From the Editor

If you are scanning this issue for tea leaves, signs about the future of the *Law & Society Review* under a new editor, I'm not sure you will want to leap to broad conclusions just yet. The contents of this, my first effort as new editor, came together in part fortuitously—although they do, of course, represent choices made.

The legal profession, like any social phenomenon, can be sliced up in many ways for study. Over the past quarter century, from the pioneering efforts of Carlin (1962) and Smigel (1964) through the more recent work of Laumann and Heinz (e.g., 1977), we have from time-to-time obtained well-founded glimpses of the social organization of legal work. Of late, however, rumors of big changes in recruitment patterns and even bigger changes in career opportunities have raised doubts about the adequacy or currency of our images of the profession. We have some cause to think that there may be significant new developments in legal work. Moreover, with the growth of research in related areas, such as dispute processing, we have begun to see challenges to the usual simple dichotomies of formal versus informal, the complexity of law versus the simplicity of negotiation. Perhaps we have overstated the extent to which the involvement of lawyers in social relationships formalizes them, raises levels of adversariness, and creates added burdens on the courts.

In this issue we see two different ways of addressing such questions about the legal profession. The first way is found in a set of papers by Richard L. Abel, Barbara A. Curran, Terrence C. Halliday, and P.S.C. Lewis; the second in papers by William L. F. Felstiner and Austin Sarat and by John Griffiths. Both sets of papers originated from conferences whose schedules made it possible to combine some of them in what appears to be a special issue on the profession. Both sets, in very different ways, throw significant new light on the legal profession and should be useful in enriching future studies on this subject.

The first set of papers was edited for this issue by Richard L. Abel. In his own paper, Abel lays out the context of the research on which the four papers are based and its significance; therefore, there is no need to repeat his discussion here. I am

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indebted to Professor Abel for his thorough work in organizing and editing these papers.

The other two papers, Sarat and Felstiner's and Griffiths', slice the subject quite differently. Instead of offering macrosocial questions about the organization of the whole profession, they show us the value of a more microsocial look at the actual work lawyers are doing. While both papers deal with divorce law practice, the similarity between the two sets of observations is remarkable in view of the fact that one was done in the United States and the other in the Netherlands.

Though we have always suspected that an "insider's" view of lawyers at work would be of special value, we have often either assumed or actually found (e.g., Danet *et al.*) formidable barriers to the inner sanctum of lawyers' offices. These two papers provide hope and guidance for future forays into that sacred world.

Finally, these two papers make significant contributions to the currently "hot" discussion of divorce law. They tend, for example, to reinforce Weitzman's discussion (1985) of changes in the roles of lawyers under "no-fault" divorce law as compared to earlier "fault" practice. At the same time, however, they both make unique contributions to this discussion because of their special perspectives. Although there was a time when divorce lawyers stirred up trouble through their adversarial approach, these papers indicate that an entirely different landscape of practice has taken over.

Robert L. Kidder
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