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19/law/01257

LAW

200 LEVEL

GOVERNMENT AND POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS

GST 203

REVIEW OF CHAPTER 7 OF SALIENT ISSUES IN GOVERNMENT AND NIGERIA’S POLITICS: POLITICAL PARTIES IN NIGERIA

A political party is an important feature of politics and crops up in all its aspects. Political parties originated in the nineteenth century as a response to the advent of elections involving large number of persons. The first modern electoral democracy was the United States of America, and the first parties were developed there. The Democratic Party is the oldest political party in the world. In Europe, political parties were established whenever democracy was established in an area having a large and varied electorate. In Nigeria, political parties emerged as a result of the growth of nationalist consciousness and sentiments and nationalists’ movements in the 1920s. Now the question; “what is a political party?’ Political parties have been variously defined by political thinkers. One of those thinkers is R.G. Gettel who defined a political party as “a group of citizens more or less organized, who act as a political unit and who by the exercise of political powers aim at controlling government and carry out its general policies.” Similarly, Edmund Burke offered his own definition of a political party saying, “political party is a body of men united for promoting by their joint endeavors the national interest upon which particular principle they are all agreed.” According to Shively, “a political party is a group of officials or would-be officials who are linked with a sizeable group of citizens into an organization; a chief object of this organization is to ensure that its officials attain power or maintain power.” “A political party is a group of citizens, more or less organized having some agreement in broad principles of national policy with an effort to capture political power by some constitutional means.” (Olaleye 2019: 81).

For an organization to be regarded as a political party, it must have certain characteristics. Some of which include; possession of party ideology and manifesto, yearn for governmental power, it must be nation-minded and it must be organized.

Also, there are multiple types of political parties. They are:

- Elitist/ cadre parties; one which draws its membership from the highest echelon of a social hierarchy in a country e.g lawyers, doctors and so on.

- Mass parties; here, membership cuts across different sections in the society. The manifestos of such party are aimed at alleviating the suffering of the masses.

- Ideological parties; a political party formed with a political ideology which forms the basis of the party.

- Broker parties; a party comprising individuals of the upper and lower classes of the society with the aim of reconciling their conflicting interests by carrying out policies of social justice for the interest of all.

- Charismatic/ personality parties; a party formed by individuals with charisma. It revolves around the qualities of the leader.

Political parties perform specific functions. Some of which include: political representation, political education, conflict management and political integration, interest aggregation and political stability.

Political Parties in Nigeria

According to Ikelegbe, political parties in Nigeria develop following the growth of nationalist consciousness and sentiments and nationalists’ movements. The fulcrum for the emergence of political parties in Nigeria was constitutional development. The Clifford constitution provided for four seats in the legislative council. The Richard Constitution retained the four seats and established regional assemblies. The Macpherson constitution established regional executive councils and provided for a system of indirect election to the legislative houses with lots of Nigerians.

Early Political Parties (1920-1950): As a result of the elective principle introduced by Clifford’s constitution, the Nigerian National Development Party was formed in 1923. It is regarded as Nigeria’s first political party and was led by Herbert Macaulay. The party was exclusively based in Lagos and won the three seats allocated to it in the legislative council in the 1923, 1928 and 1933 elections. The Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM) formed in 1934 and led by Ernest Ikoli, Samuel Akinsaya and Dr. J.C. Vaughan is another political party in existence within this period. The party contested and won the 1938 Nigerian Legislative Council elections and the Lagos Town Council elections. Another political party within this period is the National Council for Nigeria and Cameroon (NCNC) formed in 1944 and was renamed in 1960 after the break out of some parts of Cameroon. Its aim was to seek total independence for Nigeria and it vigorously campaigned against Richard’s constitution. It was led by Herbert Macaulay. After his death, his general secretary, Nnamdi Azikiwe took over.

Political Parties in Nigeria (1950-1966): Because of the prospects of the 1951 elections, the Action Group (AG) and the Northern People’s Congress (NPC) emerged from cultural associations; Egbe Omo Oduduwa and Jam’iyya Mutanein Arewa respectively. The main aim of the AG was to provide leadership and capture political power in the western region and that of NPC was to combat ignorance, idleness and injustice in the northern region and to control the government in the north.

It is worthy of note that as a result of the multi-party system practiced in Nigeria, there were several splinter political parties e.g Northern Element Progressive Union (NEPU), United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC) and United National Independent Party. Some problems faced with these parties include; lack of national outlook, prioritized personalities instead of issues, conflicts which led to break outs and the collapse of political parties during the era.

Political Parties in the Second Republic: when the ban on political parties was lifted in 1978, 6 out of 53 political parties were registered for the general elections. They are; National Party of Nigeria (NPN) whose aim was national unity. They won the presidential election and gubernatorial elections in 7 states. Union Party of Nigeria (UPN) which emerged from AG won the gubernatorial elections in 5 states. The party acted as a strong opposition to NPN. The Nigerian People’s Party which emerged from the NCNC won the gubernatorial elections in 3 states. The Great Nigeria People’s Party, led by Alhaji Waziri Ibrahim won the gubernatorial elections in 2 states. The other two parties registered were the Peoples Redemption Party (PRP) and the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN).

Political Parties in the Third Republic: in the third republic, Nigeria operated a two-party system with the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and National Republican Convention (NRC) established and registered by the national government. SDP was headed by Chief Tony Anenih and had offices in Abuja, state capitals, Abuja municipals and local government headquarters. The party predicated its campaign on progressivism, populism, crises and so on and was believed to have won the annulled presidential election. NRC was headed by Chief Tom Ikimi and had offices at Abuja, state capitals and local government headquarters. Its campaign favored private initiatives and paid less attention to free education.

Political Parties in the Fourth Republic: In preparation for the fourth republic, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) registered three parties for the 1998 and 1999 general elections. They are; the Alliance for Democracy (AD) which won 6 gubernatorial elections in the south-west, several seats in the State Assembly and local government elections. Another is All Peoples Party won 9 gubernatorial elections, several seats in the National and State Assembly and local government elections. The APP and AD presented a joint presidential candidate for the 1999 presidential election. Lastly, Peoples Democratic Party (PDP0 which won the presidential election and maintained its power for sixteen years.

During the fourth republic, more political parties were registered by INEC e.g All Progressive Congress (APC), Independent Democrats (ID), Youth Party (YP) and so on.