

ECONOMICS, LABOR & BUSINESS

*The Debtor's
Dilemma*

"Primrose Path to Bankruptcy" by Vern Countryman, in *The Nation* (Sept. 4, 1976), 333 Sixth Ave., New York, N.Y. 10014.

The Federal Bankruptcy Act falls far short of giving the debtor the "fresh start" the Supreme Court said was one of the law's primary purposes, writes Countryman, professor of law at Harvard. It's like "applying a Band-Aid to a gaping wound."

Originally passed by Congress in 1898, the Act was last revised significantly in 1938 and still reflects the attitudes and practices of an earlier era. For example, archaic state laws still prevail regarding the property a debtor may keep to make his "fresh start." In Connecticut, the debtor may retain (as he could in 1821) "ten bushels each of Indian corn and rye," and South Carolina exempts, as it has since 1895, a \$1,000 homestead.

The bankruptcy problem is growing rapidly. The number of Americans applying for remedy under the federal act rose from 10,000 in 1946 to 255,000 in 1975. (A Brookings Institution study found that the typical bankrupt is a 36-year-old married industrial worker with three years of high-school education, three children, yearly income of \$5,200 and \$5,000 in debts.) Most overburdened debtors seek "straight" bankruptcy under which their nonexempt assets are liquidated and the proceeds, after payment of court costs, are applied to the claims of creditors. The debtor preserves what exempt assets he can under prevailing state law and obtains a bankruptcy discharge of his debts.

A federal Bankruptcy Commission studied the problem for two years and proposed some major reforms in 1973. Now Congress is looking at a variety of suggested changes. Some would treat consumer debtors more harshly, others would ease their plight. Enactment of legislation that might improve the present "Band-Aid" law, says Countryman, is at least a year or two away.

*Occupational Sexism
In the Soviet Union*

"Occupational Segregation and Public Policy: A Comparative Analysis of American and Soviet Patterns" by Gail Warshofsky Lapidus, in *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* (vol. 1, no. 3, Part II), 5801 Ellis Ave., Chicago, Ill. 60637.

There are many similarities in the patterns of female employment in the United States and the Soviet Union, despite much-publicized differences in approach to the issue of women and work.

In America, says Lapidus, professor of sociology and political science at Berkeley, the de facto segregation of most women into low-status, low-paying jobs reflects a culture which traditionally has upheld male primacy in the economic realm. Such traditions are expressly repudiated by the Soviet regime, which officially promotes full equality for