

populated areas, special opportunities may occur for new designs in housing. For example the North East Polder project in the Netherlands reclaimed many acres of land for agricultural purposes from a shallow sea and new villages sprang up with well-planned dwellings for the farmers and agricultural workers. An influx of refugees necessitated the Thal project in West Pakistan. 12 new towns and 1,000 villages are planned and will be spread over 2 million acres.

A long-term trend away from bricks and timber, towards the use of other materials, largely on the basis of cement, and to some extent steel, continues in many countries. In already developed areas when a local authority is building enough rural houses to make it worth transporting the heavy machinery needed, interlocking units are just swung into place with cranes. The staircases arrive ready made, in one piece, and a complete concrete house of 4-5 rooms with bathroom and modern heating and services is finished, inside and out, in about three days.

To what extent do we find a modern design for living in existing rural homes, in Europe, for instance? U.N. figures published in 1955 show that it is only in Denmark, Western Germany, Norway, Switzerland and the United Kingdom that more than half the dwellings have inside running water. In the countryside baths appear to be a rarity except in the United Kingdom. In Ireland only about 7 per cent of the rural homes have water laid on, and in France about 12 per cent.

The same source gives figures for electricity in rural areas. Here the percentages are much higher: Western Germany 97.9; Denmark 96; Switzerland 95.2; Sweden 86.2; France and Austria about 82; Czechoslovakia 79.1; Norway 76.1; Netherlands about 72 (for farm dwellings alone).

Of recent years many old rural houses have taken on a 'new look'. State aid for conversion, enlargement and modernisation has in fact been mainly confined to rural districts in several countries including Finland, Norway and Sweden and the mountain villages in Switzerland. (Norwegian Government grants are now being considered for the installation of sewerage systems.) Rural District Councils have been responsible for re-conditioning a good many old cottages through grants for specified improvements in the United Kingdom and Austria.

Private efforts have turned outhouses into modern kitchens looking like magazine pictures: large, old kitchens have been replanned with a working section, comprising cooker, sink, etc. within easy reach of each other, and with, perhaps, a dining section, comfortable living section or office section for the busy farmer to do his paper work. American farm journals show photographs of how old wooden farm houses have changed the expression of their faces to meet the demands of young, growing families with new needs and tastes in planning and decorating, and often all this has been achieved by the family's own handwork.

War has been declared on the traditional box beds in cupboards below stairs in many European homes, in France they can often be abolished through the conversion of dark attics into bedrooms by putting dormer windows in the roof.

Soon we hope to show a representative collection of photographs of A.C.W.W. members' homes in the

various countries in a Film Strip under the title "The Homes We Live In".

Stresses and Strains

Rural building programmes were halted for many years in the countries involved in the 1939-45 war. When the fighting was over any available labour and material naturally had to be used in the more urban areas which had suffered most from bombing. But in fact in *all* countries an average rural dwelling is much older than an urban one. Sweden, for example, has a 'young' housing stock, but 40 per cent of the rural and only 18 per cent of the urban houses were built before 1900. Furthermore in many countries a larger proportion of rural houses are built of timber, with a limited expectation of life. In France, however, more than half the rural houses are over 120 years old, but as they are mostly built of natural stone they have a longer life. French figures also show that the population a hundred years ago was as high as 88 per cent of its present level, whereas in many other countries, including Italy, a rapidly increasing population aggravates the housing position.

In the Italian countryside some interesting changes are taking place. Through the centuries the rural population has followed the continental pattern of huddling together in ancient villages and as a result has had to journey long distances to work their plots of land. Now, in the development areas the new rural houses are cleverly grouped, each on their own allotment, but not very far from each other. Even so it is comparatively isolated units.

Our members in the new countries, which are developing their resources through large scale immigration know only too well the stresses and strains of a housing shortage caused by lack of labour and building materials. A variant to this situation is seen in India where there is acute over-population and plenty of unemployed labour but where lack of capital and materials scale down the most imperative housing needs.

Many of us are therefore waiting for the kind of house we would like to turn into a home. But the President of the New Brunswick Federation, in Canada, the birthplace of Women's Institutes, reminds us that one of their original aims was to raise the standard of the home to the highest possible level. She was quoting an article which said: The walls of a house are not built of wood, brick or stone, but of truth and loyalty. Unpleasant sounds, the friction of living, the clash of personalities, are not deadened by Persian rugs or polished floors, but by conciliation, concession and self-control". She added the following words "Your house is your fortress in a warring world, where a woman's hand buckles on the armour in the morning and soothes fatigues at night".

Every homemaker is indeed forging the best armour in the world, and for the world, if through happy family relationships and a considered diet she can enable her family to keep a constructive and balanced attitude in their dealings outside the four walls of the home.