

City Hall Role Fascinating to Jay Kriegel

By JOSEPH LELYVELD

One of the most elusive subspecies of governmental fauna is the staff man. The powers he wields and the risks he takes can be tremendous, but they are never his own.

Without exception, his triumphs are vicarious. He is not really a politician

The Talk of New York and not a bureaucrat. What he is, at least some of the time, is an ectoplasmic extension of a pol-

itician sent into the bureaucracy's outer darkness to commune with its minions.

In that special sense, when Jay Kriegel takes the stand at the Knapp Commission hearings on Monday to answer questions about his communion with two policemen on the subject of corruption, it will be almost as if the questions were being put to Mayor Lindsay himself.

The Lindsay administration was just 15 months old and Mr. Kriegel, as he then used to say, was 26½—less than two years out of Harvard Law School, a brash and insecure fast-talking prodigy—when David Durk brought Frank Serpico to his basement office at City Hall.

Characteristics in Common

For Mr. Serpico, it was the first and last visit there. But Mr. Durk and Mr. Kriegel had been fast friends since the summer of 1965, when they happened to fall into conversation on Central Park South where the policeman, then in uniform, was manning a post.

In no time they discovered a remarkable similarity in their personal histories and views. Mr. Durk had grown up in Manhattan and gone from Stuyvesant High School to Amherst College. Mr. Kriegel had got to Amherst by way of Flatbush and Midwood High.

Both felt strongly about the need to reform the processes of criminal justice in

the city. Both were compulsive talkers.

Even before Mr. Lindsay moved into City Hall, Mr. Durk assisted Mr. Kriegel in the drafting of a white paper on law enforcement. In the months that followed, as Mr. Kriegel assumed prime staff responsibility for the Police Department, there were many long talks, lasting into the small hours of the morning, about the police and how the Mayor could exert leverage on them.

The day he brought Mr. Serpico to City Hall Mr. Durk was on much closer personal terms with the Mayor's aide than he was with his fellow policeman.

Rapport for Three Years

Despite strains—the policeman's feeling that the staff man's commitment to reform had dwindled, the staff man's feeling that his police friend was naive about what it takes to pull off a big reform—they stayed on close terms for three years more, until the publication of The New York Times article that gave rise to the Knapp Commission.

Mr. Durk, who testified yesterday before the commission, came to The Times because he felt he had been let down at City Hall. Mr. Kriegel, who is due to testify Monday, now says the Times article created the climate of opinion that made the appointment of the commission possible.

It may be left to the commission itself to determine whether the Lindsay administration acted strongly on corruption or merely reacted to unfavorable publicity. The friendship of the two men did not survive public discussion of their private disagreement on that point, or the staff man's discovery that the detective had set him up for an argument on the phone and then taped it.

Mr. Kriegel still talks fast, like a long-playing record at the wrong speed—questions, statistics, facts and orders chasing one another in a stac-

cato rhythm that many find awesome, some benumbing. "Talking to Jay Kriegel," a Lindsay aide once said, "is like putting your finger in an electric light socket."

But he is no longer relegated to the basement at City Hall and no longer feels insecure about his place in the Lindsay administration or its ability to find out what is happening in city government and act effectively. Four months after the Knapp Commission was named, he moved into an office just down the corridor from the Mayor's and assumed the responsibilities of chief of staff.

His own favorite metaphor for what he does there during his daily 12-to-14 hour stints is that of a juggler. Actually, what he describes is less a metaphor than a physical sensation. "When everything's going well," he says, "I feel as if I have 30 or 40 things in the air, that I know where each one is and when I will have to reach out and touch it."

There are certain projects for which he has had prime responsibility on the Mayor's staff—the building of the new police headquarters, or the setting up of the 911 emergency number, or the Big Six Mayors group that lobbies against budget cuts in Albany.

Any policy issues about the police that come before Mayor Lindsay are still very much his affair.

Always: Questions

But his main function in his \$34,500 job is to keep asking questions on the Mayor's behalf about programs, performance and what staff men always call options: the "What is the next thing we have to do?" and "How do we do it?" kind of questions.

He has been married for three months to a former City Hall aide, but most nights he still takes his meals with other members of the Mayor's inner circle. Then he goes home to a garden duplex six blocks from Gracie

Mansion and talks to his colleagues on the phone into the early morning hours, about what they have found in the first editions of the next day's newspapers and other urgencies.

Although he has not been away from City Hall for more than a week in six years, he does not think he leads a sheltered life. "This is where you see it all," he says.

Other City Hall types are momentarily nonplussed when asked to define his basic commitment. "Jay is continually fascinated by the process," one ventured. "It's the Mayor," said another.

The question was put to Mr. Kriegel himself the other night as he maneuvered his blue Porsche through traffic on the Franklin D. Roosevelt Drive. It came as he was spontaneously composing an ode to the lights on the Williamsburg Bridge.

"It's this city," he replied exuberantly.

Not a Carpetbagger

That answer may sound sentimental but it served to distinguish him from another subspecies of staff man that is not uncommon here, the carpetbagging technician who is content to pull strings anywhere he can gather them into his hands.

Of course, Mr. Kriegel's passion for New York does not prevent him from dreaming of the move all Lindsay staff men dream of these days, which is why it may be relevant to recall the advice of President Johnson's former press secretary, George E. Reedy, who said: "No one should be permitted to enter the gates of the White House until he is at least 40 and has suffered a major disappointment in life."

It will be 1980 before Jay Kriegel turns 40 but he may get a start on the other half of that prerequisite at the Knapp hearing Monday. For a conscientious staff man, finding the cameras focused on himself comes close to being "a major disappointment."