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MATRIC NO: 19/LAW 01/087

COURSE CODE: GST 203

ASSIGNMENT; REVIEW CHAPTER 7

ANSWER;

Political parties are essential features of politics in the modern age of mass participation, in the liberal-democratic system; they help keep government accountable of public opinion. It is an important link between government and the people. Besides, there are as many definitions as they are many political thinkers who are aspiring to define it.

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 aim at controlling the government and carrying out its general policies.” Edmund Burke defines political party as “a body of men united for promoting by their joint endeavors the national interest upon some particular principle in which they are all agreed.” However, Agbaje, “a political party is a group of persons bonded in policy and opinion in support of a general political cause, which essentially is the pursuit, capture and retention, for as long as democratically feasible, of government and its offices. From the above opinions, political party is a group of citizens organized and having some agreement in broad principle of national policy with an effort to capture political power by some constitutional means.

Political parties in Nigeria developed following the growth of the nationalist consciousness and national movement. Nigerian National Development Party was regarded as the first political party in Nigeria in 1923 which was led by Herbert Macaulay who is the father of nationalism in Nigeria. Nigerian Youth Movement was formed in 1934 by Ernest Ikoli, Samuel Akinsanya and Dr. J.C. Vaughan. National Council of Nigeria and Cameroon was formed in 1944, it was later re-named National Convention of Nigerian Citizens in 1960, it was led by Herbert Macualay and the general secretary Nnamdi Azikiwe. All the above parties where introduced by Clifford constitution. From 1950-1966 two major parties emerged with three small parries, the two majors parties include; Action Group which emerged from Egbe Omo Ouduwa in 1950 led by Obafemi Awolowo, its aim is to provide leadership for the western region. The second is Northern People’s Congress emerged from Jam’iyya Mutanein Arewa, it became a part in October 1951, its aim is to combat injustice in the northern region. The smaller parties include; Northern Element Progressive Union in 1950and was led by late Mallam Aminu Kano. Union Middle Belt Congress founded in 1955 and was led by Late J.S. Tarka. United National Independent Party led by Eyo Ita.

The ban of politics was lifted in September 1978, following about 53 political association contesting for the 1979 general election but five were registered by the Federal Electoral Commission, these were, National Party of Nigeria lunched in 1978, its main goal was national unity, Unity Party in Nigeria which was an offshoot of Action Group, Nigerian Peoples’ Party which reincarnated from NCNC, its aim is to work towards full employment, promote equality in all sections. Great Nigerians Peoples’ Party was led by Alhaji Waziri Ibrahim, it was controlled by two states; Borno and Gangola between 1979&1983. Nigerian Advance Party was registered in 1983. All this were formed under the second republic.

General Ibrahim Babangida promulgated the transition of the civil rule decree through which two political parties were registered in accordance with the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1989, the objectives of the two parties were to set up military government, they include; Social Democratic Party approved by Armed Forces Ruling Council, with chief Tony Anenih as its chairman and National Republican Convention was registered through the approval of the Armed Forces Ruling Council with chief Tom Ikimi as its national chairman. These were done under the third republic.

Three parties where registered in preparation towards the fourth republic in 1998 by the Independent Electoral National Commission, they include; Alliance for Democracy, it gained political powers in six south-western states by winning governorship elections. All Peoples Party, won 9 gubernatorial elections in north-west and middle-belt. Peoples’ Democratic Party, its aim is preserving integrity, unity& sovereignty as one indivisible political entity. It maintained presidency for sixteen years. Up to 90 political parties were later created.

Features of political parties

* Is to capture governmental powers through constitutional means
* Political ideology
* National-minded
* Organized body
* Party manifesto
* Political constitution

Types of political parties

1. Elitist/cadre parties: it draws membership from highest echelon of social hierarchy in a country, such as; doctors, lawyers, lecturers and so on.
2. Mass parties: it draws membership from all sections of the society, the takes such name as Peoples’ party, labor party and so on.
3. Ideological parties: it is formed with political benefit or ideology which form the bases of the party
4. Broker party: is formed with members drawn from upper and lower classes with the aim of reconciling the conflicting interest of the rich and poor by carrying out policies of social justice for the interest of all.
5. Charismatic/personality party: this is formed by individuals with charisma, it involves around the personal qualities of the leader.

Functions of political parties

* Political mobilization and recruitment
* Political education
* Political representation
* Interest aggregation
* Political stability
* Conflict management and political integration
* Organization of government
* Goal formation etc.

Problems that confronted pre-independence political parties

* They were not outlook as they had regional support and ethnic loyalty
* They placed much emphasis on personalities rather than issues
* Its defection weakened of its era
* Inter-party and intra-party conflict polarized the political parties thereby splitting into factions.

In conclusion. Political parties face some challenges such as; Extreme high level of corruption which has made politics a competitive business, Its regulatory framework for establishment of parties should be changed so as not to have forged coalition of registration. There is need to arrest this trend and make political parties to be directed to fostering cohesion among Nigerians and engendering the development of the Nigeria.