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QUESTION

1. Do a two page review of Chapter 7, "Political Parties in Nigeria," In Salient issues in Government and Nigeria's Politics

Political parties are an essential feature of politics in the modern age of mass participation. In liberal-democratic systems, they help to keep governments accountable to public opinion; even in autocratic system of government, they help the government maintain its hold on power. In either case, political parties are an important link between government and the people. The first modern electoral democracy was the United States of America, and it was here that the first parties developed. By the 1820s, there were well-organised parties, and the Democratic Party, which can trace it’s roots back to that time, is the oldest political party in the world. In Britain, 1867 was the first year in which there was a reasonably widespread extension of the votes. Similarly, all over Europe, whenever a reasonably large and varied electorate was established with the coming of democracy, the political parties appeared.

There are as many definitions of political parties as the political parties as the political thinkers. One of which is the definition according to R.G. Gettel, “political party is a group of citizens more or less organised, 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.” Below are some of the characteristics of political parties:

* The central feature of political party is to capture governmental power through constitutional means. Capturing such powers must be peaceful and lawful.
* Political parties always have a broad principle of public policy adopted by its organisation, which is referred to as party ideology.
* Political parties have party manifestos which guide their conduct during and after winning elections.
* Political parties are guided by party constitution which direct the conduct of party officials and members within and outside government.

Types of Political Parties

1. Elitist/Cadre Parties: This is a political party that draws its membership from the highest echelon of social hierarchy in a country.
2. Mass Parties: This is political party that draws its membership from all sections of the society and have wide membership.
3. Ideological Party: This is a political party formed with political ideology or benefits which form the bases of the party.

Functions of Political parties

1. Political education
2. Political representation
3. Political stability
4. Interest aggregation
5. Organisation of government

Political Parties in Nigeria

Political parties in Nigeria developed following the growth of the nationalist consciousness and sentiments and nationalist movements. According to Ikelegbe, nationalist agitators formed groups and associations, to organise against colonial misrule. 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. NNDP was led by Harbert Macaulay regarded as the father of nationalism in Nigeria. The party was exclusively based in Lagos. The party was formed mainly by its leaders and it’s political activities and campaigns were aided by a newspaper called Lagos Daily News launched in 1925. The Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM) was formed in 1934 by a group of young Nigerians led by Ernest Ikoli, Samuel Akinsaya and Dr. J.C. Vaughan. The National Council of Nigeria and Cameroon (NCNC) was formed in 1944. It was later renamed the National Convention of Nigerian Citizen on 1960 when some parts of Cameroon broke away from Nigeria. Its first president and general secretary were Herbert Macaulay and Nnamdi Azikiwe respectively.

Problems that confronted Pre-independence Political Parties

* The political parties placed much emphasis on personalities rather than issues
* The political parties were without national outlook. They had regional support and ethnic loyalty.

As things stand now, Nigeria’s political parties face some challenges. First there’s an extreme high levelof corruption which has made politics a competitive business. The aim of most Nigerian parties has been the development of a national system for sharing out the “national cake” as a system of patronage. There is need to arrest this trend and make political parties to be directed to fostering cohesion among Nigerians and endangeringthe development of Nigeria.