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LAW

GOVERNMENT AND POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS

AN OVERVIEW OF THE IDEA OF PRESSURE GROUP

To put pressure on something is like force applied to a surface or impulse of any kind. It also means to encourage heavily, exert force or even influence. A pressure group may be defined as any group of people bound together by some common interests or profession who engage in some activities in order to influence government policies to their own advantage. They sometimes direct their attention to private organizations whose activities have a far-reaching effect on the people.

Unlike political parties, pressure groups are not interested in direct governance or in contesting elections. They may however support particular candidates or parties they regard as supportive of their cause. The Nigeria Bar Association, Nigerian Union of Teachers and Market Women Associations are examples of pressure groups in Nigeria.

There are five types of pressure groups: the interest groups, the cause groups, the insider and outsider groups, the anomic groups and associational/non-associational groups.

The Interest group: They are sectional groups which represent the people in the society. Example: conferences, the trade units, CBI(Confederation of British Industry), etc.

Cause groups: These are groups that represent a segment of the society but where primary purpose is noneconomic and usually focused on promoting a particular cause or value. This category is wide ranging; including churches and religious organizations. It is also aimed at achieving objectives, like protesting for the expansion of roads, etc.

Insider and Outsider groups:! Insider groups are groups that enjoy close access to government agencies and officials. Outsider groups on the other hand, involves organizations outside specialist in “the political loop”. They have no close access to government. An example is the IRAC (Irish Republican Army).

Anomic groups: These are interest groups that use violence, demonstration, arson, assassination, strikes in expressing their aims and objectives. They are mob groups, not well organized but may be interested in some common goals. Street demonstrators and student riot groups are clear examples.

Associational/Non-associational groups: A group such as a club, society or trade union, with which a consumer has some association, and which exerts an influence over buying behavior; the influence of an associational group is usually weaker than that of kinship groups which whom the consumer has closer and stronger ties. It is usually formal. Non-associational pressure groups lack formal structures and reflect largely on kinship, family attachments, traditions, etc.

There are so many vital functions of pressure groups and they are listed below:

Pressure groups try to make the government more attentive to the needs of the people. This is because as groups with many members sometimes nationally spread, they command more respect than individuals who may be fighting for similar causes.

They provide specialized and expert information to the government on their interests and explain government policies to their members and the general public. Thus, they serve as a link between the government and the people.

They help to educate their members and the whole society on their fundamental human and political rights, and on some governmental policies.

They promote economic stability of the country through their useful advice to government on economic policies.

They promote certain general welfare services. For instance, human rights groups like the Civil Liberties Organization, after free legal services in court, especially on cases bordering on the exercise of fundamental human rights.

Pressure groups help to integrate the different interests of various groups in the society into a manageable whole. With this, the government’s attention to these needs will be more focused and effectively addressed.

They promote and protect the interest of their members. For example, the Academic Staff Union of Universities(ASUU) got a special salary scale approved for its members..

The following highlight the importance of Pressure groups:

Promote discussion and debate and mobilize public opinion on key issues.

Performs a role in educating citizens about specific issues.

Groups can enhance democratic participation, pluralism and diversity.

They provide an important access point to those seeking redress of grievance.

They represent minorities who cannot represent themselves.