

THUNDER, JULY, 1951.

(77)

"PICTURE OF MISERY"

BY JANET JAGAN.

One hundred and twenty-four souls live in a bleak, square tenement building at 81, Breda Street, Werk-en-Rust. On the ground floor there are two "apartments" and the makings of a shop. On the second and third floors there are 26 small rooms, housing 43 children and 75 adults. The second and third floor each have four toilets and four baths and a communal kitchen. Little else is provided. No electricity—residents have to wire their rooms at their own expense. No locks to the doors—that too is the responsibility of the tenant. No partitions within the 16x10 rooms which in many cases house four adults plus children. No stoves—no one would dare think of that. In fact, there is not enough space for a coal pot for each family in the communal kitchen. Housewife have to take turns. Ventilation and light—each room is blessed with one window, which still leaves darkness and odours in the rooms. Where to wash clothes and hang to dry? —That is no one's business except the individual tenant.

FIRE HAZARD.

There is only one safeguard provided by the landlord, and that is for himself. He has the right and the privilege to extract the sum of \$15 per month for each 16x10 room and \$15.50 for each 11x18 room. Has he worried about fire? To some degree, yes, for he has built a wooden fire escape attached to the wooden building as a means of allowing 124 people to escape. Is there any possibility of fire? Judge for yourself. Before I brought the matter to the attention of the Georgetown Town Council on March 24th, the residents were cooking with their coal pots on wooden shelves. No protection whatsoever! Lately cement slabs on which to rest the coal pots have been built. However, there is yet no protection against fire spreading to the walls and ceiling. There is an urgent need for galvanised sheets to protect all the wooden sections of the building which would come in contact with fire. As no electrical fittings are provided, and the Elec-

each room at the tenant's expense, (besides the fact that all the occupants are very poor), it is left to the tenants to find light by the only means left—the kerosene lamp. Would you think it safe for almost 50 babies and toddlers to live in the 81 Breda Street monstrosity as it is now?

The building was constructed of poor materials and in a cheap manner. Although the building is not yet 6 months completed, the seams between floors and rooms have opened. Water on the floor above causes a steady nuisance to those below. A baby wetting the floor above must cause distress and expense to the occupants below. The sanitation of the yard in particular is terrible, with only one refuse can provided for so many occupants.

When I raised the matter in March; a report on the building was promised to the councillors. However, when Councillor Dorothy Tait brought the attention of the Town Council to the building again on June 9th, it was admitted that the matter had not yet been

A TYPICAL FAMILY.

Let us visit one of the rooms at 81 Breda Street. The occupants of the 11x18 room, are two adults and five children, the eldest child being 16 years of age. The father is a casual labourer, getting jobs when and where he can. When he works he averages \$8 to \$10 per week, but usually cannot obtain regular employment. He generally then works about three weeks in a month. The room has two beds, with a curtain between the two and another make-shift partition to give the little dwelling a sitting room section. Two small tables, a couple of chairs and some pots, dishes etc. make up the household effects. The only expensive item being a sewing machine, which has been obtained at great sacrifice. This is being used by the 16 year old who is learning to sew. What about expenses? Rent is \$15.50 per month. To feed that family, to give it enough bulk at any rate, the mother has to buy at least 28c. worth of bread per day and 2 pints of rice which comes up to about \$12 per month. Milk, sugar, meat or fish, kerosene, wood for the coal pot, soap, clothing, slates for the children—where will it all come from when the rent, bread and rice alone take up almost the whole wages of the father. Many the evening and morning meals which consist of merely a large cup of "bush" tea with a little sugar to make it palatable. Thursday and Friday are the most difficult days in the week, for the money is generally finished by then. Many families do without meals until the week's wages are received on Friday afternoon. Such is the life of the poor in