

COUNTERFEITING

The history of money is several thousand years old, since, it is said, the Chinese first put coins into circulation in about 1100 B.C.

The Greeks and Romans had their own currency. In the 13th Century, it is also said, the first banknote was produced in China, by means of a wood-engraving. The first banknote was printed in Europe, in Sweden, in 1656, and in 1694 England followed Sweden's example. In France, the first paper money, of unfortunate notoriety, was issued between 1716 and 1720 by Law's Bank.

In the history of nations, the issuing of currency soon became a Prince's prerogative, a monopoly and a symbol of power. Modern history contains numerous examples which clearly demonstrate the State's desire to have its own currency.

General De Gaulle certainly considered the issuing of currency to be a fundamental privilege of the State: on June 8, 1944 he wrote to the American and British governments, after their issuing of notes payable in Francs in the first territories liberated:

"The right to mint money having traditionally come under the State's authority in France, and its alone, the Provisional

Translated by Rosanna Rowland.

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Government of the Republic cannot attribute any legal value to the notes which have been put into circulation without its approval.”

As they have progressively gained independence, all young states emerging from colonial rule have wanted their own currency, each with its own characteristic name.

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Is the history of counterfeiting as old as the history of currency? There is every indication that it is, since cupidity and a love of easy money have certainly existed in every age.

In the Middle Ages, alongside murder and theft, counterfeiting and “clipping” were numbered among the most common and most severely punished crimes.

Scandalmongers held that King Philip the Fair was one of the first forgers whose name appears in the history of France. This reputation was ill-founded because as holder of power, he could thereby mint money. Instead, he made one of the first attempts at devaluation by diminishing the grade of those coins which bore the Kingdom’s seal.

A certain Ephraïm, who held the privilege of minting money from the King of Prussia, Frederick the Great, took advantage of this to manufacture counterfeit money also.

Much closer to us are Alveis Reis and Gustave Hennies, who, in 1925, by means of false purchase orders, succeeded in having 580,000 notes of 500 Portuguese Escudos printed in London. It must be stressed that this is still a matter of genuine currency, produced on an illegal basis.

Another famous counterfeiting venture occurred in about 1927-8 when Hungarian nationalists wished to take revenge on contemporary French policy by manufacturing counterfeit French Francs, which, released on a massive scale would, according to the instigators, endanger the French currency. This counterfeiting incident is worthy of note since it was one of the original factors which led the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Aristide Briand, to sign an international agreement against counterfeiting, on April 20th, to which we shall return later.

Yet another famous attempt at counterfeiting threatened

English currency: in his concentration camps Hitler gathered together a group of very skilful forgers and had them manufacture 134,600,00 British banknotes of 5, 10, 20 and 50 Pounds Sterling. These forged notes, with which he paid a certain number of spies abroad (the Cicero Affair) were later to be parachuted into Great Britain. In 1945, a large part of the stock of counterfeits was found at the bottom of Lake Toplitz, in Austria.

SOME FEATURES OF THE CRIME OF COUNTERFEITING

The crime of counterfeiting as perpetrated in the modern world is an offense of complex character; it is an "intellectual" offense. Certain technical, even artistic skills are necessary to reproduce genuine currencies satisfactorily as these become more and more sophisticated in design.

A significant organizational framework is also needed to dispose of the counterfeit money once manufactured. Some counterfeiters work alone; by making a limited number of forgeries they can dispose of their production themselves. However, the situation is usually different: individuals invest capital to produce counterfeit money; they recruit technicians who go about buying paper, and see to the printing of counterfeit notes. This counterfeit money is handed over to their partners who dispose of the stock by dividing it up among groups who are specially instructed to put the counterfeit money onto the market in different places and at different times. In the production of these "industrial" counterfeits, a rather complex criminal procedure is set up, calling for well-organised groups, very often having international ramifications.

The technicians who produce the forgeries are sometimes craftsmen, sometimes heads of small firms in difficulty; occasionally printing technicians collaborate and are eventually remunerated on a contractual basis—with counterfeit notes. Thus it happens that those who, strictly speaking, forge the counterfeit money are not always the initial sponsors. They are then merely accomplices, unaware of the precise scope of the organization for which they work.

