

THE EVER-INCREASING COLLECTION of personal data on U.S. citizens, now computerized and subject to instant reference, has been widely denounced as an invasion of privacy — but little if anything has been done about it.

Now, reliable evidence indicates that the FBI has been compiling secret dossiers on members of Congress, and the legislators' cries of dismay suggest that something may soon be done about it.

At least three congressional committees are preparing to examine evidence that the CIA has accumulated files on some 10,000 Americans and that the FBI, during the J. Edgar Hoover years at least, has gathered a wide assortment of intimate personal data on U.S. Senators and Representatives. Reports that such information was used to blackmail Congressmen have been denied, but as California's Senator Cranston has observed: "It's a threat even if it is just there and not leaked or gathered for blackmail."

REPRESENTATIVE KASTENMEIER of Wisconsin, chairman of the Judiciary Committee's subcommittee on administration of justice, proposes to summon past and present officials of the FBI to an investigation of what he calls a coverup "as insidious as Watergate" about its files that could "intimidate" Congressmen and threaten destruction of our form of government.

If Congressmen don't like the idea of their names going into FBI dossiers, they have the undoubted power to get these files destroyed. To destroy them, moreover, might lead to the overdue destruction of other records that invade private citizens' privacy. Aryeh Neier, executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union, drew cheers when he told the Commonwealth Club last week that new legislation to protect such privacy is needed. Personal files kept by schools, the military, employment agencies and financial organizations are capable, ultimately, of swamping individual freedom.