EKPERIGIN ANITA ONOME

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CHAPTER 7: POLITICAL PARTIES IN NIGERIA

Political parties are an essential feature of politics in the modern age of mass participation. They are an important link between the government and the people. The first modern electoral democracy was the United State of America, and it was here that the first parties developed.

There are many definitions of political parties as the political thinkers. According to R. G Gettel, “Political party is a group of citizens more or less organized, who act as a political unit and who by the use of political power aim at controlling the government and carrying out its general policies”. Herman Finer, on his own part, defined political party as “an organised body with voluntary membership, its concerted energy being employed in the pursuit of political power”. There were many other definitions but from these opinions, we can say that, “A political party is a group of citizens, more or less organised, having some agreement in broad principles of national policy with an effort to capture political power by some constitutional means”.

These political parties have certain characteristics which are: The major or central feature of a political party is to capture governmental power through constitutional means, It must be national-minded i.e. it must take into consideration the interest of the nation, They should have party manifestoes which guide their conduct during and after winning elections, They should also be an organized body, because it can only derive strength from an effective organisational structure. Etc.

We have different types of political parties existing to carry out their functions in a nation. They are:

**ELITIST/CADRE PARTIES:** This is a political party that draws its membership from the highest echelon of social hierarchy in a country.

**MASS PARTIES:** This is a political party that draws its membership from all sections of the society and have wide membership. They take such name as: people’s party, labour party. Etc.

**IDEOLOGICAL PARTY:** This is a political party formed with political ideology or benefits which form the bases of the party.

**BROKER PARTY:** This is a political party formed with its members drawn from upper and lower classes of the society.

**CHARISMATIC OR PERSONALITY PARTY:** This is political party formed or led by individuals with charisma. It revolves around the personal qualities of the leader.

Political parties also have various functions to perform which include: Political mobilisation and recruitment, Political education, Political representation, Political stability, Interest aggregation, Organisation of government, Goal formation, etc.

Political parties in Nigeria developed following the growth of the nationalist consciousness and sentiments, and nationalist movements. The fulcrum for the emergence of parties’ formation in Nigeria was constitutional development.

**Early political parties (1920 – 1950):** The Nigerian National Development Party (NNDP) was regarded as the first political party that was formed in Nigeria. It was led by Herbert Macaulay regarded as the father of Nigeria nationalism. The Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM) was formed in 1934 by a group of young Nigerians.

**Political parties in Nigeria (1950-1966):** Two major parties emerged between 1950 and 1951. These were the Action Group (AG) and the Northern People’s Congress (NPC). These parties emerged from cultural associations because of the prospects of the 1951 elections. This gave rise to the emergence of many political parties apart from the three major political parties.

Political parties before independence in Nigeria were not without some challenges. Some of them are: The political parties were without national outlook, the political parties placed much emphasis on personalities rather than issues, Political party defection weakened or led to the collapse of political parties during this era.

**Political parties in the Second Republic of Nigeria:** The ban on politics was lifted in September, 1978. About 53 political association sought to contest the 1979 general elections. Five of these associations, were registered by the Federal Electoral Commission. These were The National Party of Nigeria (NPN), The Nigerian People’s Party (NPP), etc.

**Political parties in the Third Republic of Nigeria:** General Babangida promulgated the transition to civil rule decree through which two political parties were registered in the constitution. The two parties were: Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the National Republican Convention (NRC).

**Political parties in the Fourth Republic:** Three political parties were registered in preparation towards the Fourth Republic in 1998 by INEC. They were Alliance for Democracy (AD), All People’s Party (APP) and People’s Democratic Party (PDP).

However other parties have been registered by the INEC. The political parties in Nigeria face some challenges and all these challenges need to be solved so the country can be a better place.