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The counterfeiters can make a workshop out of any room, in a chosen place, where the forgeries are to be manufactured. In this case everything necessary for work is to be found assembled on the same premises. In other cases, more difficult to disentangle, counterfeit money is manufactured in different places, on scattered premises, each place representing one stage in the production of the counterfeit. In one workshop for example, the genuine notes are photographed, in another the plates are engraved, elsewhere impressions are printed with the ready-prepared plates, etc. Thus, the offenders hope to diminish the risks by faster dispersal of the materials used for each stage of the counterfeiting. By taking this course, counterfeiting organizers facilitate the recruitment of the necessary technicians; it is no longer vital to buy equipment which is often costly. The counterfeiting team, spread about both in space and time, is less closely knit. Those who take part in one element of the operation do not know those who have worked on previous stages, or those who will work on later ones.

Forgers use, or are liable to use, all existing techniques; from hand-drawing to dry offset, and even copper-plate engraving. However, apart from a few very conscientious forgers who adhere to those methods used to print the genuine note that they are preparing to imitate, most are content with using the process that seems easiest either because of their training or because of the equipment at their disposal.

This explains why the greatest number of forgeries are produced by the method of planographic printing known as offset. This process has almost completely replaced the typographical process by virtue of the ease with which it can be set in operation and because of the widespread distribution of the equipment and machines of all sizes that use this technique.

The main weakness of this process in the production of counterfeit bank-notes is that it does not give the embossed texture which is characteristic to the copperplate method used on almost all authentic notes. The forgers have therefore attempted to "perfect" the offset by using engraved plates or by crinkling the paper in the appropriate places in such a way as to create this embossed texture.

Forgers also use other methods, although much more rarely.

Classical engraving processes can be cited (executed by hand or with acid) or distinctly artisan techniques such as collotype, or even processes which are being perfected such as silk-screen printing. The typographical method is still used, but mainly to reproduce the serial numbers on notes.

Above all the results vary according to the forger's skill: Bojarski, who executed all his engravings by hand, accomplished a counterfeit that was much more dangerous than others obtained by far more sophisticated methods.

DISTRIBUTING COUNTERFEIT MONEY

There are four criteria to be taken into consideration in the uttering of counterfeit money:

— *the quality*: It is clear that a very "poor," badly made forgery could not circulate among a relatively well-educated population, mindful of the characteristics of the money it handles every day. The dissemination of an unsuccessful counterfeit is very dangerous for its author; in the past we have come across a sample of an issue of forged notes of 20 Swiss Francs which were never circulated, because their author had deemed their production to be defective.

On the other hand, good counterfeits circulate among the most sophisticated peoples quite easily, sometimes for very long periods. Such was the counterfeit of U.S. Dollars, printed in 1947, and still circulating in 1975.

— *the quantity*: it is evident that the technique of distributing counterfeits will vary according to the number of notes issued. A single counterfeiter, whose output is fairly small, can attempt to dispose of his counterfeits one by one as his own needs dictate. These tactics were followed for a long time by the famous French forger Bojarski, who, working single-handed, produced notes of 100 French Francs of exceptional quality and uttered them to cover his family's needs. Conversely, when counterfeit money is produced in large quantities, distribution networks must be set up that are as rationally organized as the printing network. Once produced, the forgeries are stockpiled; the workshop is dismantled, the team that produced the forgery is dis-

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banded. After some delay, the partners put the notes into circulation. The stock is shared among several teams who will utter the forged notes in waves, first clandestinely, then in the open. Thus the counterfeit note has in fact a secret price, which becomes higher and higher the further one gets from the source. After leaving the printing plant, the wholesaler sells his notes for 20% of the nominal value; at the end of the chain, the one who "passes out" the forged note and brings it into the open will have bought it at 50 to 60% of its nominal value. With regard to criminal investigation, this provides an interesting guide for detection: the higher the price of the forged money and the fewer the specimens possessed by traffickers, the further one gets from the original source of issue.

— *value*: the notion of the money's value is related to the ease with which it can circulate. In this respect a distinction must be made between the nominal value of the counterfeit money and, one might say, its speculative value.

Counterfeits of notes of slight nominal value are virtually non-existent, for the simple reason that the production expenses would probably exceed the possible profit. It is for this reason that one sees so few counterfeits of small change. If the nominal value of the counterfeit money is too high, it becomes difficult to dispose of: indeed, the person who receives a one dollar bill does not pay particular attention to it, but it is a different case if he accepts payment with a 100 dollar bill: the note will be examined, felt, and scrutinized much more carefully.

