

office to get their mail. When they get there they have to stand in line and often suffer the abuse and the hardships that are related to that kind of activity, and at the end of the year they get a bill for using the post office in that fashion, the bill, of course, being for the post office box. Obviously there is a serious discrepancy there.

I wonder if the minister wants to make a comment on this, whether the terms of reference that are to be issued to the new Crown corporation will recognize the needs of rural areas, whether thought is being given in the department to charging for the service that is dispensed in the cities commensurate with or similar to the service that people have to pay for in the rural areas.

All of us are painfully aware of the incredible cost of postal service in the country and all of us are committed to bringing these costs in line. But we cannot have it both ways. If the box rentals and the services that are provided in the rural areas continue to go up and if there is a continuation of eliminating many of those services, as has, of course, been the case in many of the northern areas of our country, then I suppose the people in the northern areas have a right to expect that people who live in cities will pay an equal share of maintaining this essential and proud service. I should like to give the minister an opportunity to comment and to assure us that he is cognizant of the situation.

Mr. Fraser: I want to thank the hon. member for raising this issue. He comes from a riding in which a great many people live in rural areas and he is cognizant of the situation he describes. I invite the hon. member and others to bring to my attention anomalies which come to their attention. I have noticed there is no hesitation on the part of hon. members to approach me directly with regard to problems in the Post Office.

I will say this: the cost of providing a national postal service is high. However, hon. members will be pleased to know that, as stated in the annual report—and I am generously giving some credit to the former postmaster general who is here with us in the House—the deficit is going down. It is down again by another \$70 million or \$80 million. The total deficit, if one includes the revenues the Post Office produces, is about \$450 million. There are departments in the government which cost much more than that to operate. I am not saying the cost is not high; I am saying the cost is going down.

I can also tell hon. members that in some respects the service is actually increasing and getting better, though I know there are serious difficulties and some anomalies. I thank the hon. member for bringing them to my attention.

Clause agreed to.

Clause 2 agreed to.

Title agreed to.

The Chairman: Shall the bill carry?

Some hon. Members: Carried.

Bill reported.

Postal Rates

Mr. Deputy Speaker: When shall the bill be read the third time? Now?

Mr. Knowles: By leave.

Mr. Fraser moved that the bill be read the third time and do pass.

Mr. John Rodriguez (Nickel Belt): As the first speaker on third reading, I shall not delay the House but I do believe some closing remarks are in order before we pass this bill.

First, I want to say that the performance of the Postmaster General (Mr. Fraser) this afternoon augurs well for the future.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Rodriguez: I can only hope when they split his personality between Environment and the Post Office that common sense will prevail and that the powers that be will allow him to maintain his role as Postmaster General. I think he may have an easier time dealing with postal problems than with Inco.

• (1730)

The answers which the Postmaster General has given this afternoon were positive in tone, and I want to say that if this attitude is carried forward, then I think the people of Canada can expect an improvement in postal services. I was particularly impressed with the emphatic way in which he dealt with the question of keeping the Post Office together as an entity and his determination to transform the Post Office into a Crown corporation. Indeed, it was a welcome statement from the front benches these days which runs contrary to the neo-Conservative movement on the other side, according to which, instead of privatizing, we are now seeing a move toward Crown incorporating. That is indeed a most welcome statement.

It seems that the Postmaster General has come down firmly on the side of service. He recognizes that in a mixed economy there is a role for a Crown corporation to play, a Crown corporation that has unitary management and that can indeed cross-subsidize from those operations that are profitable to those that are mainly providing a service, and hence will oftentimes run a deficit. That is indeed a welcome principle to be established.

One would only hope that his sweet voice of reason with respect to the Post Office can sway those neo-Conservative minds on the other side with regard to Petro-Canada, because, in the same way, one can see Petro-Canada as being a service to the people of Canada. Indeed, it is a very appropriate comparison. It can be readily compared to the securing of energy for the Canadian people, in the form of the very oil that lights our industry and that keeps this great country going. When one compares it to mail delivery, one recognizes that it is equally, if not more, important.

I was also very pleased with the minister's attitude, certainly a very open attitude, towards those who are unionized in the Post Office as well as toward postal workers who are not unionized. The minister has an openness of attitude toward