panies, automobile finance firms and installment houses. There are myriad reasons why they get into debt. One might be that overtime work is no longer available or a costly crisis illness suddenly makes their burden of debt unbearable. Easy credit and the proliferation of easy-to-obtain credit cards form the quicksand into which the less sophisticated and more gullible sink. They quickly find themselves almost inextricably up to their necks in debt with the resultant dunning by creditors from every direction. In their desperation, they become easy prey to the glib debt-adjuster.

The debt-adjuster, through craftily-designed misleading advertising, seems to offer these debtors a way out of their predicament. One need only read the newspaper ads and the yellow pages and note the clever way in which the ads are written. These ads do not offer to pay off the debtor's creditors nor do they offer credit to the debtor, but the less sophisticated could easily interpret otherwise. This is the bait.

Once the debtor is in the hands of the debt-adjuster, the adjuster usually takes his fee right off the top and frequently this fee runs up to phenomenal amounts—25% is not unusual—and the creditors are not satisfied. So instead of the creditors receiving partial payments on a pro-rata basis, in most cases they receive nothing with the result that the original debt is not only increased but that the payment of the debt is delayed even longer and the dunning of the debtor by his creditors increases to a shrill pitch. Meanwhile, the debt-adjuster invariably has airily advised the debtor to ignore his creditors and assures the debtor that he, the adjuster, will handle everything. For instance, I was recently advised by the credit manager of one of Washington's major department stores that even though he had cautioned an individual that his credit card for that particular store should no longer be used, a debt-adjuster advised the individual to go right ahead and use the credit card. The truth is that once the adjuster takes his fat fee right off the top, it isn't surprising that he is no longer interested in whether the debtor maintains his payments—in fact, if the debtor drops out it relieves the adjuster of further paper work. The adjuster has made his killing and the debtor is left holding the bag.

Many of the firms currently operating in the District are chiseling outfits that migrated here because they have been outlawed in 22 States including, happily, my own State of Virginia. The State of Maryland is currently considering legislation; the City of Baltimore, to its credit, has itself adopted an ordinance completely outlawing debt-adjusting in that City. It is important to note that all those States and local jurisdictions, which approximate 70 in number, have outlawed debt adjusting as an evil.

To summarize the major reasons why professional debt-adjusters should be outlawed, I would underscore:

1. Their use of deceptive advertising. They use no description of their method or the fees they charge.
2. The fees are unconscionable.
3. A careful questioning of creditors fails to show even a reasonable percentage of cases where a debtor's credit problems were solved.
4. Consistent failure to fulfill agreements.
5. The debtor's debts are actually increased by the adjuster's high charges for a service which a debtor could do for himself. Most of the debt-adjusters take all or a major part of their initial fees out of the first monies paid in by the debtor. By doing so debt-adjusters brashly exhibit their unwillingness to place themselves and their fees on an equal pro-rated basis with the debtor's creditors. In this regard they completely unmask the pose of sincerity which they present to the public and the debtors. It seems reasonable to ask how can debt adjusters pretend ability to act as acceptable liaison agents with a debtor's creditors when they cynically collect their fees ahead of these creditors and before they perform the service for which they charge the debtor?
6. Most important, many creditors absolutely refuse to deal with debt-adjusters. This is easily verifiable in the District. That alone should prove the uselessness of the debt-adjuster.

According to the District authorities, the complaints against debt-adjusters, in addition to those just mentioned, fall into approximately three major categories:

1. The adjuster, upon receipt of the debtor's pay check, fails to make any part of it or enough of it available to the debtor to live on.
2. The adjuster fails to pay a creditor with whom he has made an arrangement on behalf of the debtor resulting in the creditor attaching the debtor's salary.
3. Some adjusters have favored certain creditors over others for his own personal gain but at the expense of the debtor.