

Discrediting our University --- the Campus Machine

EDITOR'S NOTE: The Crimson-White editorial reprinted below was first published March 22, 1961. It was responsible for at least a temporary break in campus political control by The Machine.

However, since the time it was written by then - Crimson - White Editor Jo Anne Singley, certain of her facts have proven to be inaccurate and other conditions have changed with time. Changes which should be noted in the editorial include:

—Machine control does not now extend to determining the membership of the campus honoraries mentioned in the editorial, other than putting Machine - backed people in a position to be qualified for certain of them through election.

—It now seems that The Machine had its beginnings on campus earlier than the 1930s, perhaps as early as 1917.

—The Crimson - White has been unable to discover any evidence that Theta Nu Epsilon was ever the subject of a Congressional investigation, although its accreditation was removed by the National Interfraternity Council.

—No independants are now members of The Machine.

—The meetings are somewhat less glamorous than pictured in the editorial, usually now in fraternity basements.

—The vote determining who will receive the support of The Machine is open.

—Membership is not usually extended to a person just because he is running for office, or, in fact, even if he has been elected to a high position.

—Dues are not \$35. At the time of the editorial they were \$3, and now \$5. That's inflation.

—Although initiation has some bit of mysticism, it is not now so colorful as described in Miss Singley's editorial.

However, these minor inaccuracies and changes should be taken in stride. The editorial remains the first honest talk in print about The Machine.

Unknown to the vast majority of students at the University of Alabama but nonetheless true is the fact that political life, membership in many "honoraries," and, indeed, even to some extent social life on this campus is dominated and controlled by a well-organized political machine. Ask any of the bigwigs of the campus and of the machine about its existence, and they will respond with the innocent expression of a newborn babe, and ask, "What machine?" They believe that the students of this campus are so naive as to swallow so incredible a line.

We have more faith in the students of this University. We believe that they, when told the truth, will recognize it as such. We, therefore, decided to expose this machine, this group of self-appointed political dictators, for precisely what they are — a shameful, undemocratic, vicious, and irresponsible menace to the good name of this institution.

The organization which exists on campus, commonly known as "The Group," controls the student body through the elections. The organization contains from 30 to 35 members who meet at intriguing, deserted places at midnight to decide the political destiny of 7,293 students.

Commonly called "The Machine" by

suspicious students, The Group is a tradition at Alabama, one that is crying for change, one that is festering with the illusion of its own importance.

The Group was commonly known by another name when it was founded in the 1930's and during the first years of its existence. Later the Federal government labeled the organization as "subversive," and the UA chapter changed their name to "The Group." When queried by administrative officials shortly afterwards about the now - subversive organization, the members, having changed the name and become a secret organization, denied any affiliation. Thus was The Group's secret birth, and it has been a covert organization since. Each member learns this history upon joining The Group.

There are two degrees of membership: fraternity and independent. Major fraternities have from one to three members depending on their size and power. Usually there are from one to five independents in the organization; sometimes there are none. Lesser fraternities and all sororities are excluded.

The organization has a president (usually not the most active political figure on campus) and a secretary. The secretary keeps all records and informs members of meetings by word of mouth.

Meetings are usually held in secretive, secluded places. Some of their preferred rendezvous spots include a gravel pit off the Eutaw Highway approximately three miles south of Tuscaloosa, a fraternity summer house north east on the Birmingham Highway, the basement of the Chi Phi house and upstairs in a corner store in the city of Northport.

Approximately three weeks to one month before the election, The Group meets to select their slate of candidates. At this meeting they choose for the unknowing 7,293 students who will be president of SGA, who will be editor of the C-W and the Corolla, who will get the Cotillion Club presidency, to name a few.

Nominations are made openly by the 30-35 members. The nominees leave the scene of the meeting and debates and discussions (often heated) ensue. The final vote is by secret ballot. Prior to the vote, there may be a great deal of dissention among the prospective candidates. Afterwards, however, everyone pledges his support for their slate of one candidate for each office.

The members at this meeting, and others preceding the election, are instructed to promote support for their candidates in the fraternities. The independents are urged to seek support from the marriage students and other independents. Members are to use the girls they date to gain support for their candidates in sororities and womens' dormitories. Car pools and shuttle services are planned and organized. Poll watchers are selected.

