

# The Evil Domain of INTERNATIONAL CRIME

by Herbert Brean



**I**NTERNATIONAL crime is the world's biggest invisible business. In prosperous times like the present, when money is generally plentiful, it flourishes and feeds off the prosperity of others. Every year it costs the citizens of the world billions of dollars and an unmeasurable amount of suffering, and yet very few people are even aware of how it works and how it affects them. A small carton leaving Genoa tonight may cause a stick-up murder in Chicago next month. A car stolen tomorrow from a driveway in Dallas may almost literally vanish from the face of the earth—until it reappears in South America, to which it has been smuggled piece by piece and reassembled for profitable sale. The pound note which a London shopper may receive in change at one of the Bond

Street shops this weekend may have been printed last month by a counterfeiter across the Channel in Paris.

The practitioners of international crime are hardheaded businessmen with only one guiding principle: money. Their vast networks are spread throughout the world, and have more ramifications and branches than any three international corporations put together. The diversity is endless. The products of international crime travel across the oceans, through the skies and across national boundaries by ship, plane, truck, pack mule, junk, camel caravan and human messenger. The "product" may be almost anything: not only diamonds and dope and counterfeit money but also pinball machines, cars, con games, financial credits, coffee, 4-slaves. Whatever the product and year-old children who are sold as whatever the means of transportation, the result is always the same: fast, illegal profits.

This article reports on this little-known world and the people who inhabit it. It defines this world, stripping it of the legends (familiar to mystery-story readers and viewers of the movies and TV) that obscure its true character, and reveals the methods and accomplishments of the one group designed to combat international crime on an international basis—the self-effacing, brilliant organization known as Interpol.

ONE OF THE many legends surrounding international crime is that it is run by one or more super-criminals heading far-flung networks of malefactors with branches in all the principal cities. Such organized efficiency does not exist in the criminal world. There are perhaps 12,000 really first-class international criminals and perhaps 500 times that many who play smaller roles. But when any of these six million-odd culprits work together as a gang, they usually join forces in a temporary and haphazard way. For 30 to combine is unusual, and a gang of 120 working together is a big ring. In any case, when trouble looms their alliances swiftly dissolve. The one exception is the famed Mafia, which is probably the closest thing to what might be called an "international crime syndicate." But even the Mafia is a limited operation in the over-all picture of world crime, for its operations are concentrated almost entirely in the U.S. and Sicily.



Many international criminals are professional pickpockets, con men and counterfeiters whose names are familiar entries on the world's police blotters. Others are professional "carriers" who, armed with a small library of passports, concentrate on smuggling from country to country. But a sizable number are otherwise respectable businessmen or legitimate airline or shipping company employees—amateurs unable to resist the temptation of an easy profit.

To the professionals the world is a strangely restricted place, for there are only certain areas where they care to operate. The European continent mightily attracts them, but the British Isles do not. The Mediterranean basin is pleasant for them but most of Africa is not. South America's mountains and broken eastern coastline, the major ports of both U.S. seaboard and certain Asiatic cities are highly attractive, but Australia virtually does not exist for them. Neither do countries like the Scandinavian ones and those behind the Iron Curtain. The Pacific Ocean is regarded mainly as an obstacle created to hinder police pursuit.

Within this curiously limited world international criminals are quick to respond to changing conditions. Automobile theft, for example, is now very profitable and is therefore on the increase, but white slavery has fallen off severely. Improved police proce-



dures have not only forced international criminals to shift constantly but have also required them to specialize. A good example is the theft of travelers checks, a crime that frequently affects world travelers. Until recently a continental hotel prowler (a Hungarian specialty) gained entry to the foreigner's room and stole his checks while he was out, or a pickpocket (a Spanish specialty) lifted the traveler's book of checks from his pocket while he gaped at the Eiffel Tower. In either case the thief tried to cash the checks by forgery, a risky procedure in any alert bank or store.

