

April 1966

Playboy Clubs Attempt A \$2,500,000 Extra Fee

The Playboy Club this month tried to pull a fast one on its 500,000 members. It notified them that they would have to pay \$5 a year "maintenance charge."

The original application for membership in the Playboy Club offered a *Lifetime* key which entitled members to "full lifetime privileges."

After a time, the word "lifetime" was quietly dropped from the membership applications. Nevertheless, thousands had subscribed as "lifetime" members.

This year, a letter went to 5,000 members—approximately one percent of the membership. The directors wanted to see what would happen if they told members they'd have to pay \$5 a year for what they'd already bought once.

The letters dangled a prestige appeal. Now members would receive a "white,

ance Charge listed on the accompanying statement."

Of the 5,000 in the test mailing, 3,000 paid the \$5 without protest. Barnum was wrong. There isn't one born every minute: suckers are made, not born.

Two thousand wrote letters ranging in tone from puzzled to irate. At least two lawsuits were filed with others in the offing.

The Playboy Club now sent out letter #2 to the non-payers.

"Perhaps," it explained, "our (previous) letter did not explain the change. . . ."

It then repeated the applesauce about how proud members would be with the *new* Playboy Club Key "embossed in gold."

However for those who didn't want to pay the "annual account maintenance charge" there was an alternative. They could write a letter saying they wanted to be "transferred" to a "cash-only" category.

They wouldn't receive the "embossed in gold" key. Rather, they would be sent a "cardboard Admission, cash-only key."

Warned the letter: "We do not believe that you will find this arrangement as satisfactory. . . ."

And then, for those without imagination, it compared owning the "handsome" "gold-embossed" key and paying the once-a-month statement "with the alternative arrangement (for cardboard admission-only keyholders) of having to pay in cash after each round of drinks for your guests and business associates." (Even Third Avenue and Bowery bars don't ask their customers to pay "after each round.")

If the Playboy Club could get away with it, it would receive an additional \$2,500,000 a year without having to bag another Bunny or hire another hutch.



gold and black Playboy Club Key embossed in gold. . . ." It would have "raised gold lettering" and would be "a credential you'll be proud to possess."

It was only in the tenth and last paragraph of the two-page letter that the member was told "it is important that you remit the 1966 Annual Account Mainte-