The Constitution

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Simmons: The hon. member for Yellowhead (Mr. Clark), or my good friend the hon. member for Dartmouth-Halifax East (Mr. Forrestall), could not have read the document or clearly have not understood the proposal if that is what they allege. One of the clearly stated provisions of this particular document is that it would guarantee that for all time all future changes in our constitution would require the agreement, the consensus of the provincial governments. That hardly sounds—

An hon. Member: Sit down.

Mr. Simmons: I will sit down if the hon. member for Athabasca (Mr. Shields) will let me read it to him. He may learn something. Very clearly in the documentation it states that from the day the committee comes back with a finished proposal, only by consensus will the details of the amending formula be left to the provinces as well. Only by consensus will we be able to change the constitution.

● (2140)

Mr. Forrestall: There are other ways.

Mr. Simmons: I say to the hon. member for Dartmouth-Halifax East that there is one other way. We can ask the people of Canada, which I happen to think is a very sensible way of doing things. We can ask the people who put us here. The government is not afraid of doing that. The Leader of the Opposition expressed some fear. He was dealt with rather badly by the people of Canada before, so he should be apprehensive about going back to them again.

Mr. Forrestall: Were you here when he spoke?

Mr. Simmons: As much as I would have liked to, I was not able to sit here yesterday and hear the hon. Leader of the Opposition. I was down in the riding of my good friend, the hon. member for Northumberland (Mr. Hees), helping some of his constituents who dearly wanted to hear some points about the constitution. I was delighted to go down and give them of my wisdom on the subject. I was not here but I read with interest not only the press reports of the speech of the Right Hon. Leader of the Opposition but also the actual text of *Hansard,* the transcription of what he said. The first sentence which caught my eye was:

By destroying the federal system in Canada it could destroy this country.

He was referring to this proposal. I say to him, welcome to the twentieth century. That is what we were trying to tell him during his brief days in power. That is exactly what we were trying to tell him. He hardly crossed the threshhold of power and he was giving orders to put out the fire sale signs, to give it away to the provincial governments completely. He insisted on doing it from the day he took office. At long last my good friend from Yellowhead has seen the light. I have no doubt that it has something to do with the fact that he sits next to my very good and wise friend, the hon. member for Nepean-Carleton (Mr. Baker). He is a sensible man if ever there was one, a

man who will not stand idly by and see trampled the precepts and the principles for which John Diefenbaker fought. For that I admire the hon. member for Nepean-Carleton and the public statements he has made in the past few days on this particular subject. As the chief watches us from up there somewhere tonight, he must be having a double nightmare. First, his main protagonist during his last years in this House, the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau), is now doing what he, Mr. Diefenbaker, would have done had he been given the opportunity. He would have done that very thing. Indeed, while he was in power he tried to do it, not through legislation but by another route, the route we are going now. But he was prevented from doing it by provincial governments of his own party stripe. That is the first thing which must make him turn over tonight. He must be having a nightmare tonight. Second, it is insult enough to have one's main protagonist step in and do what one would have done, but the insult of insults is to find one's successor, once removed the leader of one's party, a fellow westerner not having the gratitude and loyalty and lacking the common decency to pick up the torch when one was obliged to yield it. We know the lines which read as follows:

To you from failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high.

"No, Joe. Not upside down, Joe, you will get your hands burnt that way." When the government decided to proceed with the patriation of our constitution, it became aware of the complexities attached to making an address to Her Majesty the Queen. Asking Parliament to deal with so detailed a measure in one gulp would be like asking a man to swallow a watermelon whole.

I say to my hon. friend whose riding escapes me, as it escapes him, that at this point in time I am proposing to respond to two or three points the Right Hon. Leader of the Opposition raised questions about yesterday. I invite my good friend from the west to listen. He may well learn something; it is highly possible. Asking Parliament to deal with so detailed a measure as we have here would be quite an assignment. The rules of debate are such, as members know, that attempts to propose amendments would be awkward and difficult in this particular forum. The government did not consider this reasonable or fair and consequently it decided that the best course was not to put before Parliament what amounted to a *fait accompli*, but to present Parliament with certain ideas, the ideas of the government obviously. It decided that it was best then to appoint a joint committee of both Houses, this chamber and the Senate chamber, in effect to draft the address to be presented to the Queen. That is the assignment, not to rubber stamp but to take this particular document before us as a working paper to draft an address to Her Majesty the Queen. The proposed address which we published on October 2 and tabled here on Monday is a working paper. Naturally we on this side hope the recommendations of the committee when brought back to this chamber will be similar to the proposed address as contained in the document. But by no means are we wedded to every detail in it. In his opening statement the Prime Minister indicated we are looking forward to a frank