**T**ODAY this operation has its own production line manned by a succession of specialists. The first specialist is the thief himself for, while he may use the same old methods to get the checks, his assignment ends at that point. He simply sells the checks for 15% of their face value to a second specialist, the middle man of the operation. The middle man turns over the checks for 40% of their face value to a third set of specialists, the "selling gang" which must perform the most difficult part of the operation: passing the checks. A traveler's check is, of course, signed once by the owner when he purchases it and once again when he cashes it. The selling gang has its choice of two methods: 1) it can remove the original signature by a delicate chemical operation and replace it with the signature of the criminal who will actually cash the check, or 2) it can employ a skilled forger who will be able to reproduce the original signature under the wary eyes of a bank clerk.

The specialization does not end with the cashing of the check. If the check is used as payment for a purchase, the item bought is likely to be something easily disposed of at close to actual cost, such as a camera or a pair of binoculars. Such items are promptly sent out of the country to still another gang which specializes in disposing of goods.

International crime is not always as clearly criminal as this because what is illegal in one country may not necessarily be illegal in another. Anyone engaged in the narcotics trade in the U.S. is a criminal. But many other countries remain undisturbed about it because they have no narcotics problem of their own. Decent, respectable Turkish farmers grow acres of poppies under government license to produce opium, as legally as Nebraska farmers grow wheat to produce flour. Opium smoking is still legal in parts of India. Macedonian women use the drug to flavor pastry.

**I**N SOME countries international crime is actually encouraged by antiquated or inconsistent laws. Spain, for example, is a "car-poor" country: it produces few automobiles. But because Spain imposes a tariff of 150% on legitimate car imports, smugglers of new or stolen cars have strong financial incentive to operate there. Spain also imposes a heavy duty on foreign machine parts, even when Spain herself does not manufacture them. As a result an entire turbo-generator once had to be smuggled into the country to complete a vital dam because the legal duty would have been exorbitant. Because Brazil's tariffs contain many similar inconsistencies, its long coastline plays host to a lively inva-

sion of illicit U.S. cigars, whisky, nylons and cars. (The smugglers often depart with tons of Brazilian coffee purchased for less than the artificially pegged price, thereby compounding the crime and the profits.)

Population shifts sometimes favor the international criminal. London, traditionally free of narcotics problems, is now worried about marijuana, which has shown up among English teenagers since the recent immigration of Jamaicans and other British West Indians who use the drug. The British Isles, however, are a good example of how geography and innate respect for the law can inhibit the international criminal. British traffic in illegal goods is confined to relatively few ports and airfields that are easy to supervise. The British customs service exercises tight supervision over incoming aliens (an average of 2,500 are excluded annually), and its meticulously polite customs inspectors are well trained to detect guilt from a traveler's nervousness, his eye movements and what he does with his hands. While one inspector makes a casual examination of luggage, a second may stand by simply to study its owner—and a third who is stationed at the exit may gently ask to glance through a coat just as the traveler is leaving.

Other countries have been made vulnerable to crime because of their geography. Lebanon, at

the eastern end of the Mediterranean, has been an international trading center since the time of the Phoenicians. Uruguay, tucked in between Brazil and Argentina, is not only a convenient haven for criminals fleeing from its neighbors but is also a handy clearinghouse for cocaine leaving South America and for opium coming in from the Middle East.

Whatever the local conditions of geography, law and police work, one condition for a flourishing international crime overrides all others: the opportunity for profit. Criminals will go to any lengths and take any risks when this opportunity exists. The French Sureté recently broke up a far-flung ring which was actually using the military mail service as its means of transportation for illegal gold ingots. The gold was shipped, ostensibly as presents from loving wives, to French army officers stationed in Saigon, Indochina. The packages were keyed alphabetically by the initials of the addressees and were purposely mailed with insufficient postage so that they would come to the attention of postal clerks who could recognize them by the initials. The scheme was discovered only because some packages accidentally fell into the hands of a clerk who was not in on the plot. When he sent them back for additional postage, the return addresses proved to be nonexistent. But before this happened,

an estimated two tons of gold was smuggled out of France at a profit of more than one billion francs.

**I**NTERNATIONAL traffic in women is still profitable, but the infamous white slaver of several decades ago is now a victim of technological unemployment caused by increasing feminine sophistication. It is no longer very easy to entice unknowing women into a life of prostitution from which there is no escape, and so the white slaver has been replaced by the "theatrical agent" or "talent scout."