This has been fully grasped by forgers, and it has been ascertained statistically that counterfeit money is of medium value: the nominal value must be high enough to ensure a substantial profit, but it must not be so high that it arouses curiosity. 71% of American counterfeit notes are of 10 and 20 dollars. In Switzerland the 20, 50, or 100 Franc notes are counterfeited.

What one could call the speculative value must be borne in mind along with the nominal value. In this respect the monetary situation has a direct influence on counterfeiting. Strong currencies are far more readily counterfeited than weak ones. It is much more profitable to counterfeit American dollars which are negotiable everywhere, than a national currency which as a consequence of extremely stringent exchange controls cannot

leave the country. There is another advantage in uttering American money, above all in foreign countries: the public is not always very knowledgeable about the exact appearance of the genuine currency, and is therefore less likely to suspect a counterfeit.

THE NUMBER OF COUNTERFEITS IN CIRCULATION

How much counterfeit money is there compared to genuine money? Is the bulk of counterfeit notes in circulation significant enough to endanger genuine currency or create a lack of confidence in it? The answer to this question is negative. To take as an example the most counterfeited currency in the world, i.e. the American Dollar, it has been ascertained that the Secret Service of the United States of America, which is responsible for applying the Federal Laws on counterfeit money, calculated that there were 46 million counterfeit dollars either in the United States, or in other countries. This is an insignificant amount compared to the 2,600 billions of authentic dollar notes that are circulating in the world.

Though the percentage of counterfeit money in circulation is small, it is nonetheless dangerous, for those who accept counterfeit money in good faith believing it to be authentic are ultimately victims and may sustain considerable personal losses. Moreover, the State cannot tolerate the slightest attack on its privilege of minting money, or allow forged documents to circulate bearing its seal.

This small percentage of counterfeit money only remains small because of constant vigilance and intervention by the police, and in particular because of those specialized services created to fight counterfeiting. For example, in the United States of America, before the specialized agency known as the "Secret Service" was set up, there was a period (before 1865) in which a third of the circulating money was counterfeit! Only ten years after this agency was set up and a national currency was issued, the percentage dropped to a value comparable with present-day figures.

According to the most precise statistic which can be estab-

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lished from information available, on an average the currencies of 30 countries are counterfeited each year. A varying number of counterfeiting dens are found—for example in 1974, 47 workshops for counterfeiting paper money were discovered.

It is no less interesting to cite the number of different counterfeits discovered. In this respect a careful distinction must be made between the number of counterfeits put into circulation and the number of types of counterfeits. When a counterfeiter sets out to produce in serial, one may quite possibly see the appearance of 450,000 notes of the same type and the same manufacture. A very accurate index has been made of the types of notes counterfeited, and from 1946 till July 1, 1976, we can count 4,382 different types of counterfeits of American money and altogether 7,247 different types of counterfeits of various currencies throughout the world.

Among these various counterfeits there are some so rudimentary that they could only deceive those who wish to be deceived. On the other hand, there are some that are quite remarkable, carried out with such precision and meticulousness that one needs to be almost an expert to detect them. Such is the case of the counterfeit 20 U.S. Dollar notes which have been circulating since 1947 and whose traces are still to be found. This is the case with the famous 100 French Franc counterfeits put on the market by the well-known Bojarski. This counterfeit is even more exceptional in that it was produced entirely by one man. Bojarski, who was condemned to 20 years criminal servitude on May 14, 1966, by the Assize Court, manufactured his own paper, engraved his own plates, printed his own counterfeits and, as we have seen, also uttered them himself. It is on the day that he confided the uttering of his production to a third person that he was discovered and arrested. Fortunately, those "artists" who can put such perfect counterfeits onto the market are rare indeed.

One must go back almost half a century to find a forger as skilful as Bojarski: an artist of Russian origin, Ivan Miassodov, formerly Professor of Art at the St. Petersburg Academy, was arrested by the German authorities as the leader of a gang of counterfeiters who had forged English 10 and 20 Pound notes. He had a pupil, who was also stateless, of Russian origin and

even more gifted, called Sali Smolianov who was condemned several times for counterfeiting British notes, notably in Germany.

