

They've Got a Little List

Do you reach for the pile of mail your postman has brought, thinking eagerly of letters from family and friends, of an invitation to join some pleasurable or profitable venture, or perhaps a tax refund? And do you find all too often that what you have instead is a collection of gaudy and unwanted sales pitches for everything from Florida real estate to cut-rate tomatoes featured at the local supermarket?

If that is your all but daily experience, as it is for most Americans, you will not take it kindly that some of your commercial correspondents bought your name and address from agencies of the United States Government. Representative Ken Hechler of West Virginia, concerned with a citizen's right to keep uninvited salesmen from lurking in his mailbox, has drawn up a list of Federal agencies engaged in this obnoxious traffic.

Ham radio operators, obliged to get licenses from the Federal Communications Commission, soon find themselves on the mailing lists of radio equipment companies which have bought their names and addresses from the commission at \$55 per reel of computer tape.

Amateur sailors are besieged by the boating industry, which does similar business with the license-issuing Coast Guard. Names and addresses are bartered for a fee by the Atomic Energy Commission, the Railroad Retirement Board and the Department of Commerce. Other agencies sell names for the cost of reproducing their lists.

The Internal Revenue Service sells no names but will supply data on request indicating comparative income areas by zip code. This is ideal marketing information for bulk mailers, more interested in people's neighborhoods than in their names, which may be boiled down to "Occupant."

The new United States Postal Service, when it is organized, may or may not raise third-class rates in order to discourage bulk mail, which is now more than a fifth of the load on the mailman's back. But Representative Hechler is not prepared to wait. He has laudably introduced a bill to prohibit the sale of such lists by government agencies. The Treasury needs that kind of money even less than recipients need that kind of mail.