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PRESSURE GROUP

To mount pressure is to persuade someone or coerce a person into doing something. This makes a pressure group a formal or organized body with a common interest whose fundamental aim is to put pressure on any governmental institution with the goal of influencing government policies and laws to its own advantage. A pressure group promotes its interest regarding an issue; it seeks to influence government decisions and policies. The pressure group is referred to as “THE FUNCTIONAL REPRESENTATIVE”. This is the idea that various pressure groups represent different sectors of the society based on their functions. This is usually done through their occupation or professions. For example, the Nigeria bar association (NBA) represents the Lawyers and Solicitors, while Nigeria Medical Association (NMA) represents doctor’s interests. There is also the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) which champions the interests of academics and condition of learning in Nigeria’s universities.

According to Anifowose (1999) pressure group is described as ‘interest groups, lobby groups or even protest groups”. What pressure groups seek to achieve is to ensure that government does their biddings. And with some pressure through the right channels and means, pressure groups are able to make government listen to them. In addition to that, these groups influence both public policy, administration, and even go a long way to determine political structures of the society and forms of government. In nature, these groups could be religious, business like, educational, ethnic oriented, gender-sensitive, economic or social, among others. Some examples of pressure groups, in Nigeria are; ASUU (Academic staff union of universities), Arewa Consultative Forum, Arewa People’s Congress (representing the Hausa tribe) etc.

Pressure group and political parties appear similar, but they are different from each other. The first distinction is that political parties seek to gain government powers while pressure group does not seek to gain powers. Rather, their aim is to influence government decisions. Second, political party has a wide range of policies, whereas pressure groups narrow their goals. Also pressure groups are not actually accountable for any of their actions, while political parties do account for their actions. Political parties are more formally organized than pressure group. Pressure groups and Political parties relate together to achieve certain social changes. Pressure groups may align their interests with that of certain political parties that are believed to possess the capability to further their interests.

Pressure group’s existence is to checkmate and make democracy better, to compensate for the tyranny of majority of people in the society. Also, to treat the gaps in the democratic process, to inform debates among ourselves, to encourage participations, and to enhance good accountability in our daily society. However, while pressure groups are acknowledged as potentially beneficial to a democratic society, problems can arise when the democratic process becomes dominated by a few specific groups.ASUU and NMA may indeed have genuine agitations, but when they go on strike, they hold other stakeholders to ransom and insist that government accommodate their requests.

TYPES OF PRESSURE GROUPS

INTEREST GROUP: This group is also seen as sectional groups, representing the people in the society

CAUSE GROUP: These groups are promotion groups, which seek to promote particular cause

Insider groups and outsider group: insider groups are regularly consulted by the government. They have regular access to ministers and legislators. On the other hand outside groups have no access or links to the government and its machineries.

ANOMIC GROUPS: Groups here have unpredictable actions and behavior as they work based on the moment and situation in the society

ASSOCIATIONAL GROUPS AND NON ASSOCIATIONAL GROUPS: Associational groups are usually registered with appropriate authorities in a state or country. Also these groups have their own registered offices, constitution and so on. On the other hand, non-associational arrangement and gathering are by virtue of kinship or even family attachment, social traditions, tribal or even race afflictions.

FUNCTIONS OF PRESSURE GROUP

1. They serve as a link between the government of the day and the people it governs

2. Pressure groups is that it promotes public participation in the activities of government of the day

3. They serve as sources of information to the government

4. They promotes the rights, interests of the under privileged (minorities), especially promotional pressure groups.

5. Pressure groups are that they are instrumental in the mounting of pressure on government so that it can implement policies that are to the benefits of citizens.

6. Pressure groups may adopt a variety of strategies to achieve their goals, including lobbying elected officials, media advocacy and direct political action (e.g. organized protests). Clearly, some pressure groups exert more influence than others.