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CHAPTER 15

AN OVERVIEW OF THE IDEA OF PRESSURE GROUP

A pressure group is a formal or organised 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. It is referred to as “The Functional Representative” because of the idea that they represent different sectors of the society based on their functions. They aim at protecting the interest of their members or groups which could be educational, religious, social and business-like such as Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) and they ensure that the government does their bidding.

Pressure Groups and political parties may appear similar but are very different from each other. The differences are that:

- a. Political parties seek to gain government powers while pressure groups do not seek to gain power, rather their aim is to influence political decisions.
- b. Political parties have a wide range of policies while pressure groups narrow their goals.
- c. Political parties do account for their actions while pressure groups are not actually accountable for their actions.
- d. Political parties are formally organized than pressure groups
However, they relate together to achieve certain social changes.

Pressure groups are acknowledged as potentially beneficial to a democratic society but problems can arise when the democratic process becomes dominated by a few specific groups by them focusing public debate on a few specific issues. Problems can also arise when due to their own selfish interest, pressure is mounted to alter the direction of government decisions, while not considering government’s limited resources.

There are five types of Pressure Groups. They are:

- a. Interest groups which are seen as sectional groups, representing the people in the society e.g trade units like Convention on Business Integration(CBI)
- b. Cause Groups which are promotional groups that seek to promote particular causes e.g charities and environmental groups
- c. Insider groups, which are regularly consulted by the government e.g Nigeria Bar Association (NBA), and outsider groups which have no access or links to the government and its machineries. They both changes from time to time based on the party or government in power.
- d. Anomic groups which have unpredictable actions and behaviour as they work based on the moment and situation in the society.
- e. Associational groups, which are usually registered with appropriate authorities in a state or country, and Non-associational groups which are pressure groups without a formal organization.

The pressure groups perform some important functions which include:

- a. They serve as a link between the government of the day and the people it governs.
- b. They promote public participation in the activities of government of the day.
- c. They serve as sources of information to the government.
- d. They ensure that government do not perpetuate themselves in power thereby drifting into dictatorship.
- e. They ensure that the interests of the minority groups are not trampled upon by the government.
- f. They are instrumentals in the mounting of pressure on government so that they can implement policies that are to the benefit of citizens.

The pressure groups may adopt various strategies to achieve their goals including lobbying elected officials, media advocacy, and direct political action. 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. They lobby with government officials directly or might sometimes lobby these government officials through friends, spouses, children and other relatives.