Soviet iuriskonsults, the general counsel employed by state-run economic enterprises, are charged with protecting the legal interests of their enterprises. But they are hindered by an economic system that, because of its corruption and inefficiency, does not respond well to legal incentives.

Professor Shelley has interviewed twenty-five émigré iuriskonsults and economic-court judges (arbitrators), almost all Soviet Jews who left in the 1970’s and settled in the United States, Canada and Israel (pp. 6, 15). Notwithstanding the obvious risk of bias in this nonrandom sample (p. 13), the interviews provide an interesting factory-level view of Soviet enterprises and the role of the iuriskonsult. Too often, however, Shelley’s view of the iuriskonsult’s actual activities coalesces with her vision of what he may be capable of doing. The result is sometimes confusing.

Legislation enacted in 1972 charges the iuriskonsult with five general responsibilities: (1) to ascertain that drafts of enterprise regulations conform to the law; (2) to defend the legal rights of the enterprise and its employees, in court if necessary; (3) to monitor the fulfillment of contracts and sue for damages in the event of breach; (4) to help improve the efficiency of the enterprise and the quality of its production; and (5) to educate the workers by providing consultation and delivering lectures (p. 34). Officially he is “an active member of his organization rather than a bureaucrat on the sidelines” (p. 34), “able to use the law to combat economic inefficiency” (p. 35).

In practice, the iuriskonsult falls far short of the legislative ideal. The iuriskonsult strives to help his enterprise fulfill its plan by negotiating and monitoring supply contracts between enterprises, but the basic terms are imposed by central planning directives and may be impossible to carry out (p. 58). He can do little to avert the problems that arise from shortages, poor production standards and embezzlement (p. 58). He may sue enterprises that supply his own with substandard products, but cannot thereby deter future breaches because managers are rewarded more for fulfilling their production quotas than organizations are penalized for producing inferior goods (p. 61).

1. Associate Professor of Sociology at the American University School of Justice. She lived in the Soviet Union for a year and a half, and conducted the interviews in Russian. Pp. 6, 8. This book appears to be an expansion of a journal article, Shelley, Law in the Soviet Workplace: The Lawyer’s Perspective, 16 LAW & SOCY. REV. 429 (1981-82).


Such suits, moreover, often exacerbate the existing inefficiency. Professor Shelley tells of a bread factory that was required to return its empty flour sacks to the food distribution center. The two enterprises were linked by a conveyor belt, but the belt traveled in only one direction. The factory had no truck, and the ministry refused to provide one. Unable to return the sacks, the factory was sued each year and compelled to pay huge fines to the food distribution center. Each year’s fines would have sufficed to buy two or three trucks (p. 75).

Although one of the iuriskonsult’s major functions is to review management actions and veto or report illegal actions (pp. 33, 34), an enterprise director will sometimes induce or pressure the iuriskonsult (he may fire him at whim (pp. 46, 108)) to use his legal skills to help the director break the law in the most inconspicuous manner (pp. 110-11). Thus, the iuriskonsult may lend his expertise to covering up industrial accidents (p. 110), or helping a corrupt director evade prosecution (p. 84).

Notwithstanding these difficulties, Shelley argues throughout the book that the iuriskonsult can play an important part in the Soviet economy by vigilantly filing suit to recover fines for the enterprise (pp. 57-58, 62-64), by tracing the causes of inefficiency in the enterprise and proposing correctives (p. 4), and by improving labor relations (pp. 4, 144). In presenting anecdotal evidence in support of this proposition, however, she often fails to indicate whether she is describing what she considers to be the typical activities of iuriskonsults or an ideal role that the typical iuriskonsult may or may not someday fulfill. It is only through an occasional passing comment that the reader gathers that much of the discussion is normative. For example, she concedes at one point that “[o]nly a few iuriskonsults have become ‘problem solvers’; most remain ‘paper pushers,’ content merely to review and complete the documentation required by their organizations” (p. 57).

The book itself provides ample anecdotal evidence of the reason iuriskonsults are unable to “transcend their usual roles” (p. 143). A textile factory must knowingly produce substandard cloth because it receives an inadequate supply of raw material (p. 62); an arbitrator simply has no choice but to affirm supply contracts that are known to be technically unfeasible (p. 61); lower-wage employees must accept side payments because it is impossible for them to live on their salaries (p. 84). Soviet theory as to the role of the iuriskonsult, Shelley concludes, “is based on the fallacious premise that the primary causes of interorganizational disagreements are legal rather than economic” (p. 58). Furthermore, ambitious Soviet law students typically aspire far

4. And if the systemic inefficiency is intractable, the corruption is worse. Shelley offers no hope at all for reducing it:

Until the members of the Soviet bureaucratic and Party elite identify their welfare with that of their enterprises, law will remain an ineffective weapon against the second [i.e., illeg-
beyond the position of *iuriskonsult.* The pay is low, there is little prestige (pp. 52, 142) and little prospect for a coveted Party post or other significant promotion (pp. 45-46). And Soviet legal education does not prepare lawyers well for *iuriskonsult* work (p. 57).

Still intent on demonstrating the *iuriskonsult*’s importance, Shelley exalts his role in counseling and protecting individual workers who seek his aid. He may advise an illegally dismissed worker how to regain her position and receive back pay (p. 106), and he counsels workers on personal problems such as divorce or physical abuse by husbands (p. 115). *Iuriskonsults,* the author concludes, are “personalizers of the law” (p. 144) who “provide the flexibility needed for the survival of the Soviet legal system” (p. 145). Here again, her argument appears to be normative rather than descriptive. She observes that “[n]ot all lawyers personalize the Soviet legal system; most, presumably, remain bureaucrats concerned solely with legal formalities” (p. 144).

Ultimately, Shelley’s attempt to give substantial significance to the *iuriskonsult*’s work is not convincing. There is little that even the most conscientious and strongest-willed *iuriskonsult* could accomplish in the world she so clearly paints, a world in which debilitating inefficiency and virulent corruption nurture each other.

This is, nonetheless, a valuable book. It provides an authentic glimpse of a little-known branch of the Soviet legal profession whose activities, modest as they are, touch every aspect of Soviet organizational life. The first Soviet book on *iuriskonsults* appeared only in
1960, though they antedate the revolution. English-language works tend to either devote only a few pages to the *iuriskonsult* or merely analyze the legislation. One recent work is apparently by a former *iuriskonsult*, but Shelley's perspective, through her sample, is far wider. As she recognizes (p. 13), her sample is not random. Almost all the interviewees were members of an unpopular minority who were so dissatisfied with life in the Soviet Union that they chose the difficult route of emigration. Further, their views on their work are not tested by the opinions of enterprise directors, employees or economic planners. A more representative sample, however, is not likely to be available soon.


14. Luryi, supra note 11. See Giddings, supra note 2, at 184.

15. She appears to exacerbate some of these biases. For example, in screening potential interviewees, she rejected those who "appeared to be motivated by the prospect of financial remuneration" (the interview fee). P. 12. Having thereby eliminated the venal from her sample, she is able to conclude from the interviews that *iuriskonsults* "appear to be less involved in illegal economic activity [than other legal professionals]. . . . [F]ew *iuriskonsults* appear to take advantage of the available opportunities." P. 80.