

HOUSING BROADCAST.

The news I bring you today will come as no surprise to many of you who have been keeping in touch with current affairs. The Housing Development Programme which was launched some five years ago is now virtually completed. The last few rental and hire-purchase houses to come off the assembly line will be allocated within a matter of days. One more small Aided Self-Help Scheme is left to complete. ~~After that, there is nothing to look forward to for the rest of 1959.~~

~~If this reminds you of a death announcement let me just say there are~~ few things I have relished ~~less~~ as Minister of Labour, Health and Housing, than having to break this unpleasant piece of news. I feel ^{deeply} for those thousands of workers whose dreams of immediate relief are dashed to the ground; who, although they feared the worst, were hoping against hope for something - in the form of a house - to turn up soon.

The importance of housing could hardly be better expressed than in the following words by an international authority - I quote: "A satisfactory house is essential for happy family life; and the family is the basic unit of Society. Good housing - better than a great many now have - is essential". There is hardly any need for me to say how heartily the Government subscribes to this view.

It is for that reason that plans have already been drawn up for a new housing drive in the 5-year period beginning in January, 1960. For months discussions on a new housing programme went on, and when Dr. Jagan left for the Financial Talks in London he took concrete Plans with him in his briefcase. The size of our next 5-year housing programme will depend on the outcome of the Financial Talks in London.

The demand for houses is so great that it is certain that whatever money is set aside for housing in the coming Development Programme will fall far short of the needs of our people. That is why it is good to learn that the Georgetown Town Council will be throwing in its weight to help solve this problem. Other groups have also been showing an interest. Help is welcome from any and every source. For example, Government has been thinking of ways and means of stimulating the private building and repairing of houses for working class people, whose need is the greatest. For years, not only in British Guiana, but all over the world, private persons have shied away from building low-income houses. No one can blame them. The returns from such investments have been generally poor. Some time ago, a Committee was appointed to consider ~~the~~ among other things, what incentives could be given to housebuilders in order to see ~~the~~ ^{equitable} ~~the~~ ^{in particular, dwellings for}

in the lower income bracket.

Both landlords and tenants were represented on the Committee. They have submitted an interim report. They have made some useful and interesting suggestions. Government has already considered this report and decided to adopt some of the recommendations. When these go through, it should be easier for the private landlord to play a fuller part in the solution of the housing problem.

So much for our future hopes and plans - at least for the moment. Let us now take stock of what has been done.

If you could see, as I did, a plan of Greater Georgetown with the new Housing Estates drawn in, you could not fail to be impressed by the mark it has left on our capital city. As a woman, I like to think of it as a beauty mark. South of Georgetown at La Penitence and Ruimveldt, what is virtually a satellite town has grown up. Georgetown has also expanded on the East through the development of Lodge and Campbellville. These areas were properly planned and laid out, and add a colourful touch to a capital city already famous for its charm and beauty.

3,200 houses have been built since the programme began at a cost of nearly \$15 million. Most of this money came from a Colonial Development and Welfare Grant. We could never have done it on our own. Officially, about twenty thousand persons have been rehoused. I said officially, because there is evidence that households have grown in size since the houses were first occupied. Almost two thirds of the houses have been built in Greater Georgetown. For those interested in statistics there are 1,296 at Ruimveldt, 464 at La Penitence, 299 at Lodge and 72 at Campbellville.

It is no accident that Georgetown has come off best. The need was greatest in the city. Over the years, there had been a steady drift of population from country to city in search of employment and better amenities. This is going on all over the world today, especially in underdeveloped territories like ours. We were lucky in that Georgetown is well supplied with land on two sides. The experts say Georgetown is one of the best placed cities where prospects of expansion are concerned. These lands were mostly sugar lands and it was possible to acquire them easily at a modest price. What cost a great deal was the development of these lands; the laying down of roads, drains, septic tanks and water. Land for which Government paid \$700 per acre, cost \$15,000 per acre to develop. At 10 houses to the acre the cost per lot works out at \$1500 each. Because of the peculiar nature of our soil, land development is a costly business in British Guiana as you can see.

We have chosen for the new housing areas around Georgetown, street names famous Guianese annals, Wray, Smith, Eleazer, Thomas, ... in just a ...

favourite is Cuffey, one of the first slaves in B.G. to strike a blow for freedom.

Outside of the city, the Government has built houses at New Amsterdam, Springlands, West Coast Berbice, East Coast Demerara, Wismar, Soesdyke, Bartica, Essequibo Coast and the North West District. These do not include the Aided Self-Help Projects to which I shall refer later.

We have experimented with a variety of designs in order to find the most economical types to build, and for the people to rent. Including the Laing Avenue Apartments, we are renting at \$8.00, \$13.00 and \$17.00. ^{+15.00} The instalments on Hire-Purchase Houses range from \$ to \$..... over a period up to 30 years. Now, where value is concerned, these rents compare very favourably with rents of privately owned houses. I don't think anyone can truthfully deny that. And yet we know that in many instances the higher rents asked, have been beyond the means of the families living in those houses. That is a real problem, that although the Government is not seeking to make any profit on these houses, the actual rents charged are a terrible strain on many families. We intend in any future programme to concentrate on the type of house that will rent for \$13.00 per month, or as close to that figure as possible.

