

Houses on the subject of Printing; also, Committee on Standing Orders and Private Bills; and also, Committee on Reporting Debates for the present session.

That the name of the Honourable Mr. Snowball be added to the Select Committees on Railways, Telegraphs and Harbours, Banking and Contingent Accounts, for the present session.

And that the name of the Honourable Mr. Sullivan be added to the Joint Committee of both Houses on the subject of Printing for the present session.

The motion was agreed to.

THE BEHRING SEA CONTROVERSY.

INQUIRY.

HON. MR. MACDONALD (Victoria).—Before the Orders of the Day are called, with the permission of the House, I beg to ask, to-day, the question which I have placed on the Orders for to-morrow. It is as follows:—

Is the Imperial Government in active consultation with the Government of the Dominion in its negotiations with the Government of the United States, on all questions referring to Behring Sea, the probability of Dominion vessels being excluded therefrom, and preventing the taking of seals therein?

Hon. gentlemen will remember the attitude assumed by the Imperial Foreign Office on this question two years ago, when the United States Government was given to understand that no more seizures of British vessels in Behring Sea would be tolerated, the result being that our vessels have been allowed since then to pursue their avocations unmolested. I need not say that such a firm policy gave much satisfaction throughout the country. We now find there is to be a divergence from that policy, and a coalescing of the two powers immediately concerned to exclude British and American vessels from Behring Sea. This last phase of the question may cause very serious loss to our sealers, a contingency which I hope the Government of the Dominion has well safeguarded. The present proposal, if carried out, will raise important questions of international law. This sea not being a closed sea, it is consequently a portion of the open Pacific Ocean. Have any two nations the right to step in, during a time of peace, and arrest peaceable citizens in the pursuit of their trade or calling? Supposing these vessels are placed under the flag of any other nation, would they be exempt from seizure? Forty-nine vessels have been fitted out in British Columbia this summer for sealing purposes, and if hon. gentle-

men will consider the value of these vessels, with their stores and outfit, they will see how large are the interests involved; and if these vessels, without due warning of the new position about to be taken, are suddenly cut off from their work, the House will see how great and serious the loss will be. I hope the hon. Minister will be able to tell us that this Government has been taken into the confidence of the Imperial Government on this question, and that the important interests involved have been guarded by the Dominion Government.

HON. MR. KAULBACH.—I may be excused from saying a word on this question, when it is considered that we in the Maritime Province are equally interested with my hon. friends from British Columbia in the preservation of the seal fisheries on the Pacific coast. In fact, a large number of our fishermen from the Lower Province have gone there in pursuit of seals; from the town in which I come several vessels have been purchased and are now engaged in the prosecution of the seal fishing on the Pacific coast. No doubt, if they are prevented from carrying out the purpose of the voyage they should receive some compensation for any injury they may suffer by being debarred from pursuing their calling. This close season, agreed upon between England and the United States, is practically an admission that the latter have no exclusive right to protect the seals. I am speaking now from what I have learned from reading the correspondence between the Home Government and the United States, and the question has narrowed down, not to whether Behring Sea is a *mare clausum*, but whether Russia, at the time she ceded Alaska to the United States, under the terms of the transfer in 1867, gave the exclusive right to the seal fisheries also. That right they claim under the Ukase issued by Emperor Alexander in 1821, prohibiting foreign vessels from approaching within 100 miles of the coast and islands belonging to Russia in Behring Sea. How far those claims were conceded or recognized by Great Britain is the question that it is now being practically narrowed down to.

HON. MR. ABBOTT.—My hon. friend's question, as I find it on the Paper, is one which I think I can with perfect propriety