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**CHAPTER 15**

**AN OVERVIEW OF THE IDEA OF PRESSURE GROUP**

This chapter talks on pressure group, it is defined as a group of people that tries to influence public policy in the interest of a particular cause through constitutional means. To mount pressure is to persuade someone and convince a person into doing something. Pressure groups are collections of individuals who hold a similar set of values, common interests and beliefs whose fundamental aim is to put pressure on any governmental institution with the goal of influencinggovernment policies and laws to its own advantage. A pressure grouppromotes its interest regarding an issue, it seeks to influence

government decisions and policies.

The term pressure group is interchangeably used with such terms as interest

group or organized interest. Henry Ehrman defines pressure

groups as voluntary associations of individual who band together for the

defence of a particular interest. Interest in this sense is a conscious desire to have public

policy or the authoritative allocation of values, move in a particular general or specific direction.

The term pressure group is however loosely used here to include trade or

industrial unions, professional associations and other associations whose focus extend beyond the realization of parochial interest of their members. Barber (1975: 198–199) categorized pressure groups generally into two namely defensive and promotional pressure groups. While defensive pressure groups are basically concerned with the protection of their members’ interest and have a defined membership, promotional pressure groups are concerned with promoting some general public interest as opposed to their own self-interest. Trade or industrial unions as well as professional associations and human rights associations therefore fall into the category of promotional pressure groups otherwise referred to as functional pressure groups here. According to John and Erna Perry (1976: 584–585) interest groups or pressure groups are many and vary. Some are formally organized others are not. However the more formally organized groups tend to be more durable, whereas those informally organized usually dissolve after the crisis that originated them.

Pressure Groups and political parties' activities may sometimes

appear similar, but they are different from each other. The first distinction is that political parties seek to gain government powers, while on the other hand, pressure groups do not seek to gain power. Rather, their aim is to influence political decisions. Second, political

parties have 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. The types of pressure groups are interest groups, cause groups, insider groups and outsider groups, Anomic groups, associational groups and non associational groups

One of the functions of pressure groups is that it serves as a link between the government of-the day and the people it governs. Pressure groups stay up to date on relevant information and are able to sensitize the people on such matter and at the same time relate to the government what the opinion of the people is. Criticism of government policies curtail any dictatorial tendency government may have. The pressure groups are also sources of information to the government Another function of pressure groups is that it promotes public participation in the activities of government ent of the day.

Again, pressure groups champion the rights of the under-privileged,especially promotional pressure groups. As they go about their; activities, they ensure that the interests of minority groups are not trampled upon by the government. Thus, pressure groups act as watchdogs on the government.

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.

Pressure groups provide specialised and expert information to the government on their interests and explain government policies to their members and the general public. Thus they are an important 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 government policies. The political education and consciousness of citizens are promoted through the activities of pressure groups.

They promote economic stability of the country through their useful advice to government on economic policies. Example is the Nigerian Association of Chambers of Commerce, Industry, Mines and Agriculture (NACCIMA).

They promote certain general welfare services. For example, human rights groups like the Civil Liberties Organisation (CLO) offer free legal services in court, especially on cases bordering on the exercise of fundamental human rights.

Pressure groups help to integrate the differing 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 (ASSU) got a special salary scale approved for its members.

Pressure Groups lobby in so many ways. They lobby with governmental officials directly. For example, they lobby legislators, ministers and other government machineries. 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 thebills. Pressure groups are instrumental in the mounting of pressure on government so that it can implement policies that are to the benefit of citizens. Pressure groups put pressure on government to influence its policy, change a policy direction, withdraw entirely a particular policy that does not favour theirmembers or the citizenry.