

Group controls ballot box

By JOHN ARCHIBALD, JAN CRAWFORD and ALECIA SHERARD

When students go to the polls Thursday, not all of them will select candidates on merits alone.

Instead, the Machine will again attempt to dominate student elections and campus politics.

This organization, also known as Theta Nu Epsilon, is a secret group of about 40 representatives from 26 select fraternities.

In the fall, 30 or so Machine members pick candidates.

AND ON election day, a representative from each of the Machine houses passes out a list of Machine candidates for students to use as a reference at the polls. It is not unusual for a fraternity or sorority to fine its members for not voting in the SGA election.

The Machine has been said to use underhanded and sometimes illegal tactics to strengthen its position in certain SGA races.

For example, Bertram Fairries, a junior in accounting and candidate for SGA treasurer, said he has encountered several attempts by the Machine to keep him from running for SGA executive office.

Fairries said the Machine has tried to persuade him not to run for executive office by attempting to make political deals, threatening phone calls and even attempting to run him off the road.

FAIRRIES said a car with a University sticker and a current parking decal once attempted to run him off the road on his way to Montgomery.

On the back window of the car — a light-colored Ford LTD — Fairries said he saw three Greek letters: SAE, which stand for Sigma Alpha Epsilon — a Machine fraternity.

But the Fairries incident is not the only reported violent act said to be linked to the Machine.

Bob Schraeder, chairman of the Alabama Student Party, claimed he

was attacked outside his dorm one night in what he described as a Machine ambush. Schraeder had two cracked ribs.

And Schraeder said two, other independents had been attacked since October, both of which said they thought the attackers were from the Machine.

BOTH Fairries and Schraeder claim to have received threatening telephone calls ranging from verbal abuse concerning their sexual preferences to threats that the Machine had faculty members on its side who would ensure they suffered academically.

Fairries went to the administration with his problems. He said the University wanted to keep it "hush-hush."

Fairries said he thought about leaving the University, and his parents threatened to take his story to the media if nothing was done about the harassment.

"Dr. Lanny Moore and University

investigators came to talk to me about it," Fairries said. "I think they looked at it as though if I dropped out I would surely publicize why I left.

"And this would make them seem like they could not control the Machine," he said.

FAIRRIES said Moore told him he would "go through the proper channels to get the phone calls to stop."

After this, Fairries said, "I got no phone calls, nothing."

In another incident, a University student and member of a non-Machine sorority received a black rose with a note attached saying, "We're thinking of you," when she inadvertently became involved in a CW investigation of the Machine.

In its ongoing investigation during the past several weeks, three Crimson White reporters have received obscene calls and threats if the current investigation were not dropped.

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Machine

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In recent years, the Machine has been said to be responsible for several illegal acts, including a wire tap of 1983 SGA President John Bolus' telephone.

AND AS recently as last week, a member of Machine fraternity Lambda Chi Alpha was found allegedly trespassing in SGA Vice President John Merrill's office. Merrill says he caught Scott Miller "rambling" through his desk Thursday night in Ferguson Center. Investigation of the incident continues, and Merrill says he is unsure whether he will press charges.

In the past, University administrators sometimes have termed such incidents as "college pranks."

But Edward Whipple, in his first year as director of Student Life, said the University "has a responsibility to make sure this activity doesn't happen again."

Whipple said Texas Tech and Iowa State, schools where he worked before coming to the University,

have both large greek communities and "healthy political environments."

"I've never heard of that type of activity," Whipple said. "It isn't normal."

WHIPPLE said he believes offenders should be prosecuted.

Vice President of Student Affairs John Baier said he has no problem with the idea of a strong greek community, calling it only natural that a community would want to exert its influence.

But Baier said he would step in when the influence takes the form it appears to have taken at the University.

"The average student doesn't have the ability to reach his potential," Baier said. "When we have people who want to run, they should be able to."

Baier said the Machine is modeled after the American political process because it seeks to preserve its best interests for the greek system.

But in pursuing its interests, the Machine has excluded campus ac-

tivities to most non-greek students and diminished the credibility of the University to many students.

HE SAID problems with the Machine include ensuring integration of the electoral process and guaranteeing everyone who seeks office equal opportunity.

"The restrictions in the campaign provision of the election code make it extremely difficult for non-Machine candidates," Baier said, referring to the law that restricts SGA election campaigning to three days.

Baier said reforming the campus political structure that has perpetuated Machine politics must take place slowly. He said the first steps are eliminating the campaign restriction laws and revamping the selection process for campus honorees.

"PRESENT restrictions are violations of students' civil rights," Baier said. "I don't believe they'd stand the test of legal review."

Baier said the laws "encourage sinister, clandestine, machine-type politics."

Baier said he is not popular with "the Machine or the SGA because I refuse to allow them power they don't have."

"I am threatening to people in power because I am a threat to their power base," Baier said. "But I am not here to serve the interests of the elite, but for all students."

ELECT



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