Then she gets a ticket and traveling expenses. In Beirut or Aleppo, she goes to work in a nightclub where she may dance, if she can stand on her feet, or sing, if she can open her mouth. But her main job soon becomes that of B-girl. She must mingle with the customers, encourage them to drink and, if they request, agree to spend the night with them after the nightclub has closed.

Even more vicious is the enslavement of children in Nigeria. This lucrative trade is carried on near the eastern and western borders where Negro children 4



To get women for the nightclubs of Beirut and Aleppo, for example, where oil-rich Arabs come to spend their money, the "agent" advertises in European newspapers for models, dancers or nightclub singers. If a girl answering the ad has a union certificate, she will be free to travel abroad and can be signed up at once; if not, she is quickly taught the rudiments of kicking in the second line of the chorus so that she can qualify for a

to 12 years old are kidnaped and sold into Dahomey or the Cameroons to become house or farm servants. Sometimes the child never crosses a border but instead is sold to a local believer in juju who thinks that if he sacrifices a human being to the god he will grow rich, or that by eating some parts of the slaughtered anatomy he can rejuvenate himself or prolong his life. The current price is £300 (\$846) per child.

The international criminal

need not be a big operator to make handsome profits. A sailor who wants to take a little flier in Indian hemp, from which marijuana is made, can buy a 12-ounce package in Rangoon for about \$4.20. When he gets to an English port he can sell the package for \$22 to someone who will come aboard and take the risk of carrying it ashore. If the sailor wants to take that risk himself, he can get \$44 for it ashore, a better than 500% profit on his original purchase.

Automobiles offer incredible opportunities for profit in some parts of the world. Smuggling cars out of Germany, for example, is a big business, and some 2,000 persons are listed by police as smugglers. Volkswagens, Opels and Mercedes bring two to three times as much in Greece and Turkey as they do in Germany. In the Middle East the ratio is three to four times as much, in South America it is six to eight times as much. If the car was stolen to begin with, the profit is enormous. One ingenious thief recently cabled five car rental agencies in Zurich and asked each

one to deliver a Mercedes to five exclusive hotels on a certain day. The unsuspecting agencies delivered the five cars—and by the time the rental period had expired the automobiles were long gone. If their ultimate destination was South America, each car, worth \$2,400 in Germany, could have sold for \$19,200.

To make his fast dollar the international criminal must expose himself not only to the risk of capture but also to the vagaries of chance, to treachery within his organization and to sudden sociopolitical changes. Havana, for instance, with its big tourist trade, wide-open gambling, flagrant prostitution and generally relaxed morality, was for years a convenient home-away-from-home for international criminals. Then Castro took over and frightened the tourists away, so soon the crime business was bad. Havana today is relatively "clean," not so much through police effort as through political upheaval.

There are other kinds of risk. A Lebanese flew into Athens from Zurich a few weeks ago, collapsed in the airport and was



taken to a hospital where he died. An autopsy revealed the cause of death: coronary thrombosis induced in part by a heavy corset containing 1,500 contraband Swiss watch movements. Another kind of risk was taken by a naturalized Frenchman named Zellingold; who was hired to travel to India with an Oldsmobile containing 550 pounds of gold concealed in various compartments. Zellingold and the Olds got to India safely, but then he could not get in touch with the people to whom he was to make delivery. He found himself in a strange country, with an Oldsmobile and a fortune in illicit gold, and nowhere to go. He decided to return home and did—accompanying the car through customs inspections, always undetected. Then he concluded that there was little point in returning the gold to his employers. When they learned what had happened they fingered Zellingold to the police as a gold smuggler and he was arrested. He confessed everything, naming his employers as gold smugglers too, and they in turn were arrested.



**E**VEN THE MOST ingenious technique can go wrong. A French "antique dealer" entered English ports regularly every few weeks for some 30 months, always accompanied by a bottle of Scotch whisky (which he ostentatiously declared) and a little girl who carried a big doll. Actually both bottle and doll contained raw French perfume on which Britain sets a heavy duty. The antique dealer developed quite a friendship with the customs and immigration men. Then one day he accidentally dropped the whisky bottle on the customs house floor.

