

The Machine And Its Cranks

Maybe the average student believes elections are four months away, but a couple of third floor Union building are telling a different story.

It's a story that begins every January and finds its way into Supe Store confabs, fraternity basement meetings and general hush-hush conversation. It all boils down to the question "Who's going to get machine backing?"

Alabama students of 10 years ago might have heard the tale recounted in terms of "Theta Nu Epsilon." Shorten those words to Greek capital letters, and you've got something that resembles "ONE." This was the original secret organization which housed the by-laws of Alabama student political leaders. This was the original "machine."

Today, you hear very little about Theta Nu Epsilon on the campus. But the so-called "machine" is still with us—operating in after-hours secret meetings, getting together its slate of sure-to-win candidates for the coming student elections.

As college editors who've weathered Political Science Fund 2, we are certainly not naive enough to suggest that from here on out all candidates for student offices should run with no backing from any organization. But we do think it's time that the average student who'll cast his ballot in April should become aware of the forces behind each candidate.

In other words, we think students should know why a candidate stands where he does, and who is actually putting him into office. We'd like to see some candidates elected on merit and platform, rather than secret promises.

We find it hard to believe that "better distribution of football tickets" is sufficient to send 2500 fraternity-sorority members scurrying to the polls to select one man for a job, when his opponent offers a platform which includes something more than "Let's have more Christmas trees on Christmas."

And we recall, with none too happy memories, the case of one successful candidate for a publications' post who neither remembered nor bothered to learn anything about journalism—but defeated a capable candidate because he wore the right fraternity pin.

—True, the young man involved had had enough journalism hours to get past the University Board of Publications.

On the surface, his qualifications were gilt-edged. He was qualified to run in the annual elections and he got the job. But he lasted only one quarter.

Taking the publications' problem one step farther, we are vitally aware of the confusion which occurred last year when two young men on the same side of the political fence came up against machine rule. Both had worked hard for a publications' job; both were qualified. Yet one refused to run because the machine candidacy had already been promised to his partner in campus politics.

In all of the cases mentioned above, fraternity membership was a prerequisite for candidacy. But this does not always hold true. Independents have been backed by the "machine" in previous cases, and they will receive backing again this year.

Such backing is awarded on the basis of the candidate's promise "to play ball."

In agreeing to play ball, candidates will be promising cooperation with the dictates of the Capstone's one-party leaders. If they're independents and aspire to have their names on the party slates, they'll have to agree to play that much harder.

And if they play long enough and hard enough, the day before elections will find their names on a small slip of paper headed with the motto "Cooperation Is The Key To Success." Such slips are mimeographed and sent to all fraternities and sororities on the campus which hold membership in the political organization. In some houses, the slips are posted on bulletin boards with the attached instructions: "Memorize this before you go to the polls."

Thus a potential 2500 votes are organized for every name on the "machine" slate each year. A winning proposition? It can't lose.

It can't as long as no party of equal strength exists on the campus—and we've yet to see one that proved effective.

The Student Government association is this week proposing a school for prospective political candidates. Its aim is the improvement of administration of student affairs.

Certainly no organization is more interested in improving student government than this newspaper. For that reason, The Crimson-White, carrying out its "pre-view" promises, will next week carry its plan for an open and above-board two party system on the campus.