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## **CHAPTER 15: AN OVERVIEW OF THE IDEA OF PRESSURE GROUP**

To mount pressure or to pressurize someone means to persuade or coerce them into performing an act. Therefore a pressure group is 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. A pressure group promotes its interests regarding an issue; it seeks to influence government decisions and policies. The pressure group is referred to as “The Functional Representative”. This is usually done through their occupations or profession, ethnic oriented, gender- sensitive. For example, the Nigerian Bar Association (NBA), represents the Lawyers and Solicitors, while Nigeria Medical Association (NMA) represents doctor’s interests. There is also the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) which champions the interests of academics and condition of learning in Nigeria’s universities, Oodua (representing the Yoruba tribe), Nigeria Labor Congress (NLC). What pressure groups seek to achieve is that the government does their bidding. These pressure groups not only influence public policy and administration, they also go a long way in determining the political structure of the society. They can be religious in nature, business-like, ethnic-oriented, educational, gender inclined, economic or social among many others.

In this chapter, the difference between a political party and a pressure group was also looked at. 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. Both political parties and pressure groups are a structured group of people, which are directly or indirectly related to the political system of a country. However, they are different in the sense that pressure groups are confined to a particular domain, i.e. workers pressure groups are open to workers only. On the other side, a political party has no such limitation, and so any person can join, the party of their choice. Also, pressure groups are not actually accountable for their actions while political parties do account for their actions. In addition, political parties are more formally organized than pressure groups. However, these differences do not point to the fact that pressure groups and political parties have nothing in common. They do. Pressure groups and political parties relate together to achieve certain social changes. Pressure groups may align their interest with that of certain political parties that are believed to possess the capability to further their interests.

There are types of Pressure Groups namely:

- Interest groups: These are also seen as sectional groups, representing the people in society. For example, the trade unions, for instance, CBI (Confederation of British Industry) known as the voice of business in the country, and in Nigeria, Convention on Business Integration.
- Cause groups: These are also known as promotional groups. These are pressure groups that promote some causes which may not directly benefit

their members. Examples are the National Council for Eradicating Illiteracy, Human Rights groups and the Red Cross.

- Insider groups and Outsider groups: Insider pressure groups are regularly consulted by government departments (e.g. CBI, NFU, BMA).The price of this privileged access is restraint: keeping confidences, making sure arguments are well-substantiated, avoiding disruptive tactics and “screening out” unacceptable demands. Some insider pressure groups may be “Prisoners” i.e. dependent on government in some way (e.g. Welsh Tourist Board), some might be “Low profile”, concentrating on behind-the-scenes pressure (e.g. National Trust), and some might be “High Profile”, consciously using the media as well (e.g. The Royal College of Nurses, RCN). Outsider pressure groups are not regularly consulted by the government, and are thus reliant on winning over public opinion. They include “Potential Insiders”, who only need acceptance (e.g. Charter 88, which campaigns for constitutional reform) and groups that would never want to be anything other than outsiders. The latter lack political sophistication, and tend to be strident and uncompromising (e.g. ‘Fathers 4 Justice’, a pressure group which campaigns for the rights of divorced fathers to see their children.) Potential Insiders are groups such as Amnesty International, who prefer to remain outside the system.

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

- Associational groups and Non-associational groups: These are usually registered with appropriate authorities in a state or country. Also, these groups have their own registered offices, constitutions and so on. On the other hand, non-associational groups are pressure groups without a formal organization. Their gathering is by virtue of kinship or even family attachment, social traditions, tribal or even race afflictions, to name a few.

This chapter also talks about the functions of pressure groups such as: It links Government to the people, It promotes participation in government, It curtails dictatorial tendencies etc.

Pressure groups perform different functions; they serve as a link between the government of the day and the people it governs, It promotes public participation in the activities of government of the day, They serve as sources of information to the government, they help curtail dictatorial tendencies, pressure groups champion the rights of the under-privileged,

especially promotional pressure groups, they are instrumental in the mounting of pressure on government so it can implement policies that are to the benefits of the citizens.

Lastly, this chapter talks about the various strategies used by Pressure groups to achieve their aims and goals such as lobbying elected officials, media advocacy, and direct political action (e.g. organized protests). Pressure groups may either lobby with governmental officials directly or sponsor bills in legislative houses and contact legislators to ensure the passage of the bills.