If the only way to catch international criminals were through such accidents, the world would plainly be overrun with vice. Nor will strict and meticulous customs inspections, carefully worded laws or energetic national police work suffice. All such local efforts are vulnerable to the international criminal simply because he never stops moving. If things look bad in one place, he merely folds his tent and slips away, popping up elsewhere with a new variation on his racket. Years ago the major countries of the world decided the only answer was cooperation among themselves. And so a remarkable organization called Interpol came into existence.

Even though its name stands for International Criminal Police Organization, Interpol is not an international police force, as some



moviemakers have portrayed. Centered in a dignified old town house on the rue Paul Valéry in the heart of Paris, it is a supercommunications center for the police around the world. While it employs some brilliant policemen, not one of them has made an arrest on behalf of Interpol since its founding in 1923.

Interpol serves 63 nations in Europe, Asia, Africa and North and South America by maintaining a thorough filing system, operating a radio transmitter and using its members' collective brains. Each country has at least one veteran police officer as its Interpol representative. These men meet periodically at Interpol conventions like one held recently, but normally work in their own countries until an international case comes along. Then they go to work for Interpol. When the police in Copenhagen, for example, want to check a report that a man they want is in Rio de Janeiro, the Danish Interpol representative asks Interpol to check the Interpol man in Brazil and the latter immediately issues the necessary orders. This sounds obvious, but until Intrepol was set up the routine was very different: the Danish officer asked his foreign ministry to ask the Brazilian embassy in Copenhagen to communicate with its home office in Rio and ask it to ask the police there to check on the presence of the suspect. The lat-



ter by that time could have reached San Francisco by slow freighter.

Interpol's entire administrative staff, whose job is to locate and cause the arrest of the world's smartest international crooks wherever they may be, consists of only 59 people. All but 14, who are assigned to operate the Paris radio station or run a special counterfeiting branch at The Hague, work at the Paris headquarters. Many of them are veteran career French policemen lent to Interpol by the French government, which pays their salaries. Interpol gets along on a minuscule annual budget of 600,000 Swiss francs (\$138,000).

Interpol flashes crime bulletins and "men wanted" information around the world through a network of 21 radio stations that handle 55,000 police bulletins a year. It also keeps a routine file of international criminals consisting of 400,000 names (120,000 real names, 280,000 aliases) and an elite file of about 6,000 top criminals.

**A**S IT DOES its job of keeping the various worldwide police departments informed and in touch with each other, Interpol makes use of the best investigative agencies and resources in the world. It calls on the scientific index systems of the German police, the U.S. Treasury Department's T-men and Britain's astonishing crime detection laboratories which specialize in such particulars as poisons, spilled blood and dusts from grasses and weeds. But Interpol also has some unusual resources of its own.

One is a quiet, thoughtful police officer named Louis Beaulieu, "borrowed" 12 years ago from the Paris police to set up Interpol's record bureau. Beaulieu worked out his own fingerprint filing system and made other innovations for the bureau but his greatest triumph is his method of profile analysis. He adapted it from a system of basic terminology for describing people that he had originally learned in police academy.

Beaulieu's problem was to find a way of making positive identification from photographs sent in from perhaps a dozen different countries, in which varying camera techniques were used and the subjects were people who changed their appearance as much and as often as possible. Beaulieu divided the human profile into six zones and subdivided each into two to eight types according to characteristics: jutting

or receding chin, sloping forehead, tilt of nose and the like. His reasoning was simple. While a criminal can change his hair style or may suffer a broken nose or start wearing glasses, he cannot change the entire outline of his face.

Beaulieu knew he had to prove his method to his superiors, and he said nothing about it for four years until the right case came along. Algerian police had picked up a young dark-skinned man with a shaved head and had sent photographs of him to Interpol for possible identification. Beaulieu analyzed the profile, set down the proper numerical formula and went to his files. He found a corresponding set of numbers—together with a photograph of a bushy-haired, mustachioed man who had a long record as a thief and swindler. There was no apparent resemblance. Nevertheless, Beaulieu showed the picture to his superiors. He was laughed at.