If a person selected to run in the election is not a member, the scherning process begins to secure his membership. New members are accepted

about twice a year to fill vacancies of former members. Prospects are voted on by The Group, and one vote can blackball a candidate from membership.

When a prospective member is first contacted, he is told that The Group's motto is "Get the best man in office," and that membership is necessary to "get anywhere" in campus activities. After a period of time elapses, the prospective member is contacted again and told to meet a car sent for him at a deserted spot about 11 or 11:30 p.m. A frequent meeting place is near the dark railroad trestle by Mens' Lake. The prospective member waits until he recognizes the pre-arranged signal. Then he puts on his blindfold and gets into the car. The prospective member's sense of direction is confused by being driven about in twists and turns.

Upon arriving at the meeting place, the prospective member is usually instructed to wait outside (or if it is outdoors, away from the campfire). After a while, he is taken into the meeting where he is welcomed into the membership.

A \$35 membership fee is charged each member. This fee is used to buy refreshments (usually sandwiches, potato chips and beer) for the meetings and to pay for the "Victory Party" of The Group after they win the election.

Occasionally part of this money has been used for election campaign expenses.

No girls may join The Group, and AWS is laughingly discussed at some meetings as a "trivial thing" to keep the girls happy. However, if sororities, or fraternities, do not go along with the machine candidate, various "pressures" may be placed on them.

Not only are elections controlled, but this organization also dictates the control of various honors and organizations. To be specific, Druids, Jasons and ODK are regulated and controlled by The Group. (Occasionally a few independents or nonmachine members are allowed to join if they are considered politically "harmless") to make things appear less suspicious.

A partial list of members for the Spring Semester last year and Fall Semester this year is as follows: Fred Ingram, William H. Albritton, John S. Bowman, Julian Butler, Gary Huckaby, Tommy Smitherman, Dick McLaughlin, Frank McRight, Johnny Owens, Howard Shenk, Tommy Tillman, Jim Wood, Max Pope, Marvin Epstein, Earl Whatley, Bill Lindley, Thomas Christian, Louie Anders, Charles Crook, David Ellwanger, Lenny Stolar, and Davis Crenshaw.

We suggest that the doubting student reflect a moment: check his Corolla to see who's who in the "honoraries" and top governmental offices.

What do you know about your student government? What has it done for you? What more could it do? What

benefits do you reap from the more than \$12,000 of your activity fees earmarked for SGA use?

The problem the machine presents is not one of denying its existence, as its members so often do, but denouncing it and taking steps to allvate its power.

The University students, with above-average intelligence and education, are ruled quite unknowingly by a group which represents .41 per cent of the entire University student body. If the students were denied the right of popular elections, if the members of the various "honoraries" and high governmental committees were chosen by a minority group, the students would immediately howl: "This is not fair! We're supposed to be democratic."

In reality, have not all your candidates this year for the top positions (except for C-W editorship, the only contested race) been chosen for you by a group of 30-35 students, not even one per cent of the student body?

The Crimson - White drew up a notarized statement, before any applications for office came in, disclosing the machine slate. We were 100 per cent correct in our prophesy, and we tried, in vain, to stir enough student interest to have some contested elections, but only one person decided to run against the machine for a major office. To vote "yes" by an uncontested candidate on the ballot is a joke, a joke on all University students.

Why have not the average students, who hold the absolute power numerically, not run against the machine candidates, or support those who did? Why do they continually tolerate the gravel - pit, intrigue - filled type of politics that The Group offers?

The fault is clearly the students; however, one cannot expect to be against that which he knows nothing about.

During all these years, the only voices heard against The Group were few and far between. It is the admitted desire of this newspaper to be a dissenting voice now. We feel that it is the right, indeed the duty, of the campus newspaper to inform the students of any situation or organization which makes a farce of student rights.

But we do wish to dissent. By doing so, we have hoped, by our editorial policy, to dispell apathy and passivity. It has been our intention to have you look at yourself and around you, and re-evaluate what you see.

You are more than customers or readers. You are the news. And we intend always to print whatever you do, or whatever is done which will affect you.

And now "I have done!"
(The facts stated herein are true and correct. The validity of any statement can be proven by us with sworn statements, notarized documents, and other evidence.)

—The Crimson-White
March 22, 1961