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Review of Chapter 15 (An Overview of the Idea of Pressure Group)

A pressure group is a formal or an 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. They are known as ‘the functional representative’ because they represent different sectors of the society based on their functions. They could be religious, business-like, educational, ethnic-oriented, gender-sensitive, economic or social.

Anifowose (1999) described pressure groups as interest groups, lobby groups or even protest groups. They exist to complement, enhance and even protect the interest of their groups or members. Their primary aim is to make the government do their biddings, and sometimes, if they apply just enough pressure and also put some measures in place, they manage to beat the government into submission. An example of a pressure group is the Nigeria Medical Association (NMA).

Pressure groups differ from Political parties, in the sense that not just their activities make them distinct from each other. Other differences are;

1. Pressure groups do not seek to gain political power unlike Political parties.
2. Pressure groups work with a narrow range of goals unlike political parties which have several policies.
3. Pressure groups cannot be held accountable for their actions unlike political parties, who are responsible for their actions.
4. Pressure groups are not as organized as political parties in a formal sense.

Regardless of their vast differences, they do share some similarities like; they relate together to achieve social changes and they may also align their interests with political parties they find worthy or capable of furthering their interests.

They also serve some distinct purposes. Some of which include;

1. They checkmate and make democracy better by compensating the minority for the tyranny of the majority.
2. They treat the gaps in the democratic process
3. They encourage participations
4. They inform debates amongst ourselves.

While they seem extensively beneficial to a democratic society, when the democratic system comes under the influence of a specific set of groups, the voice of only a few people are heard and others are ignored. Also, when they become adamant in their quest to have their needs to be met and they do not consider the situation of the government, they put the government in a tight corner.

As earlier mentioned, pressure groups may differ based on their functions but they are also of different types. Some types include;

* Interest Groups: they represent people in the society. E.g. trade units
* Cause Groups: they seek to promote specific causes. E.g. Amnesty International
* Insider and Outsider Groups: insider groups have regular access to the government, while outsider groups have no access or links to the government. They can be switched depending on the government in power.
* Anomic Groups: their actions cannot be predicted and they act based on the situation in the society. Riots, protests and strikes are some of their actions.
* Associational and Non-Associational Groups: Associational groups are registered with appropriate authorities in a state or country while Non-Associational groups lack a formal structure/organization.

The functions of pressure groups are almost the same as the purposes they serve. But it is important to know that, pressure groups lobby. Their ability to achieve their goals depends on how good they are at lobbying i.e. their ability to convince the government to do their bidding, and their popularity (their influence on the government). In conclusion, they are a key part of society and cannot be completely ruled out.