

REPRODUCING ORDER: A STUDY OF POLICE PATROL WORK. By Richard V. Ericson. University of Toronto Press, 1982. Pp. xii, 243. (\$30.00)

In recent times academic interest in the police has shown a tremendous upsurge with an increasing number of publications on a multitude of aspects. Ericson argues that in the brief period of 150 years during which the police have been in existence, interest has shown such phenomenal growth that

one would expect to find some basic research on obvious questions: How do the police spend their time? What do they concentrate on and what do they ignore? How do they accomplish their results in dealings with the public? Whose interests are served by these outcomes? What does all this tell us about the role of the police? What wider functions of the police can be theorized from this?¹

However, such information does not appear to be forthcoming despite the fact that "the police are an excellent vehicle for studying topics of significance to social science, including most generally how forms of social control are related to the reproduction of social order. Questions of importance to both academics and public administrators are involved in this area of research."² This book is Ericson's attempt to supply some of the missing information: the author has studied "patrol officers in a large Canadian municipal police force" using "systematic observation, official records, and unstructured interview data" in order to obtain an idea of "police patrol work from the viewpoint of the line officers whose work it is".³ He seeks to do this not as simple description and interpretation but as "an organizational analysis within the social-action framework . . . in order to contribute both to sociological understanding of organizations and to the substantive area of policing".⁴

In his first chapter, Ericson provides the framework for his study. The commonly held belief among the public and even among the police, he claims, is that police are crime fighters devoting most of their time and energy to fighting crime. However, research on the work they do indicates that they spend most of their time in non-crime activity. Taking into consideration what they do, the mandate of the police patrol officer could perhaps be described: "to employ a system of rules and authoritative commands to transform troublesome, fragile situations back into a normal or efficient state whereby the ranks in society are preserved."⁵ The evidence for this conclusion is not overwhelming, yet it is possible to decide that it is a reasonable description in view of the fact that one of the major tasks of the police is to maintain law and order. In order to perform this task, the police must have a sense of order and the wherewithall to enforce it, which Ericson asserts is the law. However, the manner in which

¹ P. 5.

² P. 31.

³ *Id.*

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ P. 7.

the police use the law is subject to certain contextual constraints such as the attitude of the public, the organizational structure of the police department and the reaction of judges. According to Ericson, the police officer is able effectively to manipulate all of these to achieve the desired result. He makes this claim not from the top of his head, but from a careful analysis and synthesis of the existing literature, and not as a dogmatic statement but as an hypothesis which he sets out to test.

To test the hypothesis, he collects the data through "extensive and intensive observation of patrol officers in the full round of their work activities".⁶ Not only statements of fact were recorded but also the meaning the field research officer believed each act had for the patrol officer. Data was also collected from documents and unstructured interviews. The impression one obtains of the data collecting procedure is that it was so exhaustive as virtually to constitute an audio visual recording of all that went on — not a trick was missed. This, of course, is within the limitations of the setting. While the upper echelons of the police department gave their unqualified assistance and cooperation, the lower echelons who were being studied were not that enthusiastic, and, as has been pointed out in the book,⁷ there is a very strong possibility that the data collected by the field workers was nothing more than the data dished out to them.

Ericson divides his findings into four categories: (1) occupational environment, chapter 3; (2) mobilization, chapter 4; (3) dealing with victims and complainants, chapter 5; and (4) dealing with suspects and accused, chapter 6. What his data reveal is that patrol officers have a considerable amount of potential power which has been effectively contained by the supervision of the patrol sergeant, the activity of the despatcher and peer pressure — so much so that a patrol officer could be likened to a fierce dog taken out on a short leash. The data also reveal that the patrol officers not only react to calls from the citizenry but also undertake proactive work, the extent of which is determined by the directives of supervisors, the controls exerted by the despatchers and the cues for proactive work developed by the officer's own initiative. A third revelation that the data make is that the patrol officers endeavour to patch up the citizen's disorders by various 'cooling out' strategies",⁸ reacting with an official report mainly when property loss is involved, thus displaying the exercise of "considerable power in controlling whether or not a citizen's complaint will be recorded, how it will be recorded and what its subsequent career is likely to be in the priorities of police business".⁹ Regarding police reaction to suspects and accused persons, the data convey the impression that what a patrol officer does

⁶ P. 33.

⁷ Pp. 47-51.

⁸ P. 113.

⁹ P. 134.

(e.g., doing a CPIC¹⁰ check and carrying out a search), is determined by the action he has decided to take, which, in its turn, is dependent on the socio-economic status, age, and attitude and demeanour of the individual. A final revelation that the data make is that any charges laid relate more to the police desire to have the individual inflicted with the maximum possible punishment than to the offence committed. This is because charges tend to be altered in the subsequent stages of the criminal justice processing.

From this data Ericson concludes in chapter 7 that the patrol officers are engaged in reproducing order. They are not reproducing their own order but "their own sense of order as it is filtered through to them via the organization forums within which they operate."¹¹ In practical terms what they seek to do is to keep a targeted population of marginals under control. In the performance of this task, Ericson claims "the bulk of the patrol officer's time was spent doing nothing other than consuming the petrochemical energy required to run an automobile and the psychic energy required to deal with the boredom of it all."¹² This is mainly because the social system is so structured as to provide the police only with those resources necessary to keep the lower orders in line.¹³

Using both qualitative and quantitative data, Ericson has presented a picture of how the patrol officer in one Canadian district functions, how his or her task is structured, the facilities made available to him or her and how the constraints placed on that officer operate. Ericson justifies his use of qualitative data by claiming that "there is no other way of capturing the relevance of factors, including the criminal law, in any given situation, or of depicting organizational elements which affect this activity."¹⁴ This is certainly so. At a time when the use of statistical techniques has become the "in" thing in behavioural research, an author might be constrained to justify his use of qualitative data. Research using qualitative data is usually relegated to a lower level mainly because use of such data is associated with a laxity in the manner in which conclusions are drawn: the canons of the scientific method are not strictly observed. Ericson contributes to this situation. Though his study is essentially an exploratory one, he has sought to make it one in which hypotheses were tested and in doing this he has failed miserably. Had he been satisfied to keep his study as an exploratory one from which hypotheses regarding

¹⁰ Canadian Police Information Centre. For more information, see RCMP Liaison Branch Leaflet No. 7610-21-878-3723, Canadian Police Information Centre/Centre d'information de la police canadienne.

¹¹ P. 195.

¹² P. 206.

¹³ *Id.*

¹⁴ P. 198.

the activity of patrol officers could be drawn, one would be compelled, this reviewer believes, to conclude that "it was worth it"¹⁵ as Ericson himself if hoped.

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¹⁵ P. xii.

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