Because the rents have been too high, many families had fallen into arrears of rent. I think when I took over the portfolio of Housing, the arrears was something like \$60,000. However, when we went into this, we found that there was a great deal more than met the eye. Many tenants who were in arrears had no excuse. They could afford to pay, and, had the landlord been a private person they would have been up-to-date. There are some people, however, who feel that because the Government is the landlord, they need not pay up. Now that is a bad attitude and I despair for our country if we don't get over it. *We have, however, been sympathetic with those in genuine difficulties.*

I'm afraid we had to apply a great deal of pressure in those cases where we were satisfied that better could be done. It is surprising how many tenants handed over quite large sums of money when they realised we meant business, and would levy if necessary. *According to the latest information,* when I last heard, the arrears had been reduced by two-thirds to something like \$20,000. This is still very much on the high side and every effort must be made to wipe out arrears completely.

Of the three thousand odd houses built under the programme, about 1500 are rental, 1000 hire-purchase and about 700 Aided Self-Help. Thirty eight groups ranging in size from 10 to 29 have been building their own homes throughout the coastlands. By this method, Government bulk-purchases materials and provides skilled supervision for each group. Giving their own labour, the groups have saved up to one-third of the cost of their houses. This system has not been an unqualified success, however, some

groups, notably those in Georgetown, have responded magnificently. But the response of others has been indifferent and of a few just plain bad. In the majority of cases the groups have taken a longer time than had been anticipated, and the cost to the Government in terms of supervision was much more than had been bargained for. I think that in any new Programme, we may have to consider concentrating Aided Self-Help Housing in Greater Georgetown.

Although the housing drive has been concentrated in the lowest income group where the need is greatest, other groups have not been forgotten. 178 middle income lots have been provided at Campbellville. As far as I know, they have all been taken up, and in most cases, building is already completed. We have also experimented by allocating 80 lots at Ruimveldt and La Penitence to persons in the lower middle-income group who will build their own homes. If this proves a success, we hope to do more of this in the new Programme.

It is not enough to build houses for people and leave them to fend for themselves. New communities need community services such as churches and schools, playing fields, shopping areas. This has not been lost sight of in the planning of the new housing estates. A number of schools and churches have already gone up and more are planned. Sites are now being developed for the erection of shops and stores, cinemas and gasolene stations. Applications have already been invited for the purchase of these sites as soon as they have been prepared. It won't be long before the buildings start going up and they are opened for business.

In the planning of the new housing estates, in the design of the buildings, indeed in the formulation and execution of the entire housing programme, the Government has had the expert advice and wholehearted help of the I.C.A. ~~The names of Messrs. Theo Vaughan, Howard Mackey and Frank O'Brien will long be remembered through the length and breadth of British Guiana.~~ *given valuable assistance.*

No aspect of the housing programme has been more misunderstood than the system of awarding houses. ~~Only a few days ago I received a letter from a disappointed applicant who had some hard things to say - I quote: "I know that you and your staff do not appreciate me, because I speak truth; wicked ones hate truth. You in authority keep me from getting a home because you're plain wicked" etc. etc. This only goes to show how emotional one can become over a house. I can assure the writer that no one regrets more than I, that he has not been successful in securing a house. The unfortunate fact is that there have been houses for only a fraction of those in desperate need. It is inevitable that many many deserving cases have been left out until better can be done.~~

~~The actual fact,~~ great care has been taken in the processing of applications.

~~most major~~ *most major* ~~of applicants~~

who appeared to be in real need. They visited both to verify the information given on the form and to assess the conditions. Points were scored on the application form for such factors as overcrowding, a closing order issued by a Local Authority, uninhabitable accommodation, a magistrate's eviction order, ill-health and disability and separated families, among other things.

Short lists of applicants with the highest points were then prepared and as the houses became available the short-listed applicants were called up for an interview by a Committee of the Central Housing and Planning Authority. Only when this Committee was satisfied that an applicant deserved priority was a house awarded. And yet many complaints have been received that some who received houses were not as deserving as some others who were left out. That may well be,. Hardly any system is fool-proof. There was some false information on application forms, and when our investigators went out, I am told certain applicants even borrowed their neighbours' children to bolster their claims. I think it would need a Solomon to be infallible. And yet on the whole, I think the Committee has done a very difficult and thankless task well.

No doubt there is room for improvement and in the months ahead before the new programme gets underway, we shall be examining the existing system of allocation critically. I expect we shall be changing up the form to reflect an improved method of scoring. In anticipation of this we shall be disposing of all the thousands of old completed forms lodged at the Housing Department. We shall start from scratch next year. I must ask all those who are still in need of a house to be patient until applications are invited in 1960. It will serve no useful purpose to send any further applications for the remainder of this year. There are just no more houses to give out. When more houses are built everyone will have an equal chance to apply and equal consideration.