

Q: Why did Cosas choose Student-Worker Action as its theme for 1982?

A: Students were realising slowly — after 1978 and 1979 — that they are a specific group and that they play a limited role in the broader struggle. Their role is to support the struggles of workers. One of the aims of Cosas is to teach students that after completion of their studies they have got a role to play in society. Students are the workers of tomorrow and as such they must be educated and organised. The reason that Cosas was formed, was because we realised that our role is actually to support the struggles on other fronts, especially the trade union and community fronts.

The students experience conditions that might be different from the conditions that workers experience, at work and in the

community. We feel that by bringing the workers struggle to the students and the community, students will actually play a very supportive role in the overall struggle led by the workers. That is why our theme is Student-Worker Action.

Q: Do students and workers have a basis for united action?

A: Students are oppressed at school. Workers have grievances at the factory and places of employment. Students and workers in the community have common grievances — unhealthy living conditions etc. We feel that by bringing these two distinct groups together on the basis of a common experience they would form a very strong united front to challenge the system, to expose injustice.

Q: Does the adoption of this theme indicate an advance in student activity?

A: Very importantly. One would not have expected such a theme in the pre-1976 period where students to a large extent thought that they would bring to an end the system of education and also bring about liberation. Students saw themselves as a leading force in the struggle while, ultimately, that was an illusion. We realised our limitations.

Q: How is Cosas organising in the schools?

A: Since the boycotts of 1980, we have made demands for democratic student councils in the schools. To get students involved in the struggle they must be organised. SRC's can organise students around issues they experience at school and show them the importance of

supporting the community. We see ourselves as part of the community and therefore have an obligation to serve the community.

One of our aims in the schools is to improve relations amongst the students themselves. As students we should realise that we are oppressed and have common grievances. We should come together around these common grievances.

We would like the teachers to realise that they are also part of an oppressed community and will have to join with us to fight to end apartheid education.

Q: What immediate problems are you facing?

A: One is the state-induced measure of compulsory education. By introducing compulsory education, the state is forcing parents to pay for their children's tuition.

In a society where exploitation is the order of the day, education must be seen as a weapon used to maintain oppression and inequality. We can never be free until the entire system is eradicated. Compulsory education can only be acceptable when it is free and democratic and will equip students with skills for the betterment of society.

Another problem facing school students is the age limit issue. The age limit states that students over the age of 21 should be forbidden from school and should register with Adult Education Centres. These regulations are in fact a response to 1976 and 1980. They are aimed at controlling activity and getting rid of so-called trouble makers at school.

In all areas where Cosas has branches, this issue was taken up. In Port Elizabeth Cosas took up this issue in conjunction with the parents and organised a survey. A parent-student committee was formed which managed to force the government to suspend the introduction of the age limit.

Q: What is your attitude towards other student organisations?

A: During the earlier stages of Cosas, many students were not clear about their position as regards organisations like Nusas, for instance. Now students are able to analyse the situation more realistically and are able to identify the forces which oppress them — not colour as such but rather economic factors.

We have realised that Nusas sees the situation in the same way as we do. It has democratic aims and foresees a non-racial democratic society which is what we are also struggling for.

It is through day to day experiences in the struggle that students realise the struggle is not against white individuals, but is against the system of oppression and exploitation. There are committed activists amongst the ranks of the white community who have dedicated their lives to the struggle. That this number is limited, we can understand by appreciating the constraints and dynamics of the white community.

Q: And Azaso?

A: As far as Azaso is concerned, it is another Cosas in the universities. Our aims and objectives are the

same in almost all aspects as our grievances and situation are to some extent common. We are working very closely with Azaso.

Q: Does Cosas organise white school students?

A: We have to point out that the conditions of black and white students differ. You will find that in white schools, the issues that they can take up would be of little relevance to black students.

It is not a question of policy, but rather a question of strategy, that students organise separately. It is a creation of the South African system which has caused students to organise like this. We have to organise black students around their grievances and equip them with the means to analyse the situation from a progressive point of view.

Q: How do you view the education system in this country?

A: A system of education in a racist and undemocratic society is only of benefit to the rulers of our country. We feel we have to respond by challenging this indoctrination. We commonly decide what type of education we want by sitting down and formulating our demands and principles.

Take for example the Freedom Charter. There was a time when people were active in rejecting pass laws, and all criminal laws in this country. And so a time came when they saw the need to formulate the Freedom Charter. People submitted their demands and said the only system that will meet their demands is a society where the people govern.

The total onslaught of propaganda in the veld

A NEW report has again branded veldschools run by the Transvaal Education Department (TED) as pure propaganda attempts.

In a report on the Schoemansdal veldschool, the Johannesburg College of Education (JCE) report says: 'Under the guise of environmental education the veldschools are guilty of using the isolation of the veld to propagate a particular, one-sided view of the South African situation.'

The report again underlines the falseness of repeated TED claims that veldschools are neutral and objective approach, and that there is no possibility of indoctrination.

The veldschools are generally seen as an extension of schools' Youth Preparedness (YP) programmes.

A teacher who went on one of the camps said children were far more racist when they returned from veldschools.

