

Combines Investigation Act

the passage. I was at the committee meetings and I recall this discussion with Mr. Gilbert and others. The hon. member was kind enough to refer me to pages 136, 137 and 138 and following.

To get down to whether the retail merchants association made any representations to the C.C.F. party with respect to this bill or its predecessor, Bill No. C-59, this is not so. Mr. Gilbert of the retail merchants association made no such representations. We had a meeting with him. When this question arose in the committee I am reported as saying, as found on page 137:

Mr. Chairman, what Mr. Gilbert said was quite correct; we did meet with him in April or May of 1958.

The hon. member for Kenora-Rainy River then said that it was 1959. I was incorrect as to the year and I was also incorrect as to the month. We did have a meeting with Mr. Gilbert, and I have a letter from him dated March 2, 1959, addressed to myself. The letter is from the retail merchants association of Canada and it is signed by D. A. Gilbert, general manager. The letter reads:

I want to express my sincere appreciation for the time devoted to me by the C.C.F. caucus meeting on Monday, February 23—

It was on Monday, February 23, 1959, that we had this meeting with Mr. Gilbert at which we discussed a number of matters. One of those matters was financial aid to small business which this government promised, incidentally, but has not put into effect and probably will not unless they happen to do so before an election. This was one point in our discussion and, as Mr. Gilbert points out in his letter, we discussed also the orderly marketing of consumer goods. This was the only meeting that we had with Mr. Gilbert and I point out that this was February 23, 1959, a full four months before Bill No. C-59 was introduced last year. He made no representations whatever on this Bill No. C-58.

Mr. Aiken: May I ask the hon. member a question?

Mr. Howard: Yes.

Mr. Aiken: Was Mr. Gilbert ever asked to appear before a caucus of the C.C.F. party to give his views?

Mr. Howard: I thought I indicated that this morning.

Mr. Aiken: What the hon. member said was that he had written a letter asking Mr. Gilbert to write. I am asking if he ever—

Mr. Howard: My hon. friend does not mind if I answer the question. I read this letter this morning, and it was written on May 11

[Mr. Howard.]

which, I believe, would be five days after the introduction of Bill No. C-58 by the minister. It is addressed to Mr. Gilbert at the correct address as shown on his initial correspondence with us. I sent him a copy of the bill and asked him for the benefit of his thoughts. He was told verbally that he was always welcome, but we asked Mr. Gilbert at that time for the benefit of his thoughts. We not only have not received the benefit of his thoughts in any personal way, but we have not had the courtesy of an answer to our letter.

Mr. Aiken: But what I rose—

Mr. Howard: Let me finish the answer to your question, and then you can ask another one. I mentioned this very matter in the committee to Mr. Gilbert when Mr. Gilbert said he had met with the C.C.F. party in a caucus meeting about May or April of last year on this very subject, and then he met with members of the Tory party and the Liberal party. I pointed out to Mr. Gilbert that he would recall that when the bill was tabled in the house I sent a copy to him as soon as it was possible to do so. I had asked Mr. Gilbert if he would care to make his opinion available to us and I had not had any answer so far. Mr. Gilbert replied that that was quite understandable. I imagine it is quite understandable. Perhaps he did not have any intention of replying or giving us his opinion. The fact is that I personally wrote him a letter, sending him a copy of this bill and asking him for the benefit of his thoughts. I do not mean to imply that this was my personal letter. I wrote it on behalf of the C.C.F. party.

As I have said, I did not get the benefit of his thoughts or even the courtesy of a reply. All I received was a smart crack to the effect that the reason I did not get an answer was quite understandable. This is quite unfortunate—

Mr. Aiken: I was just going to ask the hon. member if he had finished answering that question. I do have one more I want to ask. Was it not a fact that in committee the result of the complaint was that, for once, the Conservative members came to the committee too well prepared?

Mr. Martin (Essex East): That is not the way I remember it.

Mr. Howard: I doubt if the Conservative members have ever been too well prepared on anything. I would point out, however, that they did come to this meeting having had presented to them a document which was