

11/63.

Parliamentary Advisory Committee on Nutrition.

Minutes of the first meeting held at Cape Town on Monday, 9th March, 1942.

PRESENT:

- The Hon. H.C. Lawrence, Minister of Public Health (Chairman).
- Senator the Hon. E.H. Brookes.
- Senator the Hon. R. Jones.
- Dr. H. Gluckman, M.P.
- Dr. A.M. Moll, M.P.
- Mr. H. v.d. Merwe, M.P.
- Mrs. Bertha Solomon, M.P.

ABSENT:

- Dr. K. Bremer, M.P.
- Mr. J. Hirsch, M.P.
- Mr. D.C. Burnside, M.P.
- Mr. M. Nentridge, M.P.

IN ATTENDANCE:

- Dr. Peter Allan (Secretary for Public Health), and
- Mr. D. MacD. du Plessis (Secretary, National Nutrition Council).

Mr. Lawrence welcomed the members present to the first meeting of the Committee and expressed regret that four of the members had not found it possible to attend.

With regard to the constitution of the Committee, the Minister said that it had not been appointed in terms of the provisions of Act 14 of 1940, under which the National Nutrition Council had been established, but that he had formed the Committee to obtain the benefit of the advice of those Members of Parliament who had shown a special interest in the subject of nutrition. He hoped that members would express their views freely on the work of the National Nutrition Council since its establishment, as summarised in the statement circulated.

The Minister remarked further that he was concerned about the number of persons serving on the National Nutrition Council. As far as the work of the Council was concerned, it seemed as if some of the recommendations were out of touch with practical affairs. The activities of the National Nutrition Council would, however, be included in the enquiries of the National Health Services Commission.

A/....

A fair amount of criticism had been levelled at the Council and one of the reasons was perhaps the fact that the work of the Council had not received adequate publicity. Progress was, however, being made in two directions, namely:-

(1) The institution of a comprehensive Health Education Campaign.

(2) The establishment of a Nutrition Bureau.

The Health Campaign was intended for the purpose of bringing home to all people in the Union the absolute necessity of carrying out public health measures. The support of all concerned in the matter would be enlisted. It was hoped that the country would respond whole-heartedly to the campaign. A section of the campaign would be devoted to the question of nutrition and the opportunity would be taken to publicise the activities of the National Nutrition Council.

After functioning for eighteen months the Council and all its committees had arrived at the conclusion that no real progress in connection with nutrition problems could be expected unless the Department of Public Health were so staffed that it could cope adequately with the position.

The proposal was that the Bureau should operate under the direction of an officer who had specialised in nutrition as this seemed the only way in which satisfactory progress could be made on the Council's recommendations.

Dr. Moll referred to the statements which had recently appeared in the press concerning the incidence of malnutrition amongst European and non-European school children. The Committee considered that bald statements might shock the public and that they should not be published in their crude form but that suitably worded articles should be prepared for publicity purposes.

Senator Brookes suggested that the Minister consider making a statement on the activities of the Council when the Department's Vote was under consideration in the Senate. He was also of opinion that greater use should be made of the newspapers published in the smaller urban centres and of church papers, women's journals, etc. Publicity should not be concentrated in the press issued in the larger centres only but particularly in the smaller papers as they were in a position to reach most people living in country towns and districts.

Mr. Lawrence stated that he had had the matter of a full statement in mind for some time and that it was his intention not to limit it to the activities of the Council but to include in it all subjects of public health importance.

Senator/...

Senator Jones expressed his approval of the suggestion that a special section for nutrition work be established by the Government. He felt that the officer to be appointed should be responsible for persistent, systematic and co-ordinated publication and distribution of propaganda and educational material on nutrition and general health topics.

Dr. Gluckman explained to the Committee very fully the functions and activities of the National Committee of Health Education of the South African Red Cross Society which he stated was constituted in such a manner as to be able to expand in any direction. He considered that the Committee was in a very favourable position to assist the Department of Public Health in its health and nutrition activities and expressed the hope that the existing relations would be strengthened.

Dr. Moll explained the methods recently adopted in England in connection with the subject of nutritional education by means of printed material such as posters, etc. The scheme had been a very successful one and he suggested that special attention be paid in this country to the education of the poorer classes along similar lines.

Mrs. Solomon stated that she was very much impressed with the Minister's remarks regarding the establishment of a nutrition section in the Department of Public Health and hoped that the right person would be appointed to take charge of it.

Mr. v.d. Merwe stressed the necessity of the introduction of nutritional principles into the homes of the people. He also referred to the appointment of Domestic Science officers in the Department of Agriculture and Forestry and considered that they should be on the staff of the Department of Public Health where they would always be in close touch with modern developments on the subject of nutrition.

After further discussion it was resolved -

"that this Committee expresses its strong approval of (a) the institution of a health campaign by the Department of Public Health, and (b) the proposal to establish an office for nutrition work only."

The next matter on which Mr. Lawrence invited the Committee's comments was the problem of feeding the people under present conditions. He referred to the appointment of a Food Controller by the Government in the person of the Hon. the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry whose task it would be to control the production, distribution and consumption of the nation's food and inquired whether the committee had any suggestions to make which would assist the Food Controller in carrying out his duties ?

The Committee was unanimously of opinion that it was very desirable that the Food Controller should be advised by the National Nutrition Council on nutritional matters and that there should be close collaboration between the two organisations.

After further discussion it was resolved -

"this Committee recommends that in any matter relating to food consumption the Food Controller should consult the National Nutrition Council and the Department of Public Health."

Subsidisation of the food of the poor sections of the community.

Particular attention was drawn by Senator Jones to paragraph 15 on page 6 of the statement regarding the activities of the National Nutrition Council, reading as follows:-

"The Council is convinced that the nation is not making proper provision for ensuring an adequate supply of protective foods at sufficiently low prices in relation to the needs of the community and is, therefore, seriously perturbed at the prospect of increasing malnutrition in the future."

He suggested that the time was ripe for consideration to be given to the question of the subsidisation of the food of the poorer classes. The matter had previously been raised by the National Marketing Council. He recommended that it be investigated and that it be further considered at the next meeting in conjunction with paragraphs 10(a) and (b), 14 and 15 of the statement.

Resolved -

"that the necessary action be taken as suggested by Senator Jones."

Mrs. Solomon invited the Committee's attention to paragraph 13 of the statement to the effect that special reference must be made to the unfortunate fact that existing methods of educating doctors and other health workers stress almost entirely the subject of health with the result that the majority of doctors and even of public health workers, have little conception indeed of what health is or the basis on which it rests and hence are unable to give simple information to people who require it. She considered that the Committee should express its approval of these views and that the matter be taken up.

In/...

In conjunction with this matter Mrs. Solomon also expressed the opinion that the time was opportune for the Government to consider the report of the Committee on Medical Training, 1939.

In concluding the deliberations of the Committee, the Minister was pleased to say that the meeting had served a very useful purpose and he thanked the Members for the valuable suggestions and recommendations made by them in the course of the discussions.

Future Meetings.

In view of the fact that members of the Committee all serve on various standing parliamentary committees and consequently find it difficult or impossible to spare time for any other work, it was resolved -

"that future meetings of the Committee be arranged during the first ten days of the Session of Parliament."

CONFIRMED.

CHAIRMAN.

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Secretary.

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Date.

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