consumers to incur further increases in debt." The Nova Scotia Royal Commission on the Cost of Borrowing Money, the Cost of Credit and Related Matters, points out the need for statistics on personal finances of consumers. The report of that Commission observes that the degree to which individuals are excessively committed cannot be determined by reference in general to the financial position of consumers. Professor Neufeld of the University of Toronto has also spoken of the need for "data on personal disposable income and net worth of individuals using consumer credit."

Although it is subject to the same limitation that it deals with "the average borrower", one of the few informed opinions that has come to our notice concerning a safe amount of credit for an individual to assume, is found in a statement made to the Ontario Committee by the chartered banks. They suggest that "instalment obligations up to 15 per cent of net income, exclusive of residential mortgages" would be reasonable. One who represented the Consumers' Association of Canada at the hearings of our Committee, recently told the Canadian Home Economics Association that only families who have an income above subsistence level can afford to use credit at all. Well publicized recent studies suggest that roughly one-fifth of Canadians are in what is declared to be the poverty group. It would therefore seem that her estimate that about 10 per cent of Canadian families are unable to cope with credit is no exaggeration. The words of the final report of the Commons Banking and Commerce Committee of June 1, 1938 bear repeating to-day: "The unhappy lot of those who have a deficit economy, in the sense that they are chronically unable to live within their income, is not to be bettered by borrowing (no matter the rate)."

Consumer credit can take various forms, but not all kinds of credit are available to the low-income groups who do not usually possess assets which can be pledged for security. Banks and insurance companies lend mainly to those who are better off, leaving the poor people—unless they can borrow from credit unions—to the small loans companies, retail credit dealers and the sales finance companies, all of whom, for reasons explained elsewhere, charge high rates.

A man may borrow from one party to pay another in cash, or he may deal with a merchant who sells him an article (or a service) and at the same time lends him the money to pay for it. If, as often happens, the retailer sells the instalment contract to a finance company, the debtor may be obliged to make his payments to one who has no obligation whatever to him. But the sale of the original agreement to pay does not change the nature of the transaction. The essential unity in consumer credit is the fact that it practically always arises out of the sale of goods and services, and in every case it creates debts which the consumer undertakes to pay.

From the point of view of the consumer, then, the important first question is whether or not he can afford to add to his commitments. This is something which the wise buyer decides for himself. But temptation is great in a world of easy credit, and not everyone is sufficiently well informed to make a rational decision. The danger is that poor people will, through lack of understanding of the consequences, bite off more than they can chew. At a conference on consumer credit held at the University of Saskatchewan a few months ago, a Co-Chairman of this Committee observed that the poor need protection because "they are more gullible, more easily cheated, less conscious of the quality of goods they buy, more likely to over-commit themselves, more likely to deal with high cost neighbourhood stores and pedlars, less aware of credit charges, less able to understand and assert their rights." He added that, "For them a missed pay cheque spells disaster."