

# he West won't be won in this way

A FAMILY of nine are risking their lives every day they set out from their tiny cottaged home at Uggool, Killadoon, near Louisburgh, overlooking scenic Clew Bay.

To reach the nearest school, through the church, Michael Burke, his wife Mary and their seven children, whose ages range from 1 to 16 years, have to walk from their house Uggool over a half mile stretch of rugged mountain track, cross a portion of Clew Bay itself and then trek over a rapid mountain stream, barefooted or wellingtoned. The stream, when in flood, becomes a raging river—at times impassable.

There are two reasons why 51-year-old Michael and his family must undergo this unusual, dangerous ordeal daily if they wish to remain in contact with their neighbours. First, there is no roadway from their tiny house connecting the nearest village at Killadoon. Secondly, the Land Commission, who are vesting the land to Mr. Burke, refuse to build a road.

## MISERABLE CONDITIONS

The sad result is that the lives of the Burke family are governed by sea tides, although technically they live on land, and they suffer nerve-wracking tension and misery.

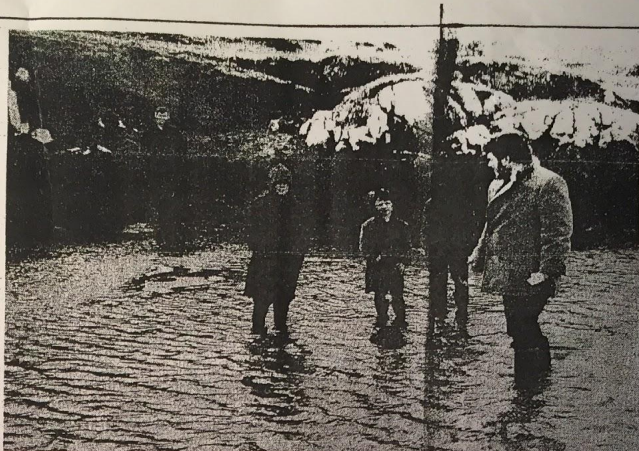
The story began when Mr. Burke's father, a herder, was given a 20-acre holding of the farm which was formerly owned by the Lucan and Sligo Estates by the Congested Districts Board. Since then, his son, Michael, purchased a holding further inland where he now lives. He maintains that when he made the purchase the Land Commission promised him that a roadway would be built to the house. That was over 21 years ago.

"The right of way into my house was put on paper all right but it wasn't put on the ground. The result is that the only way into my home and farm is by a footpath and this is passable only at very low tide," said an angry Mr. Burke.

"You need daylight to walk it as there are scores of little

one can easily lose the way. My wife and children are terrified," he added.

"In the last couple of years I have been straggling very hard to manage. I have seven children and every day that there is a flood I have to take them by hand and help them across the river to school," said Mr. Burke. For his wife, Mary, living on



★ MRS. MARY BURKE, of Uggool, Louisburgh, watches Focus reporter Seamus Counihan see three her children safely to school.

# FOCUS ON Mayo BY SEAMUS COUNIHAN

cliffs and banks. Then there is a river coming out from Clew Bay and when you cross it you enter even rougher land where the peninsula has been a nightmare. "The children are always my chief worry. Especially in winter time when the nights are very dark as well as the mornings when they are going to school two miles away," she said. Apart from facilities for his children Mr. Burke says he cannot carry out his chief livelihood—farming. "Doing any tillage is

completely out of the question. I can't get any machinery into the place. Every year I have to carry over fodder for my cattle. On top of this, the three acre field that I have, has to be cut with a scythe," he said.

The family's misery does not stop there. The local postman is reluctant to cross the river to the Burke household. Instead the letters are handed in to the local school, two miles away where the Burke children collect them and bring them home.

The local doctor is also hampered by the tides of the sea tides.

"Three years ago," said Mr. Burke, "one of my children, Michael, got sick one night. I wasn't sure what was wrong. She was doubled up in pain. The doctor could not come over because of the high tide so I carried her over the mountain in my arms. With the aid of rocks and boards we managed to get her across. When she arrived in Castlebar Hospital it was found that her appendix had burst. But she survived."

Last year the veterinary surgeon could not enter the peninsula from February to June because of high tides. Agnín Mr. Burke was obliged to slaughter some of his 30 cattle were examined there was nothing wrong with them. His biggest problem was getting a gang of men to repair his house after a huge storm. No local contractor would take on the job. A local friend, Mr. [redacted] is battling the elements now and "crosses over whenever it is possible to do the job."

"I am cut off from every social amenity there is. I pay 64c-a-week in rates and as a citizen I feel I am entitled to a roadway into my home the same as everyone else. If I don't get my money I am going to stop paying my taxes and go to jail instead," said Mr. Burke.

"All I can look forward to," added Mrs. Burke, "is all my children emigrating from here. You see, the youth will no longer put up with this sort of living. As they grow bigger they will want more liberty just as other kids. You can't have any dances or liberties in this place.

Asked if he would move his home elsewhere, Mr. Burke said: "I certainly would for the sake of the children. But the Land Commission or the Co. Council would have to fix me up with a home."

Perhaps the saddest aspect of Mr. Burke's twenty-one year wait for a road into his home is the number of promises he has been made by election candidates, campaigners and successive TDs.

"So far, none of these men's promises have been even partly fulfilled. Mr. Michael O Morain promised me personally when he was campaigning in Louisburgh that I would have a road within six months. His successor, Mr. Flanagan, told me at the Mayo Sheepbreeders' Dinner in Westport that a road would be built. It has gone on now for more than two years and I have still no road or even a guarantee of one," he said.

"Every year it is getting more dangerous. The sand is beginning to slide and sometimes I have to use a walking stick to poke it after a flood. My children are missing more and more days at school. When they do go they get wet up to the belt," he added.

"Focus" photographer, Mr. Derek Mandell, and myself had to wait four hours for an ebbing tide so that we could speak to the Burke family. When we actually arrived there, we had walked over treacherous quick-