They are much more convinced of an undefined total onslaught against South Africa. They then understand why they are taught how to build bomb shelters in YP sessions.'

The JCE report found pupils were warned against certain teachers who were 'not Christian, failed to keep discipline in their classrooms and lived with their boyfriends.'

Lecturers told children these teachers were more likely to try to indoctrinate pupils with 'marxist ideas'.

The implication of this is that teachers who step slightly out of the strictures of Christian National Education are likely to be harassed by their pupils, because they are seen as 'Marxist', and thus a threat to the country.

The ideology of 'total onslaught' comes across very strongly at the camps.

The main themes of the total onslaught which 'has intensified violently in the last decade' are spelt out: 'military, economical, ideological, political, apartheid, racism, religion, colonialism'. The precise nature of each of these 'onslaughts' is not defined and children are presumably left to conclude that any criticism of any of the 'main themes' is inspired by an outside 'Marxist menace'.

All South Africa's problems are

located outside rather than inside the country.

One pupil, who had asked a question about cholera, was informed that: 'It comes from Mozambique, their standards have deteriorated so badly since independence that cholera is rife there, and now it is spreading across our borders.'

When the pupil challenged this answer by pointing out that rivers flowed from South Africa into Mozambique, and that therefore cholera was more likely to spread into Mozambique, she was told that it is in fact 'illegal immigrants from Maputo who bring it into South Africa'.

The lecturer then went on to indicate that the cholera epidemic was also a result of overpopulation — 'blacks having too many babies' — and the fact that blacks had not yet developed to the same stage as whites had.

The real problems of apartheid are denied, and instead the evil is sought outside South Africa, in African degeneration and a communist total onslaught.

Add the requisite racist ideology, and a recipe for the programmed indoctrination of young white South Africans emerges at the Veldschools.

The JCE report is particularly critical of the para-military nature of the Veldschools. At the Schoemansdal camp, pupils were put on obstacle courses, camouflage exercises and a 'nocturnal obstacle manoeuvre'.

The regimentation is continued in the set up at the camp — the blue group will eat while the green group washes and the red group tidies its bungalow, for example.

Army lecturers are frequently used at veldschools, 'to give a foretaste of army life', according to a TED document.

The 'moral' aspect of the Veldschools is possibly the most insidious.

At one camp, Std 8 pupils were told to hand in all pills and medicines they had with them.

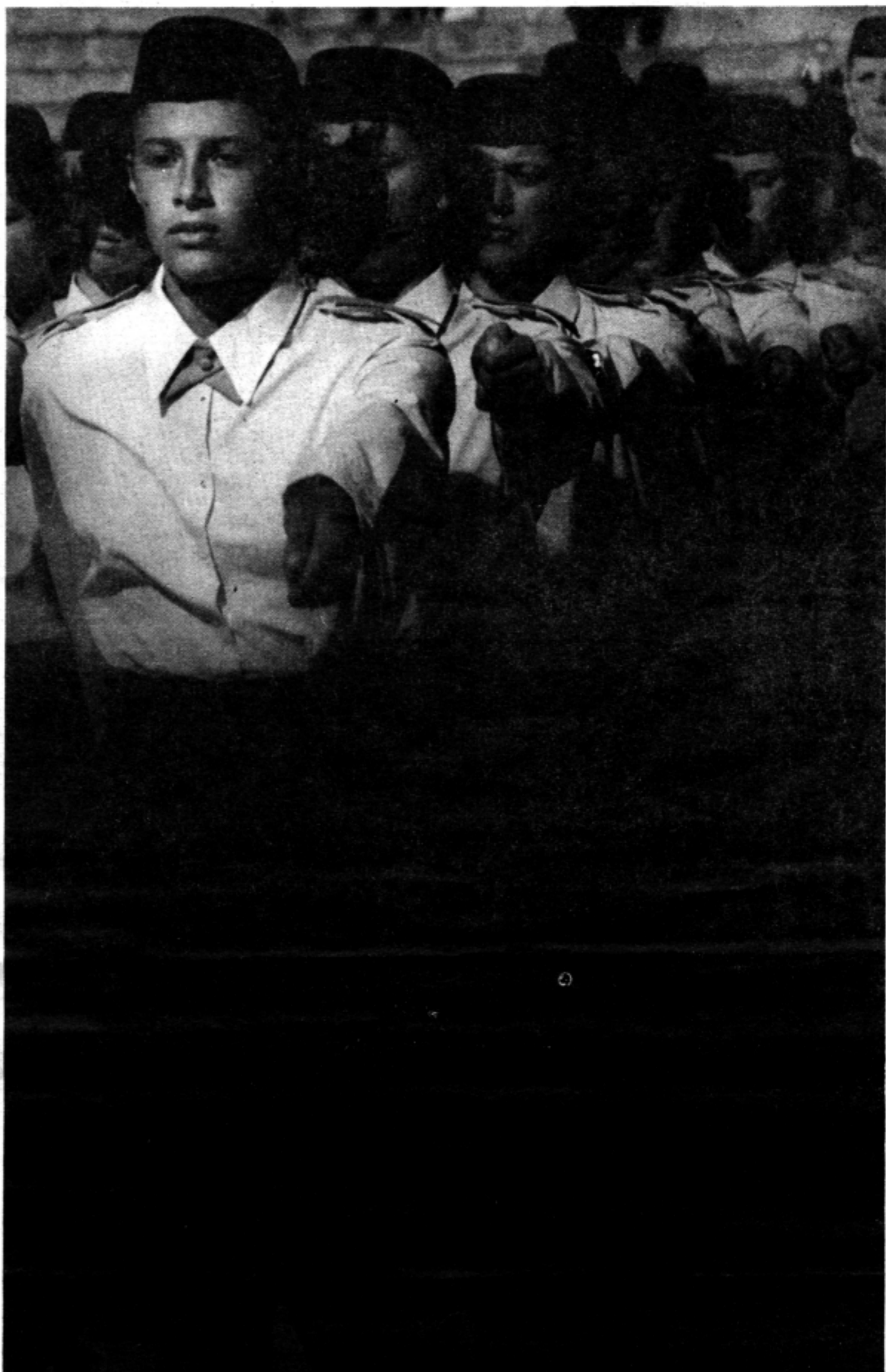
Later a search through pupil's lockers uncovered a pack of contraceptive pills in one woman's locker, which she had failed to hand

