

27 x 40

Schlesinger and Aide to Nixon Debate Public's Right to Know

By PETER KIHSS DEC 12 1972

Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. yesterday labeled the Nixon Administration "the most closed government within memory," while Herbert G. Klein, President's communications director, declared that Americans now were "the best-informed public this country has ever seen."

The duel in words between Professor Schlesinger, the former adviser to the Kennedy Administration, and Mr. Klein, for the Nixon Administration, took place before 400 people attending a Foreign Policy Association luncheon at the New York Hilton on "the public's right to know."

'Manipulation' Charged

Professor Schlesinger, arriving with a formidable text, contended that the pre-election report of "peace at hand" in Vietnam now appeared to have been "indefensible misjudgment or indefensible deception."

Mr. Klein, confidently extemporaneous, held it inappropriate to discuss the current negotiations on Vietnam, but asserted "the ones who know the most say the least." He said this had been "the most thoroughly reported war in all American history."

Professor Schlesinger, Pulitzer prize-winning historian, charged the Nixon Administration "carried news manipulation farther than any of its predecessors," and took "unprecedented steps to discourage the media from doing their job."

Mr. Klein politely suggested more research by Professor Schlesinger. He said that since general guidelines were issued two years ago by the Attorney General in response to journalistic protests, there had been 13 Federal subpoenas to newsmen, with 11 of them having wanted such procedures before

giving information to law enforcement agencies.

President Nixon has moved against government secrecy, Mr. Klein said, with the number of agencies empowered to classify documents as confidential cut from 37 to 25; the number of individuals so authorized reduced from 52,000 to 20,000, and the officials able to apply the top-secret lid shrunk from 7,134 to 1,631.

Need for a Law Disputed

Mr. Klein said "an adversary relationship between the government and press is healthy and necessary," and favored protecting the confidentiality of reporters' sources. He disagreed with the recent imprisonments of reporters in New Jersey and California, but he said these had been state actions and he did not yet see any "demonstrated need" for a Federal shield law.

Professor Schlesinger charged the Nixon Administration had not "understood" a need to assure information "essential to democratic decision." He accused it of "misleading and deceiving the people"—for instance by proclaiming neutrality in the Indian-Pakistani war "while the President privately instructed the Government to 'tilt' American power in favor of Pakistan."

Mr. Klein argued that the policy on the war had been an effort to avert India's escalation of the hostilities into West Pakistan.

Responding to a questioner, Mr. Klein said: "I believe the Government does not have a right to lie—it has the right on certain occasions not to discuss a subject, for instance, the content of current negotiations on Vietnam."