

# Debt Makes The World Go Round

**D**EBT has become the "in" thing in the struggle for power and prestige. The more you can borrow, it seems, the higher your notches on the economic and social totem poles.

Instead of debtors being " beholden" to lenders, bigger borrowers may outrank those whose money they are using.

The whole world is in debt. Countries, states, businesses and individuals have obligated themselves, legally or morally, to reimburse creditors for cash, goods or services.

Several days ago The Wall Street Journal devoted six pages to a review of the debts of nations. It was not much consolation to note that the United States is not as deeply in the red as some other countries, because we owe plenty.

Only a financial wizard would be able to comprehend the hundreds of billions of dollars cited in the reports. We Americans use curious similes to help us visualize our debt.

We are told that, if gathered into a stack of dollar bills, our national debt would reach one-fourth the way to the moon, or pay for a new small car for every adult American.

Taxpayers can understand that unrestricted piling up of debt can be disastrous. Surveys have shown that the majority favor a constitutional amendment to compel Congress to "live within Uncle Sam's income."

Congress doesn't seem to be much interested in such a limitation, preferring to "spend and elect," shifting blame for the perpetually unbalanced budget to whoever is president.

Oklahoma has a prohibition on state debt except by vote of the people. That didn't keep the Legislature from converting a \$300 million revenue surplus into \$300 million tax increases in about a year. Gov. George Nigh said he thinks most people want this kind of "progress."

Congress and the Legislature use similar practices when it comes to

spending money and cutting down on expenses. Both use a shovel to scoop it out and a spoon to cut taxes.

Business indebtedness also is up, increasing 188 per cent in the last 10 years. Indebtedness of people has gone up nearly as much, keeping pace with government spending.

Department of Commerce statistics show the value of land, buildings, machinery, natural resources, housing and personal belongings in the United States was nearly \$12.5 trillion at the end of 1982. That averages to \$53,800 for every man, woman and child in the country.

At the end of 1983, total public-private debt was calculated at \$26,566 for each American. A report of the Joint Economic Committee of Congress last year declared the possibility of the government going broke is remote.

So, eat, drink and be merry on what you can borrow. It's no longer what you own but what you owe that counts.