

1944
NEW ZEALAND

PHYSICAL WELFARE AND RECREATION

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INTRODUCTION

We have set out to rally the young and the old of the nation to a new approach to good health and general welfare.

There is no need to labour or to emphasize the appalling percentage of illness, both physical and mental, not only in this country, but in the world generally. There is no special reason why we should content ourselves because this disturbing condition is present in other countries. It is no exaggeration to say that, before this tragic war was precipitated, nationally and internationally, illness, both physical and mental, was the most far-reaching and the largest industry of all. Larger and still larger hospitals do not afford any consolation. Especially is this so in view of the modern scientific and medical knowledge and in view of the fact we are able to win from Nature the means of life with much more ease than was the case fifty years ago. The hospital institutions should become fewer instead of more.

No good purpose could be served by creating a bad psychological atmosphere or by attempting to lay the blame on this or that section of the community. The unpleasant fact is that we know this condition is with us, and, for the moment, we are content to draw the nation's attention to it and to all that it implies. After all, the medical and surgical sections of the community should know more about reassuring the nation on this question of illness than anybody else, because members of those sections are trained for the work. To reduce their status in the eyes of the community on the grounds of rights of free criticism can do nothing more than shatter the hope of the people we are setting out to build and strengthen.

Hippocrates, the Father of Medicine, in his wisdom, said somewhere that the doctor's greatest influence on his patients was *to dispense hope*. We feel, as he did, that it would be bad to take part in work, of educational or any other nature, which would encourage a nation of sceptics, instead of one which would encourage a spirit of hopefulness in well-being—spiritually, morally, and physically. That is our approach to this great work—to create an attitude of mind and spirit toward the objective of well-being for all. A clean, healthy balance in mental, physical, moral, and spiritual well-being is our objective, and in moving towards that goal, would it be too much to ask for the undivided efforts of all, such as we have had in the waging of this tragic war—not to injure and destroy one another, but to wage a constructive war against the disease and illness which undermine the very foundation of human life.

There is no bar to any person or to any section of the community taking a part in this great work—any section of the community—religious, political, social, or medical—in working for the common objective which affects the health, the lives, and the souls of us all. It is in this spirit we set our course.

There will be no compulsory games; neither will our recreation and recuperative activities be regulated by blue prints. On the contrary, it is intended to encourage the greatest measure of freedom in the development of a good, clean, healthy outlook among our people; to encourage them to take part in the full enjoyment of their own chosen recreations, rather than in any way to be subject to disciplinary action; not to play because they are compelled to do so, but to develop a spirit for the enjoyment of social contacts.

The war has emphasized impressively the vital importance of physical and mental fitness for various tasks which have required full use of national strength on the fighting fronts and the home bases from which the Forces are supplied. Strenuous years of post-war construction will continue to make heavy demands on national strength, so that there will be a certain carry-over of war strain.

If we are candid with ourselves I think we will agree that as a people we tend to live in a too-secluded fashion. To remedy that and to extricate ourselves from that mental attitude we must encourage change, group travel, games, and recreation, health exercises, and recreative holidays of all kinds, in addition to participating in and popularizing all forms of the cultural arts and recreation.

PURPOSES OF THE ACT

The main purpose of the Physical Welfare and Recreation Act of 1937 is now well known to many people. To quote the text of a section, it is concerned with "matters relating to the maintenance and improvement of the physical well-being of the people by means of physical training, exercise, sport and recreation, and social activities related thereto." I believe firmly in having a liberal interpretation of the term "physical well-being," which is broad enough to cover a wide variety of desirable activities for the welfare of individuals and the community as a whole.