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ASSIGNMENT : Summarise chapter 15 of the Government and political institutions textbook

Chapter 15

Pressure group is 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 policies and decisions. The pressure group is referred to as “The Fundamental 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 occupations or professions.

According to Anifowose (1999) pressure groups is described as “interest groups, lobby groups or even protest groups”. Pressure groups came into existence to complement, enhance and protect the interest of its members or groups (Oyeleye, 1998). What pressure groups seek to achieve is to ensure that government does their biddings. With the right channels and means, pressure groups are able to make government listen to them. In addition, these groups also influence public policy, administration and even go a long way to determine political structures of the society and forms of government. These groups could be religious, business-like, educational, ethnic-oriented, gender-sensitive, economic and social, among others. Some examples of pressure groups are the Nigerian Bar Association (NBA) represent the Lawyers and Solicitors, Nigerian Medical Association (NMA) represents the doctor’s interest and Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) which champions the interests of academic and condition of learning in Nigeria Universities, Christian Association in Nigeria (CAN), etc.

Pressure groups are different from political parties. The first distinction is that political parties seek to gain governmental powers while pressure groups seek to influence government decisions and policies. Secondly, Political parties have a wide range of policies while pressure groups narrow it down to their own goals. Pressure groups are not accountable for their actions while political parties are. Also political parties are formally organized than pressure groups. Although their differences, pressure groups and political parties have something in common. Pressure groups may align their interests with that of certain political parties that are believed to possess the capacity to further their interests.

Pressure groups are classified into different types namely Interest groups, Cause groups, Insider and Outsider groups, Anomic groups, Associational and non-associational groups. The InterestGroups are also seen as sectional groups, representing the people in the society. For example, the trade units, CBI (Confederation of British Industries) known as the voice of business in the country, and in Nigeria, Convention on Business Integration (CBI). The Cause Groups are promotion groups which seek to promote particular causes i.e. charities and environmental groups. Insider Groups are regularly consulted by the government. They have regular access to ministers and legislators. The Nigerian Bar Association (NBA) is an example. On the other hand, Outsider Groups have no access to government or its machineries. They have to use ways to impact. Example of this set is the Animal Liberation Front, which argues for earth exploitation and destruction. Anomic Groups have unpredictable actions and behaviours as they work based on the moment and situation in the society. Protest, rioting, strikes and sometimes revolution are means they use to mount pressure. Associational Groups are usually registered with appropriate authorities in a State or Country. They have their own registered offices. On the other hand, **Non-**Associational Groups are groups without a formal organization. Their arrangements and gathering are by virtue of kinship or family attachment, social tradition and so on.

Pressure groups also have certain functions to perform. These functions includes that it serves as a link between the government and the people, it promotes public participation in the activities of the government, they serve as sources of information to the government, they ensure that government do not perpetuate themselves in power thereby drifting into a dictatorship, they ensure the interest of the minority are not trampled upon by the government, they act as watchdogs on the government, they are also instrumental in the mounting of pressure on government so that it can implement policies that are to benefit its citizens and they influence legislation.

Political groups may adopt a variety of strategies to achieve their goals, including lobbying elected officials, media advocacy and direct political action. Clearly, some pressure groups exert more influence than others. The degree to which such groups are able to achieve their goals may depend on their ability to be recognized as legitimate by the population, media and by those in power. For example, civil rights groups, trade unions and professional associations are more widely recognized and accepted than newly formed pressure groups or single issue pressure groups. They lobby with governmental officials directly. They might sometimes lobby these government officials through friends, spouses, children and other relatives. Also, pressure groups may sponsor bills in legislative houses and contact legislators to ensure the passage of the bills.