Undaunted, he sent back to Algiers for the man's fingerprints and compared them with those of the thief. The two sets were identical. "Since then," Beaulieu says now, "when I say that two photographs show the same person no one disputes the fact."

An important part of Interpol's job is preventive police work. When a known swindler or jewel thief drops from sight in his native city the local police

tell Interpol that he may be on the prowl, and Interpol sends circulars on him to other areas where he might turn up. When a large international gathering, like a coronation or a religious pilgrimage, is about to take place, Interpol checks on the whereabouts of known pickpockets. If they do not appear to be at their home stations, it circularizes them to the police guarding the event.

How effective this system can be was strikingly illustrated at the 1958 Brussels World's Fair. Early raids on suspicious hangouts before the fair opened, a close watch on ports of entry, Interpol's invaluable circulars and checks with police of other countries enabled the Belgian police to scare off or turn back a large number of potential marauders. When the fair opened, a special pickpocket squad was assigned to it with instructions to make a big early roundup for deterrent purposes. This they did, hauling in an entire gang during the first month. As a result pocket pickings averaged less than two a day during the entire run of the fair, despite 200,000 to 700,000 daily visitors.

**I**NTERPOL'S most dramatic function is the pursuit of a specific criminal across national borders. A famous recent case was that of Hans Flecken, a German who was suspected of having killed a 16-year-old girl for the

14,500 marks he allegedly induced her to steal from her employer. The girl's body was found on a Cologne highway and police began searching for Flecken as "the autobahn murderer." An innkeeper near the Swiss border reported seeing a man resembling the fugitive on a bus. German police, through Interpol, immediately asked the help of police in Switzerland, Austria and Italy, supplying pictures of the wanted man.

Flecken soon showed up in Tosens in the Tyrol where he took a *pension* room under the name of Landmesser. The landlady had seen pictures of "the autobahn murderer" and had her suspicions, but by the time she got around to reporting them to the police, Flecken had fled, taking with him a passport stolen from a fellow lodger, Werner Parth. Next day he was glimpsed on another bus near the Italian border, again not in time. Soon he turned up in Florence, still calling himself Landmesser, and there he convinced the representative of a German company that he was from the company's home office in Bonn, had been robbed and needed 5,000 lire. He got it. But the company representative grew worried, called the home office that night and learned that Landmesser was not an employee. He called the Italian police. A new alert went out all over Italy.

Flecken showed up in Palermo, Sicily, and used his Werner Parth passport to register in another *pension*. The Italian police promptly swooped down—only to find he had moved. But they knew he was in the neighborhood and, armed with Interpol photos, they began checking all *pensions*. He was finally found and is now being held in Palermo for extradition.

Interpol has matched wits with some remarkably ingenious people. One was a forger who traveled to various cities with what appeared to be a very handsome and expensive valise, impressively heavy. No hotel man would suspect its owner of being anything but well-heeled. Actually the valise was made of plastic and filled with water. When he had papered a town with spurious checks, the forger emptied the water from the valise in the hotel washbowl, folded it up, tucked it under his coat and walked out without paying his bill. But the uniqueness of his *modus operandi* proved his undoing, for it made him easy to identify. An Interpol circular caught up with him in Nice.

An even greater talent belongs

to 77-year-old Attilio Pollastri, a Genoese who is currently in jail. A onetime jewelry faker, Pollastri branched into counterfeiting, starting first with Spanish coins. At the outbreak of World War I, Pollastri converted to the manufacture of French and Swiss francs, Italian lire and U.S. dollars. A fine technician (he once made such perfect 50-lira notes that Italy had to withdraw the entire legitimate issue from circulation), he did well until he changed to 100-lira notes and was caught. From jail he wrote the Bank of Italy polite suggestions about how to make their notes more nearly counterfeit-proof. He never got a reply, but the Bank of Italy's 500- and 1,000-lira notes in due time displayed the improvements Pollastri suggested.

Of all varieties of international crime confronting Interpol, by far the most prevalent is smuggling. It attracts the widest variety of people, it involves the widest and most incongruous variety of substances and it has given rise, to some of the gaudiest and most profitable escapades in recent criminal history.—*from Life*.

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