When the Nazi leaders thought of using counterfeit money to remunerate the services of some of their spies during the last war, they "called in" this counterfeit specialist who had not yet finished serving his sentence. Smolianov, who was interned in Sachsenhausen Camp, became the leader of an important team which made a large number of counterfeit Bank of England notes (several tens of millions of Pounds). These counterfeits were so well copied that the Bank of England decided to withdraw that type of note and issue a 5 Pounds Sterling note of new and completely different format.

Once liberated by the Allied Troops' advance Smolianov eagerly sought to find his teacher, who had taken refuge in Lichtenstein. Together they set up a new counterfeiting enterprise for making 100 U.S. Dollar notes on this occasion. However, the authorities of Lichtenstein and Switzerland swiftly intervened and the two forgers were arrested once again in 1947, when only 45 counterfeits had been produced.

COUNTERFEITS OF FIDUCIARY MONEY

In the modern world new methods of payment have been devised to supplant cash transactions. Documents have virtually the same power as money: they authorize the buying and exchange of goods. These documents circulate freely from one country to another. They have increased in number remarkably in recent years: we are referring to traveller's checks and credit cards as well as to traditional checks.

Counterfeit checks are as old as checks themselves and they are all the more easily reproduced, since authentic documents are all too often printed in rudimentary fashion. Even checks printed for imaginary banks have been seen to circulate with perfect ease on numerous occasions. The checks of a so-called "Banco Popular del Peru" for example, easily found takers a few years ago.

The problem of counterfeit traveller's checks is no less dis-

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turbing. The traveller's check, issued by various loan societies, has become a truly international currency accepted almost everywhere in the world: by hotels, airlines, banks, and numerous businesses. As they are negotiable anywhere in the world, a falsified traveller's check can be exchanged thousands of miles from the source where it was printed and issued.

Counterfeiters were unlikely to pass up the chance of forging such documents, which are, according to the penal code, far less well protected than official government currency. From time to time counterfeits of traveller's checks of the largest issuing companies appear on the market: American Express, First National City Bank, Bank of America, Barclay's Bank, Bank of Tokyo, etc.

However, the greatest frauds are perpetrated with counterfeit traveller's checks of less well-known banks: in September 1975, large numbers of counterfeit traveller's checks of an Australian bank were simultaneously uttered in the Netherlands, Sweden, Norway, Greece, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Spain, Italy, Finland, France, Switzerland, Turkey and the German Federal Republic. The total known loss on this day reached 323,300 Australian Dollars. Most of the crooks, who were using false identity documents, were eventually arrested.

We should now like to consider a counterfeit token of a very special kind, since, with a little word-play, it could almost be called authentic. We are referring to coins of precious metals, of gold mainly, which are printed in clandestine workshops but whose raw material is genuine. What is there to be gained from this operation? It lies in the difference between the price of the raw material in bullion and the price of the coins which are eventually made with the equivalent amount of this raw material.

Let us take an example: 1 kg of gold is worth 19,500 French Francs. With 1 kg of gold 170 coins of 20 Francs are made that are then worth 38,250 French Francs. Here it is as much a question of fraud as of counterfeiting. The buyer of "genuine fake coins" acquires the goods he wished to obtain, but their origin is not genuine: there is a forgery of the State's seal and the origin of the goods sold is deceptive. Is this truly a monetary counterfeit? The judicial answer to this question may vary

from country to country. In this case many elements have to be taken into account: is the counterfeit gold coin legal currency, does it have value as legal tender, is it money in the legal sense of the word, or is it merely a commodity? There are numerous juridical subtleties to resolve. Whatever the answer it might well be that a certain number of "genuine fake coins" have been accumulating in nest eggs, which the holders will discover when they wish to realise their savings. It could be objected that the large banks issuing currency introduce gold coins onto the monetary market at regular intervals, minted with old stamps. Yet these coins cannot be "fake," for here they are using the royal prerogative. Therein lies the difference.

THE FIGHT AGAINST COUNTERFEITING

A way to halt the counterfeiters' activities is to be found in prevention and proscriptive measures.

Prevention:

In our opinion, the prevention of counterfeiting depends upon a dual action: on one hand, genuine money must be well-made. Then the public, which is required to use this authentic currency, must know it well in order to avoid falling into the trap of forgery.

