

*Tariff Board—Mr. Ralston*

views that I feel I should take this opportunity of expressing them. Let me first say that I appreciate the fact that the hon. Minister of National Revenue (Mr. Ryckman), who has just sat down, has at least come out and faced man-fashion the objection which has been made frequently from this side of the house, and an objection which is no objection in detail but an objection which I believe goes to the fundamentals of this bill.

With regard to his remarks regarding the jurisdiction given to this tariff board to replace the board of customs, let me remind him that the shocking state of affairs to which he refers, namely, that the board of customs could sit and review the decision of its chairman, is not unknown in legislation which was passed by my hon. friend's friends not very many years ago. Let me remind the house that pensions in this country for ex-service men were administered by a board of pension commissioners, and that the only appeal which was provided by the act which was passed by my hon. friend's friends was an appeal to two members of the very board which had made the decision in the first place, and that was the only method of review. There was no reference to a minister, no opportunity to go to the governor in council. The applicant who had been refused his pension had simply the questionable privilege of going back to two of the same men who had made the decision in the first place and asking that their decision be reversed. So my hon. friend should not be too greatly shocked at the state of affairs which he presented. Let me impress it upon the house, if I may, that the decision to which he refers and the shocking state of affairs which he portrays does not appear in just exactly the same light that he would have it when he admits that the decision of the board of customs is a decision which must be approved by the minister, and is not a decision such as that of of the pension board which was final and not subject to review by anybody. As I said before my hon. friend has dealt fairly and as squarely as he could with one of the vital objections to the bill. My hon. friend the Minister of Railways and Canals (Mr. Manion) in the course of his eloquent speech left until the very last minute his remarks concerning this fundamental objection, namely, the ten year tenure of office of the members of the board. The hon. member who spoke to us later in the evening skated entirely over the matter of tenure of office.

I venture to say that we have now before us the consummation of a series of enactments the like of which has not been seen

[Mr. Ralston.]

in any responsible government anywhere. This series began last September, and I am afraid with such enactments following each other so thick and fast we are becoming callous and hardly realize what is taking place. Last September with practically no consideration there were amendments to about two hundred tariff items, and an entirely new tariff policy was inaugurated at a special session called to deal with unemployment. At that same session power was given to the minister practically to revolutionize the tariff by authorizing him through no less than five different sections of the Customs Act to fix arbitrarily the prices of commodities, and consequently to fix the tariff on goods which must be paid by the people of this country. Following that, and without any tariff board, there is brought down at this session another long list of increases to the tariff. I believe reconsideration is already being given to quite a few of those tariff items due to the fact that in the first instance proper consideration was not given. In addition to the tariff changes proposed in the budget now before us we have here a bill which by its provisions would saddle the country with a board which would take tariff matters largely out of the hands of the representatives of the people, and the government asks that the board be placed in office for a period of ten years. It may be that the people of Canada realize what has taken place during the last eight or ten months, but if by chance they are not aware of the changes which have taken place I think it is the duty of hon. members at least to bring it to their attention.

The powers of the proposed board have already been thoroughly discussed. I should like to remind the house again however that the proposed board has the power to make an inquiry and report on what increases or decreases in rates of duties are necessary to equalize the differences in costs of production, to make a report on the effect of the increases or decreases of existing rates of duty, to make a report on the extent to which the consumer is being exploited and finally—and this section to my mind is as important as any—by section 4 subsection 5 there is provision that the board is empowered to inquire into any other matter or thing in relation to the trade or commerce of Canada which the governor in council sees fit to refer to the board for inquiry and report. I would ask hon. members to bear in mind that all these inquiries are to be made under the direction of the minister. To my mind that would indicate how nonpartisan and independent the board is really expected to be.