

# HEW Stops Condom Program

(Special to *The Wanderer*)

WASHINGTON, C.C. — The Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) has quietly terminated a program that mailed unsolicited sex information and "condom stamps" in unmarked envelopes to teen-age boys.

These stamps, subsidized with the taxpayers' money, read as follows: "Condom information service: worth \$1 on purchase of one dozen condoms. . . . Write brand name here."

In other words, HEW was setting up shop as the world's largest drugstore and at the same time drumming up business by offering what was supposed to become the Green Stamps of the sexual revolution.

Only the "target population" wasn't buying. During the two years the program was in operation (at a cost of about \$100,000), more than 43,000 boys, aged 14 and up, received the unsolicited mail. But only 254 "condom stamps" were ever redeemed. In other words, for every package of a dozen condoms sold through the mail under this program, the cost to the taxpayer was \$400.

As usual, however, the abysmal failure of the program was not the government's reason for discontinuing it. Rather, according to Diana Altman, a project director for Population Services, Inc., the North Carolina firm which operated the program, HEW's chief worry was that sending unsolicited sex information and "condom stamps" through the mail might be declared illegal (invasion of privacy). A few of the recipients had in fact requested the U.S. Postal Service to order the firm to stop sending the offensive material to their homes.

The now defunct program began as part of the War on Poverty. It was intended to reach boys in "low income" families. It got under way in 1971 with a grant of \$47,000 from the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO). Cleveland and Philadelphia were selected as the

target cities for a mailing to 31,243 boys.

Here is how Population Services, Inc. (PSI), decided which boys should get the offer. The Cleveland Community Action Agency (another federally-funded, "anti-poverty" operation) keeps a list of the local teen-age boys whom it believes to be "sexually active." This snoop list was turned over to PSI. Next, PSI went to a commercial direct-mail firm which provides mailing lists to businesses that sell children's educational products. PSI went down the lists, marking all the addresses which fell within "poverty areas." A very similar procedure was followed in Philadelphia.

After the first year, OEO provided \$50,573 to continue the program through July, 1973. In this second year of operation, about 12,000 pieces of mail were sent out, and only 60 "condom stamps" were redeemed.

PSI's application for renewed funding was turned down last year, when the programs formerly managed by the dismantled OEO were shifted over to HEW.

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