The process of manufacture must ensure that both metallic and paper money be well-produced, and the issuing banks must also take the utmost care. The manufacture of paper money is particularly important; all those involved in the manufacture of paper money have always attempted to ensure the maximum security.

The choice of paper is of prime importance (thickness, resistance to folds and crumpling). For a long time the utmost has been done to incorporate safety controls into the paper (colored fibres, metallic strips). It has always been considered by the I.O.C.P. - Interpol that the presence of a well-produced and artistically designed watermark is a major deterrent to counterfeiting. Printing techniques must also be raised to the highest degree of perfection: the engraving of the note must be impeccable. Various kinds of printing should be used, super-

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imposed on each other. The choice of color is vital, for on this choice depends much of the difficulty of choice for the photo-gravure technicians. A good currency should not necessarily be attractive and artistic to the eye. Above all it must be technically well-executed and contain all the traps and difficulties which can be used against counterfeiters. A good authentic currency cannot be produced on the cheap. Naturally, no man-made document exists which cannot be reproduced by another man's hand, but the greater the difficulties amassed, the fewer sufficiently expert people will be found who can produce a perfect counterfeit.

Not only is it important that authentic money in its fresh and new state be well-made, but also that this money, which will pass through many hands, remain clean, readable, and of decent appearance, so that it can be distinguished from the counterfeit. Currency which remains in circulation for too long will become a scrap of crumpled paper which will no longer demand the respect of its holder. Furthermore, it will become impossible for the public to distinguish the genuine from the fake. The systematic elimination of dirty, damaged money is a necessary requisite of prevention, as important as the high quality of the money leaving the mint. That is a responsibility of the issuing Bank; the disadvantage of such a policy of prevention is the expense.

Informing the public:

The public, which is the user of the genuine currency and is the eventual receiver of counterfeits, should be the first informed of the condition in which authentic currency is put into circulation.

In this respect we can cite the example of the drive which took place in the United States where a public information program entitled "Know Your Money" showed citizens how to examine various dollar notes and distinguish the genuine from the fake.

Obviously there are certain manufacturing devices which should not be revealed, but all in all a well-informed public seems desirable. Of course it is even more essential that specialists be informed, and by specialist we understand all those

who by virtue of their profession handle money: bank cashiers, tellers, agents of the State Treasury, etc.

Proscriptive Measures - Police Investigation

To proscribe is to condemn and it must be stated immediately that counterfeiting is a severely punished crime in almost all countries. So that no one can plead ignorance, banknotes in some countries bear notice of the various sentences provided for cases of counterfeiting; numerous penal codes stipulate life imprisonment for counterfeiting currency. Though the legislator has often been very understanding about other offenses, such as drug-taking, he has been so far less frequently about the use and trafficking of counterfeit money. For wrong-doers to be condemned they must also be discovered and brought before the courts and this is the responsibility of the police. If a ship leaks there are two courses of action to take: either the boat is emptied as the water penetrates by bailing it out with the aid of some container or the leak is stopped by repairing the boat. Where counterfeit money is concerned the police find themselves in an analogous situation: it is obviously essential and useful to unearth counterfeit money and seize it as it appears on the market; however it is much more efficient and important to suppress the evil at its source and discover the dens where the banknotes are made. The investigator comes up against many difficulties in his attempt to achieve this result. Whereas in matters of criminal investigation speed and suddenness of intervention usually determine success, when dealing with counterfeiting one has to deal with an offense that is spread out through time and space, rendering all investigation difficult.

In violent crimes there are motives, clues which can be exploited and may lead to identification of the guilty. It is hard to imagine counterfeiting being motivated by revenge, love, or jealousy. There is usually one sole motive: the need for money—apart from a few rare cases in which the motive is political.

Finally, the police detective virtually never finds himself witness to the main act, which is the actual manufacture of the money, during his investigations of counterfeiting. Police in-

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vestigations often start with secondary acts of the operation, that is with the issuing of counterfeit money. On the other hand, and this is a positive aspect of his work, the investigator possesses a clue of the first order, which is the counterfeit itself. By skillful analysis, one can determine the nature of the paper that was used and the techniques employed by the counterfeiters. Each counterfeit in fact bears its own trade-mark, as does genuine currency. A certain issue will bear a certain defect; for instance, a few strokes will be missing from the beard of the main figure, or an accent on a letter will have been forgotten. Other more significant faults have been noted: during the handling necessary to obtain a reproduction of a note by the photomechanical process, certain elements may be inverted, and decorative whorls, for example, might point in the wrong direction. This is all information which will enable a link to be established between counterfeits of the same type and will therefore provide clues as to the circulation of counterfeit money. In addition, the investigator will be able to deduce information about the way in which the money was uttered.

