

The Letters Of the Law

By Timothy S. Robinson

The FBI does not have an exclusive right on the use of those three letters of the alphabet, a federal judge ruled here yesterday.

U.S. District Judge Barrington D. Parker said a French clothing firm — Fabrication Brill International — may label its products in the U.S. markets as being made by FBI. The other FBI, which has its headquarters at 10th Street and Pennsylvania Avenue NW,

had opposed the use of the three letters on wearing apparel.

The U.S. law enforcement agency brought a suit here three years ago in an effort to block the use of the letters FBI on the label of suits, coats, trousers, vests, town suits, evening dresses, day and night shirts, ties, sweaters, pullovers, socks, gloves, hats, caps, shoes and men's underwear designed by the French firm.

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The lawmen said the use of the letters would falsely suggest a connection with the bureau, and might lead customers to believe the designers' goods had the endorsement of the bureau; that the sale of such goods would confuse the public; and that the use of the letters without the agency's approval is a criminal offense.

Judge Parker pointed out, however, that the French FBI plans to have its

full company name on the same clothes labels on which it displays its initials.

"The court is hard put to conclude that the general public would mistakenly assume that the bureau is endorsing or approving the goods; that the defendant's goods have a connection with the bureau; or that the bureau is manufacturing or merchandising such apparel," Judge Parker said.

He said the criminal statutes concerning the use of the initials, FBI,

deal specifically with advertisements, books and motion pictures, and not with the display of the letters on the inside labels of clothes.

The government had also argued that the use of the letters by the French firm might "harass and force the bureau into ceasing its own use of the initials."

"It is difficult for the court to conceive that such a situation would ever arise," Judge Parker said in dismissing the suit.