

Herbert Klein: The Man Behind Nixon's

By RICHARD HALLORAN
Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Jan. 3—When President Nixon sits down in the White House tomorrow night to discuss the Presidency with four television commentators, it will be the highlight of an extensive effort to publicize the Administration's accomplishments midway in its four-year term.

That effort was devised by Herbert G. Klein, the President's amiable and soft-spoken Director of Communications, who was appointed two years ago to stimulate the flow of information from the Government to the American people.

From all accounts here, Mr. Klein has fulfilled a good part of that mandate. But, as the Administration heads into its third year, Mr. Klein and his staff still seem to be groping for a way to make a solid impact on the Administration's information policy at the highest level.

Often Consulted

Policy decisions on crucial matters are made within a small circle of the President's closest advisers, among whom Mr. Klein cannot be counted. He is often consulted in White House policy meetings, but the final say on the public relations of a particular issue is not necessarily his.

"Herb Klein is a real pro, and the concept of his job is excellent," a well-placed official said. "But in execution, he's still a man in search of a mission." Mr. Klein has considerable influence in the public relations operations of most Government departments, but is regarded within the White House more as a technician than a policy adviser.

The Administration's public relations project began six weeks ago, when Mr. Klein asked the public affairs officers in the departments to submit reviews of their agencies' achievements in the last two years.

Those memorandums were returned, however, not to Mr. Klein's office but to that of James Keogh, the President's special assistant in charge of speechwriting. Mr. Keogh worked them into a general view on domestic and foreign affairs

News Briefings

Newsmen were then called in for briefings. John H. Ehrlichman, an assistant to the President; George P. Shultz, director of the Bureau of Management and Budget, and Robert Finch, a counselor to the President, gave the briefing on domestic matters. Dr. Henry Kissinger, the President's assistant for national security affairs, delivered the briefing on foreign policy.

Copies of the general view were also sent to editors and broadcasters outside of Washington, in line with Mr. Klein's effort to reach beyond the Washington press corps into the editorial and broadcasting offices across the country.

As another part of the exercise, Mr. Klein asked Cabinet officers and heads of agencies to hold news conferences. The Secretaries of Defense, State, Agriculture and Commerce, plus the heads of the Export-Import Bank, the Peace Corps and the Veterans Administration, have already done so. Others will be scheduled before the new Congress convenes on Jan. 21.

A member of Mr. Klein's staff said that the President's appearance tomorrow night was intended "to complement the program of having all of the departments report on their stewardship of two years."

'Clout' Described

"Herb Klein's clout in this administration," a former official said, "is in direct proportion to the place in the pecking order of the man on the receiving end of the clout."

In domestic affairs, Attorney General John N. Mitchell and Mr. Ehrlichman, who heads the Domestic Council staff, are the most influential on how the substance of policy will be transmitted to the public.

Information on foreign affairs is controlled by Dr. Kissinger, who heads the National Security Council staff, and by Secretary of Defense Melvin S. Laird.

Administration sources said that Mr. Shultz is outside the range of Mr. Klein's influence and speculated that the new Secretary of the Treasury, former Gov. John B. Connally of Texas, also would be outside Mr. Klein's influence when he takes office.

Clear It With Ron

H. R. Haldeman, the President's chief administrative officer, and Ronald L. Ziegler, the White House press secretary, who reports to Mr. Haldeman, hold sway over White House staffers. When an aide is not sure whether to see a newsman who requests an interview, he clears it with Mr. Ziegler.

Officials elsewhere in the Government reported, however, that they paid close attention to Mr. Klein's office. The Secretaries of Transportation, Labor and Commerce, for example, know that Mr. Klein has been a personal friend of the

Midterm Talk

27

Tonight



The New York Times/George Tames

Herbert G. Klein in his office in Executive Office Building in Washington.

President for more than 20 years.

When Mr. Nixon appointed Mr. Klein, he emphasized "the need for free access to information in all departments of Government, to the extent that it does not endanger national security."

"The execution of this philosophy will be one of Mr. Klein's primary responsibilities," Mr. Nixon said then. "In this position, Mr. Klein will serve as a spokesman for the executive branch as a whole. He will coordinate the activities of public relations officers in every branch of Government."

A New Operation

Mr. Klein and about a dozen assistants in effect started a new operation in the Government when they moved into the cavernous Executive Office Building next door to the White House.

In earlier Administrations, the White House press secretary was the spokesman for the President and tried to oversee the public relations activities of the rest of the Administration. But he was usually too busy with the first job to give proper attention to the second.

In the Nixon Administration, the job was split. Mr. Klein took on the task of making officials in most departments more accessible and establishing effective coordination of departmental public relations, without dominating them.

Mr. Klein has generally been given high marks by Government information officers, Administration officials, and newsmen. Yet, his influence over the information policies of the Cabinet members is limited.

"When Herb Klein calls here," a departmental press officer said, "and asks the Secretary to go somewhere to make a speech to some innocuous audience, the Secretary goes."

The Director of Communications, who is generally considered accessible himself,

appeared to see his role generally, but not exactly, as did other sources. "There's no question that we have a major influence on what the departments are doing," Mr. Klein said.

But he did not contend that he was the sole or primary adviser on public relations to the President, whom he sees or talks with on the telephone several times a week. "There's me and several others," he said, referring to such advisers.

Mr. Klein, who was editor of The San Diego Union before taking his present job, drew the distinction between his role and that of Mr. Ziegler's. "Ron speaks for the President," Mr. Klein said, "and I speak for the entire Administration."

"Ron has to be with the President all of the time and to be on the firing line twice a day [at White House news briefings]," Mr. Klein continued. "I have to be knowledgeable about all of the departments to explain the Administration's policies in all sorts of forums."

'Feedback' Role

He added: "I can get out on my own and contact editors and national groups in other parts of the country to impart the Administration's message. I can also get a feedback to help keep the President from being isolated."

Mr. Klein has recently been the target of criticism from the news media for not arranging more Presidential press conferences. But he has kept his own counsel on whether he thinks it would be a good idea.

In an article in The New York Times on Dec. 29, he maintained that those conferences "are only one of the many ways in which the Presi-

dent communicates with the people." He mentioned the televised conversations, Presidential speeches and messages, and statements by members of the Administration as other methods of communication.

Because Mr. Klein is far from being the Administration's communications "czar," many of its public relations blunders cannot be laid at his feet. Perhaps the most recent one was the decision to re-run, on the night before the mid-term elections last November, a substandard television tape of the President's hard-hitting campaign speech in Phoenix, Ariz., several days earlier.

Most political observers agreed that the President did

not come off well in the re-run. What made it worse was the contrast with the smooth, expertly filmed talk by Senator Edmund S. Muskie, Democrat of Maine, that immediately followed the President's speech.

Mr. Klein, who acknowledged that the re-run was a mistake, said that he was consulted before it was shown. But other sources maintained that the recommendation to use the re-run came from William Safire, who wrote the Phoenix speech, and other White House advisers.

"Let's face it," said one source, "there's no one in the communications area who could have picked up the phone and told the President not to use it."