The traditional arsenal of weapons at the disposal of the investigator, i.e., surveillance of suspects, perquisition, information picked up in criminogenic circles, must of necessity be supported by thorough centralization of information accumulated through the chance discovery of counterfeits. It is essential that proscriptive measures be based upon a thoroughly centralized police effort, and even the countries with the most decentralized police have understood this: in the United States, for example, a single Federal Service, the "Secret Service," is responsible for co-ordinating all police activity regarding counterfeiting, and this applies throughout Federal Territory. This is also the case in Switzerland.

The specialized service most often pertains to the organizational structure of the national police staff: in some Spanish-speaking countries, it comes under the issuing bank. The fight which is based upon a central, specialized, proscriptive agency, must naturally extend to the international level.

There are daily examples of counterfeits circulating in many countries throughout the world. One particular American counterfeit, for example, circulated in 18 countries, and in another

example counterfeit traveller's checks of certain large tourist companies were discovered in seven countries.

To aid efficient proscription on an international level, the member states signed, under the aegis of the League of Nations, an International Convention which still holds good today: that of April 20, 1929.

The main provisions in this Convention are as follows: counterfeiters of foreign currency are to be punished with the same penalties as counterfeiters of the national currency; proscriptive measures are to be co-ordinated in each country by a specialized central agency; wrongdoers arrested in one country for counterfeiting currency of another country may be extradited. By April 1, 1975, 104 countries or territories had ratified the 1929 Convention.

But a Convention remains merely "a piece of paper" as long as practical measures are not taken to impose it, and, as can be understood from the above examples, international police co-ordination is vital in the fight against counterfeiting. Information needed to recognize forged currencies circulating in different countries throughout the world and to identify counterfeits must be centralized. A liaison between the police forces of various countries must be established so that there can be an easy exchange of information, both about the circulating counterfeits and on their authors. This task of centralizing and co-ordinating on an international level, has been fulfilled for almost 50 years by the International Organization of Criminal Police—Interpol, which has at its disposition unique archives on counterfeiting, as well as on genuine money which serve as specimens for comparison.

At the general secretariat of Interpol there exists a collection comprising on one hand the authentic currency of some 175 countries or territories, and, on the other, counterfeits indexed since 1946 affecting 102 countries. Besides the confidential data which it publishes on traffickers and authors of counterfeits, Interpol publishes a magazine called *Counterfeits and Forgeries* to which almost 10,000 banking establishments subscribe. This magazine, printed by Keesing Systems in Amsterdam, provides information both on authentic currency and on the dominant characteristics of counterfeits which circulate inter-

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nationally; it is thanks to this publication that the above-mentioned specialists are kept informed.

The necessity and the efficiency of such police co-operation are substantiated throughout the year by concrete cases which it would be superfluous to recount here.

To ensure good co-ordination between the establishments which issue the official currency and the services of the police responsible for protecting this currency, the I.O.C.P. - Interpol organizes at regular intervals joint conferences which are in fact incorporated in the recommendations voted for along with the 1929 Convention: at Geneva (1930), Copenhagen (1935), the Hague (1950), Copenhagen (1961), Mexico (1969), and Madrid (1977). Experts gather together to exchange information on their experiences, seek solutions, intensify proscriptive measures, and render prevention more efficient.

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From the list of illicit acts, anti-social acts, attacks on people and on wealth, counterfeiting has this special feature: it is directly damaging both to private individuals and to the State.

The State, wherever it may be, whatever it may be, has never taken any threat to itself lightly, and this is why counterfeiting has always been closely watched, fought, and condemned.

In comparison with other criminal offenses, it has not increased at the same rate despite the facilities which offenders can find in new techniques.

Should one deem this to be a consequence of a general policy of stringent proscription, whose deterrent effects are so often contested? Perhaps. This certainly provides matter for reflection.