

VIEWS ON A UNION CLINIC

Until recently, workers in the Paarl area went to a local general practitioner when they were ill. The consultation was paid for by a fund financed by workers and their employers. The fund also paid for drugs up to a limited amount, but this was often exceeded and workers then had to pay the additional amounts themselves.

A few years ago, the Food and Canning Workers Union and the African Food and Canning Workers Union negotiated with management so that the fund could be used to set up a clinic in the area. The fund was used to establish the clinic, pay a doctor nominated by the Union, and pay for medicines to be dispensed at the clinic.

Union members attending the clinic were asked what they felt about it. This is what they said:

"We like our clinic. We pay only twenty cents and we get our medicines for free. Also, the doctor makes sure that we get paid our Workmens Compensation money quickly."

Another worker had this to say:

"It is good that our Union helps to look after our health. It is part of our struggle for a decent living."

Another worker added:

"This clinic helps to strengthen our union - the Food and Canning Workers Union."

Many workers related their illnesses to their working conditions. One blamed his chest condition on the refrigerated air at work, and

the small, draughty, concrete room he shares with two others at his hostel. A woman blamed her muscle pains and her persistent anxiety on the hard physical work she has to do at a rate set by the machine."



The clinic run by the Food and Canning Workers Union in Paarl is a small clinic over which patients have some control through their Union. The workers there are satisfied with their Clinic. In the future, other unions may also set up clinics, and extend the control that working people have over their own health.