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CHAPTER FIFTEEEN: AN OVERVIEW OF THE IDEA OF PRESSURE GROUP

The persuading of someone or the coercing of a person into doing something is what makes a 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 function. This is usually done through their occupations or professions like the Nigerian Bar Association represents the lawyers and solicitors while the Nigeria Medical Association (NMA) represents doctors interests.

Pressure groups by Anifowose can be described as “interest groups, lobby groups or even protest groups.” What pressure groups seek to achieve is to ensure that government does their biddings. With pressure through the right channels and means, pressure groups are able to make government listen to them. These groups influence both public policy, administration and even go a long way to determine political structures of the society and forms of government. In nature, these groups could be religious, business like, educational, ethnic oriented, gender-sensitive, economic or social.

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 pressure groups do not seek to gain power but rather they aim to influence political decisions. Secondly, political parties have a wide range of policies while pressure groups narrow their goals. Also pressure groups do not account for their action while political parties do account for their actions. Political parties are formally organized than pressure groups. Pressure groups and political parties do have similarities. They 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.

Pressure groups existence is to checkmate and make democracy better and also to treat the gaps in the democratic process, to encourage participations and to enhance good accountability in our daily society. Although pressure groups are acknowledged as potentially beneficial to a democratic society, problems may arise when the process is dominated by a few specific group. In this situation, the voice of a small group with people of narrow interests can become overly influential.

While the pressure groups are really important in the nation, they have their downsides. Sometimes due to their selfish interest, pressure is mounted to alter the government decisions while not considering the governments limited resources. When professional bodies go on strike citizens suffer and government might be incapacitated due to shortage of funds to meet the requirements of these associations.

TYPES OF PRESSURE GROUPS

INTEREST GROUPS- This group is also seen as sectional groups, representing the people in the society. For example, the trade units, for instance, CBI (Confederation of British Industry) known as the voice of the business in the country and in Nigeria, Convention on Business Integration(CBI).

CAUSE GROUPS- This groups are promotion groups, which seek to promote particular causes. For example, charities and environmental groups. For example, the Amnesty International, which campaign for the need to end human rights abuses. It is always aimed at achieving a single objective.

INSIDER GROUPS AND OUTSIDER GROUPS- Insider groups are regularly consulted by the government. They have regular access to ministers or legislators. The Nigeria Bar Association is an example of such groups. However, an insider group may be high or low in profile, nevertheless they intend to have influence on government’s mission and visions. Outside groups have no access or links to the government and its machineries. They use other ways to impact. The insider and outsider group changes from time to time based on the party or government in power.

ANOMIC GROUPS- These groups have unpredictable actions and behavior as they work based on the moment and situation in the society. Protest, rioting, strikes are some of the means through which they amount pressure.

ASSOCIATIONAL GROUPS AND NON-ASOCIATIONAL GROUPS- Associational groups are usually registered with appropriate authorities in a state or country. This groups have their own registered offices, constitutions and so on. On the other hand, non-associational groups are groups without a formal organization.

FUNCTIONS OF PRESSURE GROUPS

-Links government to the people: it serves as a link between the government of the day and the people it governs.

-Another function is that it promotes public participation in the activities of the government of the day.

-They are sources of information to the government. They make the government aware of information on aspects of issues they may not even be aware of.

-They criticize government policies in order to curtail any dictatorial tendency the government may have.

-They promote the interest of the minority. They ensure that the interest of the minority groups are not trampled upon by the government.