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Operation Against Swiss Watch Imitation

A team of two police experts has recently toured Hong Kong and Singapore for ten days to persuade their respective governments to act with more determination against the manufacture of watches stamped with the false "Swiss-made" brand. The two men were Mr Jean Benoit, head of the Swiss Interpol Office and Mr Dominique Thomas, director of the foreign affairs division of the Swiss Watchmakers Federation.

The production of fake "Swiss-made" watches with mainly Japanese and Russian components is a thriving business costing an estimated billion francs' loss of watch exports to Switzerland. Hong Kong is by far the main producer, but there is a chance that, with rising costs, this production may shift to South Korea and Taiwan. Hong Kong exports about ten million units a year, mainly to Indonesia, India and Africa. Singapore is the main transit and distribution centre for this trade.

Although both Hong Kong and Singapore stand to lose by stamping out this industry (which is not really "illegal" as there is no international convention on counterfeit brands) they are nevertheless prepared to co-operate with Switzerland in this matter. In fact, Hong Kong has already inflicted severe fines on exporters and manufacturers of fake "Swiss" watches. Mr Benoit explains this goodwill is due to the fact that both these financial centres have a reputation to defend. Hong Kong wishes to achieve prosperity but within ethical limits. As for Singapore, its main concern is to be the cleanest city of Asia. Long-haired tourists are mercilessly trimmed by customs men if they wish to visit Singapore, and cigarette stubs thrown on a public causeway are conducive to fines of £75. This cleanliness must also apply to business. Singapore's prime minister has also pledged during a recent visit to Switzerland not to allow this traffic to tarnish the reputation of his country.

Following this far-east tour by two experts, Swiss watch interests will try in earnest to fight the continued business of false "Swiss" watches. To begin with, the Swiss Watch Federation will send a permanent representative to Singapore. The exchange of information will be developed and the Watch Federation will intensify its intervention through its lawyers abroad. Schemes envisaged include publicity campaigns or the recourse to paid informers.

★ ★ ★ ★ LAUGH A LITTLE

"How much do you charge for pulling a tooth?"

"Ten dollars".

"What, ten dollars for a job that takes only two seconds?"

"If you wish I can also do it slower."