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MATRIC NO: 19/MHS06/006

COURSE CODE: GST 203

DATE: 28th NOVEMBER, 2020.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE IDEA OF PRESSURE GROUP

Pressure is the use of persuasion or intimidation to make someone do something. To mount pressure is to persuade someone or coerce a person into doing something. This makes 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. 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. According to Anifowose (1999) pressure group is described as “interest groups, lobby groups or even protest groups.” Pressure groups came into existence to complement, enhance or even to protect the interest of their members or groups (Oyeleye, 1998). What pressure group seek to achieve is to ensure that government does their biddings. Some examples of pressure groups in Nigeria are: ASUU (Academic Staff Union for University), Nigeria Bar Association (NBA), Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN).

Pressure Groups and political parties’ activities may sometimes appear similar, but they are different from each other. One of the differences 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. Pressure groups and political parties relate together to achieve certain social changes. Pressure groups may align their interest within that of certain political parties that are believed to possess the capability to further their interests. While pressure groups have their importance place in the scheme of things in a nation, there is some downside. Sometimes, due to their own selfish interest, pressure is mounted to alter the direction of government decisions, while not considering government’s limited resources. For example, when some professional bodies go on strike citizens suffer and government might be incapacitated due to shortage of funds to meet the requirements of theses association. 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: the first is Interest group which is seen as a sectional group, representing the people in the society. For example, the trade unions. The second is Cause Groups, these groups are promotion groups, which seek to promote particular causes. For example, charities and environmental groups. The third is Insider Groups and Outsider Groups, the insider groups are regularly consulted by the government. They have regular access to ministers or legislators while the outside groups have no access or links to the government and its machineries. They have to use other ways to have impact. The fourth is Anomic Groups, these groups have unpredictable actions and behavior as they work based on the moment and situation in the society. These groups are not guided by an appropriate behavioral style or rule, and they may sometimes act violently.

Functions of pressure groups: one, it links government to the people; 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. The second is that it promotes participation in government; some pressure groups engage in demonstrations and other measures to put their views across to the government. Third function is curtailing of dictatorial tendencies; criticism of government policies curtail any dictatorial tendency government have. Also, the activities of pressure groups ensures that governments do not perpetuate themselves in power thereby drifting into a dictatorship. The fourth is promotion of the interest of the minority; pressure groups champion the rights of the under-privileged, especially promotional pressure groups. Lastly we have pressure group's lobbying which may adopt a variety of strategies to achieve their goals, including lobbying elected officials, media advocacy, and direct political action. 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 the bills.