

Roots of The Machine seen in outlawed TNE

The clandestine campus political organization called The Machine has its roots in an older, once national, fraternity which had the same goal as its object — the gain of political power for its own sake.

Theta Nu Epsilon, or TNE, was founded at Wesleyan University in 1870. Its history is clouded, since at least some of its chapters appear to have been legitimate, while others served only as fronts for secret political organizations.

It was in the second case that TNE masqueraded as a drinking fraternity which accepted members from established social fraternities. The real purpose of the

chapters was to gain political control on their campuses.

The next step in the grand plan of TNE was, after securing campus politics, to move into state, and then national, government. "We used to joke that, while we were holding our meetings in some fraternity basement, there must be another one going on the basement of the Capitol," said a former member of the local group.

TNE was unmasked during the middle 1930s, however, and came into general disrepute as a result of investigations by the National Interfraternity Council. As a result it was outlawed on many college campuses.

Though the formal national organization of TNE withered away under the pressure, political activism of the individual chapters continued as many went underground.

As many as 81 unauthorized chapters have been identified, while others doubtless kept their secrecy intact.

The early days of TNE were not without humor, however. A dean of the University of Illinois once declared that "There seems to be little doubt that in the earlier days, TNE was promoted by unscrupulous jewelry salesmen who secured badges from small, unknown manufacturers of fraternity jewelry."

It is now obvious that TNE on many campuses, as on this campus, changed its name when it went underground. While here it took the name The Machine, similar organizations at the University of North Dakota and the University of Virginia have been unmasked this year under the names "The Iron Mask" and "The Society of the Yellow Rose."

TNE at the University of Alabama, though it has gone under the names The Machine, The Group and The Society of Friends, has continued to operate under the old TNE constitution and rituals since its arrival in the 1930s.

The documents and records of the local group are now in the hands of Scott Nabors, the current president.

The initiation ritual reads much like that of any other Greek organization, with elaborate and flowery speeches involved in the actual initiation, still followed by The Machine.

The shield of the organization is a skull, one eye red and one green, with crossed keys below.

Various customs are observed at the meetings. One is that members hold their beer in their left hand so that the right will remain warm and ready for shaking.

Though in the ritual members are called "Nuktogoi," local members call each other "Malacheeks." Initiates are called "Neophytes."

The Machine here has endured two major crises, one in 1947, the other in 1961.

In 1947 Machine membership was composed almost equally of fraternity and independent representatives. A quarrel between the two groups arose in April of that year when the independents became dissatisfied over the number of prime appointments going to members of the big fraternities.

The independents withdrew and The Machine was supposedly dissolved. However, the fraternities immediately formed a new Machine and continued to function.

The independent faction retained some of its organization for a few years, giving strong opposition to The Machine, but when the strong members graduated, the independent group folded.

In 1961 the Crimson-White exposed the inner working of

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The Machine for the first time in public.

Though the organization stumbled for a time and lost, through a series of circumstances, its leverage in campus politics, the organization itself remained.

Although it has not regained its pre-1961 power, The Machine has made considerable gains, especially in the last two years, and now has unquestioned prominence over the less formalized, election-time-only political structures on campus.