education in corrugated iron schools. This does not mean that we prefer corrugated iron schools in the society we envisage.

We strongly feel that all student organisations should come together and formulate the type of education they want in terms of short and long term demands which can become our programme of action — a national democratic programme for a democratic, universal education for all.

It should not only focus on the controls of education at present but also how we want to change them. Our broader aim is to struggle for a free, democratic, compulsory and non-racial education for all in a new society.

In this regard we can learn from the Freedom Charter. The Freedom Charter is a valid and accepted document not only because it embodies democratic demands and objectives but because it was democratically formulated and adopted.



South African youth are kept in line through Youth Preparedness and veldschools

over. She received an angry lecture on the evils and immorality of pre-marital sex, and was held up to her bungalow-mates as a bad example.

When the pupil in question protested that this was not the case, but that she had been prescribed the pill for medical reasons, she was accused by the lecturer of being a liar.

There is a great deal in a veldschool programme emphasising the sanctity of marriage, the evils of

pre-marital sex, the importance of only one sexual partner throughout life, and the like.

One of the most typical responses to veldschools has come recently from groups such as the PFP who have condemned veldschools for pushing National Party propaganda.

However, this response is inadequate. In fact, veldschools only put the cherry on the top of the total

indoctrination and socialization of the ideas of South Africa's ruling group.

As one teacher put it: 'Veldschools work, and they work because most of the children enjoy them, and find them reasonable.'

This blind acceptance cannot be combatted by condemning Veldschools. It must be understood as the outcome of the broad socialization of white South Africans.

Cosas interview continued

Presently the government is embarking on cosmetic changes in the educational field to counteract progressive organisations and to put into effect its total strategy. This to many people is not obvious. Thus it is very necessary to formulate basic and fundamental demands of a democratic and universal education that student organisations are fighting for. An education charter can play this role.

If this is not done, the system will succeed in winning the students onto their side by some of the half hearted and in fact meaningless forced concessions they are making. For instance they are now building double story schools.

We need to expose the inefficiency of the system — why we have unqualified teachers in the schools. Rather than learning inferior education in modern schools, we would prefer a democratic and a better

So for an education charter to be accepted by all, it has to be democratically consisted.

Q: Do you think only students should decide what type of education they want?

A: We do not want to come out as students only, and say we want this kind of education. We want our parents as workers to be there when we determine the kind of education we want.

We feel that emphasis should be laid on a link between formal and informal education and the fact that education does not end at school. Education continues outside of school, like adult education and education in a broader sense.

Q: At its last Congress, Cosas made provision for a youth organisation to cater for pupils who have had to leave school. Could you expand on the reasons for such an

organisation?

A: Due to repressive measures and conditions in the townships, many students are forced to leave school. These students are accommodated in some areas but in most areas there are no youth organisations. So, Cosas set up a committee to look into the practical ways of involving the youth in an autonomous structure.

Youth who leave school are generally inactive. Some get frustrated and vent their frustrations by resorting to undesirable activity. We feel that if we can provide the youth with a structure, they will be able to make a more meaningful contribution to the process of change.

In addition many activists have been expelled from school and they become disorganised and disillusioned with the struggle. We should also cater for students who have completed their studies and who have the same aims as Cosas.

They have certain skills to serve the community.

Q: How has Cosas been affected by state repression?

A: In the last decade we have seen an increase in state repression of democratic organisations. Cosas has been one of the most hard hit. In 1979, almost the whole national executive was detained. The first president of Cosas, Ephraim Mogaie is now serving a jail sentence.

State repression affects the progress of Cosas. Students stay away from Cosas because they fear detention. More subtle repression like the age limit also affects us but we do not foresee a situation where it will stop Cosas from growing.

Nobody can silence the forces of justice and democracy. State repression has not been able to stop our determination to achieve our goals.