

# Going After the Hard Stuff: An Ethnographic Examination of London Street Level Police Officers and Drugs Policy by Daniel Bear

## The Research

- Research into the orientation and implementation of drugs policy by street level police in a major London borough was conducted using ethnographic methods.
- Over 10 shifts, the researcher worked with Response Team officers and Safer Neighbourhood Teams (SNTs), and held seven interviews with senior officers.
- This research builds on Garland's (2001) theories on penal modernism as well as Dorn and Lee's work (1999) on police managerialism. This research focuses on the information and strategy coming from New Scotland Yard, the message street level officers receive, and how they implement the message.
- **Though never directly told to them, analysis showed that street officers receive the 'gist' of the drug policy message from commanders, but implementation of drug policies was sometimes dictated by forces not in line with the official Metropolitan Police Service strategy.**



## Distorted Priorities & Public Managerialism

*"We're supposed to go after the hard stuff, I know that. The [cannabis] smokers aren't my priority; they're not the ones knocking [old ladies] over the head or dealing in front of the tube. But sometimes I'll get told that I need a few more detections. Not a number mind you, not a quota by any means; but I need to write up a few people. I just gotta go over to Pointer's Park and I'm bound to find somebody smoking [cannabis]. It's quick and in 20 minutes I'm back out on the street." (PC Kevin)*

*"The Met's got a drug strategy? Fuck... What is it?" (PC in Babcock Station canteen)*

*"I wouldn't like to see officers from Mayne proactively go out there to get a cannabis warning just for the sake of it". (Senior Scotland Yard Police Officer)*

## 'There's No Front Line Out Here': The Vietnam Syndrome

- Two years ago, a gang of east African youths controlled cannabis dealing in Rowan Hill. The local SNT went in to action with a protracted investigation.
- The team eventually arrested a whole swath of young men. Some received prison sentences, most received an Anti-Social Behaviour Order (ASBO) banning them from the area for two years.
- Whilst the officers did not give up on their anti-drug efforts, they moved on to target the other problems highlighted by the local ward council.
- **When I joined them two years on, they were conducting a repeat operation to combat the same dealers who had now returned, effectively retaking the same ground they had spent months trying to clear of drug dealing.**

