

The Machine — or whatever you want to call it — has been around at the University of Alabama a long time. More than 40 years ago, I participated in its activities, and it had been a non-sanctioned campus organization for many years before that.

We didn't call it a "machine" — though others did — and it wasn't "Theta Nu Epsilon." We called it "the group," and we existed for one purpose — to get our candidates elected to campus office.

It was, pure and simple, a political party. We didn't beat anybody up. We didn't stuff any ballot boxes.

But we did work pretty darned hard to get our candidates in, and for the most part we succeeded.

We were, naturally, sworn to secrecy since there was ample evidence the university administration would take a dim view of our efforts. But I would think that the passage of 40 years has dimmed the necessity for silence.

The workings of the group then were comparatively simple. The active participants were representatives of a dozen or so Greek-letter fraternities, a couple of members from each at any given time. We also had several independent members.

Not all fraternities participated, nor did any sororities — though most of the latter could be counted on to support group candidates.

We met secretly every few months, more around election time, and most times in the woods around Tuscaloosa. We talked about upcoming elections, and discussed possible candidates for the various campus posts.

The result each year was a slate of group-backed candidates — some members of the group, some not. It was no guarantee of election, but it surely helped.

With group backing, I ran for editor of the campus newspaper, the *Crimson-White*, in the spring of 1951. Bob Vance, the federal judge killed by a bomb blast in Birmingham



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ran several years ago, ran for Student Government Association president on the same ticket.

We won. But it still took a lot of work. We hung banners. We gave out literature. I still recall visiting various fraternity and sorority houses during that campaign, somehow eating two lunches and two dinners each day while making my pitch to different meal shifts.

In retrospect, our main failing in those days was a tendency to challenge elections that didn't go our way. G.B. Kahn of Mobile — now chief U.S. bankruptcy judge here — beat the group's candidate for yearbook business manager. We challenged the win on a technicality, and the student court upheld Kahn. The court was right. We were wrong.

But most of the candidates we supported became effective campus officeholders. And another thing is certain: Many of the people who were active in the group in those days went on to become household names in Alabama and elsewhere — most in the fields of law, business or politics.

I do not know how the group — or "machine," if you prefer — has evolved over the years. But in those days we won elections the same way politicians do everywhere. We were organized, and we got out the vote.