

Klein Re-emerges as a Key Member of the

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Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Dec. 19—Not long ago, Secretary of the Interior Walter J. Hickel, whose image is still suspect among conservationists, made a quick luncheon swing through the editorial offices of several major newspapers and magazines in the Northeast. He created, by all accounts, a favorable impression, winning over a number of skeptics.

Nobody was more delighted by Mr. Hickel's success than the man who masterminded the tour—Herbert G. Klein, the President's director of communications.

Whether coordinating the government's information policies, distributing "fact sheets" on administration programs, seducing camera-shy Cabinet members into weekend television appearances, advising the President on his news conferences, or setting up "backgrounders" for Washington correspondents, the soft-spoken, 51-year-old Klein has firmly established himself as the Sol Hurok of the Nixon team. The refurbishing of Walter J. Hickel is only one of his triumphs.

KLEIN DIPPED from public view during the summer but in recent weeks he has resurfaced in dramatic fashion. He lent the weight of his office and his words to Vice President Agnew's denunciations of the media.

Klein's office distributes the Agnew speeches, and Klein himself publicly agreed with the thrust if not the tone of the vice president's remarks.

In addition, with the White House Press Secretary, Ronald L. Ziegler, Klein arranged a series of "background" sessions in which key officials have sought to give the administration's version of Nixon's achievement in the last 11 months before reporters sit down to write their own versions of the same events.

THE BRIEFINGS ended today on a typically theatrical note. With newsmen looking on, Nixon, the vice president, the Cabinet and sub-cabinet gathered in the East Room for a high-level minstrel show to review the plusses and minuses, but mainly the plusses, of the year.

Given no precise mandate when he was named to the post a year ago, Klein performs a threefold function: He prods reluctant officials to release information, thus guarding Nixon's campaign pledge to conduct an "open administration;" he coordinates the flow of information from the departments; and, as a former editor himself, he acts as Nixon's envoy to the news media.



United Press International

Herbert G. Klein, facing camera, Director of Communications for President Nixon, planned Walter J. Hickel's tour.

Answering the charge that he is merely a public relations man, Mr. Klein draws a distinc-

on between two tasks. He says the task of applying cosmetics to the Administration's performance is not his primary function. But he says the task of dispensing information and background material to give reporters a better chance to evaluate the Administration's performance is his primary function.

To many people, however, it is a distinction without a difference, in the sense that the free flow of information is not consistent with good public relations.

The Administration, for example, has made much of eliminating the "credibility gap," and so far no major chasms have appeared between what the Administration has said and what it is in fact doing. But Mr. Klein himself concedes, defining the credibility gap itself precisely the sort of thing that one would expect a good public relations man to

do. Finally, despite all the ballyhoo about an open Administration, and the admittedly broad accessibility of most senior officials of Government, old-fashioned reportorial digging is not become an obsolete skill under the Klein dispensation. Much of the information he dispenses is readily available elsewhere.

Capital observers believe that within his definition of his role, Mr. Klein — after many trials and a few errors — has helped the public and, not incidentally, his Commander is Chief.

He has worked particularly hard, if anonymously, to merchandise important but complicated pieces of new legislation.

It is well known that Mr.

Klein persuaded the President that his far reaching manpower proposals last spring merited a Presidential statement and a White House briefing to give the proposals greater public visibility.

What is less known is that Mr. Klein has been quietly drumming up support among Mayors and Governors for the President's revenue-sharpening proposals and that he invented and designed the nationwide tour by Budget Bureau and White House staffers last summer to explain the President's innovative welfare plan.

Aid for Drug Drive

On some occasions, Mr. Klein has had to rescue the Administration from potentially cataclysmic errors of judgment. Last summer, for example, he was appalled to discover that the architects of Operation Intercept, a program designed to stop the importation of marijuana across the Mexican border, had given no thought to an orderly public explanation of what the program was designed to do and how it would operate.

The story had begun to leak in haphazard fashion, frightening businessmen who feared disruption of normal commerce across the border. Mr. Klein quickly arranged a series of public briefings and contrived to bring matters under control.

In these and other tasks, Mr. Klein can call upon a staff of 14, who help him keep tabs on the agencies, monitor editorial reaction across the country and dispense thousands of

Nixon Team

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"fact kits" on Administration programs to editors.

Mr. Klein's recent identification with Mr. Agnew stems in part from the fact that Mr. Agnew's press secretary Herbert L. Thompson, is also a senior member of Mr. Klein's staff.

The Klein shop also dispenses the Agnew speeches and information about the Vice President's activities. Since Mr. Agnew started making news again a month ago, the telephones in the Klein office, probably the busiest in Government anyway, have started ringing on the average of 400 times a day.

Mr. Klein also played a little-known role in Mr. Agnew's first attack on television commentators, an attack inspired by the critical assessments that some commentators made immediately after Mr. Nixon's Nov. 3 report to the nation on Vietnam.

Criticism in Telegrams

Leafing through the telegrams that poured into the White House after the speech, Mr. Klein noticed that a sizable percentage called attention to—and roundly condemned—the post-speech television commentary. He relayed this information to the Vice President, who sensed immediately that he was assured of a responsive audience to a speech attacking the networks. Mr. Agnew delivered the speech 10 days later.

At the same time, Mr. Klein is said to have been mildly disturbed at the strength of Mr. Agnew's rhetoric—although he agreed with the notion that the media should "re-examine itself" and try harder to separate subjective commentary from objective reporting.

In a later trip to New York Mr. Klein spent several hours cooling the frayed nerves of his many friends in the television business.

In addition, he is known to have played a role in toning down Mr. Agnew's subsequent

attack on the newspapers. The White House was nervous about the speech, and when Mr. Klein called from New York, where he had been addressing a group of radio and television editors, the distribution of the text was held up for two hours while revisions were made.

The most difficult aspect of Mr. Klein's role to pin down in his relationship with the White House. Mr. Ziegler, the press secretary, has a sizable apparatus of his own, and is clearly the President's principal spokesman on a day-to-day basis.

It is also an old Washington truism that the men who see the President have influence with the President, and Mr. Ziegler sees the President several times a day while Mr. Klein sees him only when the matter is urgent or when the President needs to talk to him.

In this connection, insiders report that the one Cabinet department whose public statements have caused Mr. Klein the most dismay is Justice. The officers there have a habit of saying controversial things, and their boss is the President's closest Cabinet adviser, John N. Mitchell.

Mr. Klein, himself, denied any rift, but the suspicion persists that Mr. Mitchell, given his access to the President, is less likely to accept Mr. Klein's advice on public affairs policy than, say, Mr. Hickel is.

But as one old Washington hand commented the other day, "Herb Klein has staying power," an observation that seems to be borne out by the record. Mr. Klein has known Mr. Nixon since 1946—"when neither of us amounted to much," he says—and has served on and off as his spokesman, friend, and confidante for over two decades.

"The President calls Herb when he needs him," says a mutual friend, and observers here believe Mr. Nixon will continue to find a need for him in the future.