

The Emergence of Pressure Groups on Nigeria: A Sectarians Upheaval of Oduas People's Congress (OPC) and Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP)

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Abstract

The entity called Nigeria has constantly fallen into the quagmire of existence since its amalgamation in 1914. Against this backdrop, it has consequently basked in the euphoria of ethnic isolation, religious bigotry and sectarian interest to the detriment of its success as an entity and one indivisible nation. The bane of this backdrop calls for the nexus of this research paper which sets out to investigate the backdrops and origin of pressure groups in Nigeria, its adverse effects and possible solution employing the ethnographic and analytical methods with Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) and ODUWA People Congress (OPC) as a case study. The pressure groups' ideologies are interest groups or associations whose interest informs the basis of the group. Within its pure and undiluted forms, it stands to define the common goals of its general members. But this noble goal has over time been hijacked and bastardized by regional interest and separatist ideology which has today hydra-headed into banditry and terrorism. It is within this understanding that this research intends to look at the origin, history and the attendant problems of two major pressure groups and how they affect the economical, political and social structure of Nigeria.

Introduction

The emergence of pressure groups in Nigeria is as old as the amalgamation of the two protectorates, forming the country Nigeria. This sectional interest whether biased or prejudiced is purposive for the group. This purposive interest which is often selfish in most cases generally serves as the basis for the formation of the group. Pressure group could also be known as interest groups or associations, etc. in Nigeria these sprang from labour and trade unions. Such unions include: Market women Association (NWA) Nigerian union of Journalists (NUJ), Nigerian Union of Teachers (NUT), Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC), Nigerian Medical Association (NMA), Nigerian Union of Road Transport Workers (NURTW) etc.,

Recently, the purpose of these groups which was originally meant to safeguard and project the welfare of their groups, associations or unions have taken different dimensions as is found in these movements such as Oduwa People's Congress (OPC) and Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) which shall be the focus of this research paper. Their activities and operations have been termed rebellious by the government and its citizens. Though their intentions are genuine when objectively considered, but the modus employed for the achievement of their goals are nefarious and unhealthy to Nigeria as a nation and the world at large. Some of such movements because of their notorious activities have been branded with such names as unscrupulous elements, rebels, anti-government etc. This is due to the adverse effects of their activities which more often than not bastardize and destabilize the economic and political development of the country.

To that effect, foreign investors such as companies and firms withdraw their investments for security reasons. The oil investors in Rivers state for instance are threatened by the Ogonis and the Ijaws. This jeopardizes the economy of the country because almost eighty percent of our income accrue from oil. Whereas on the political terrain, their threat to secede fluctuates the growth of federalism, thus punctuating the success of democracy which is at its prime. Based on the aforementioned facts, we shall then attempt to examine pressure groups in Nigeria, how they affect the political and economic development of the nation with due emphasis on Oduas Peoples Congress (OPC) and Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP).

Though they have crippled and fluctuated the political and economic growth of Nigeria, it must be noted that their grievances and agitation should not be all together ignored. This forms the basis for our critical evaluation and conclusion.

What is Pressure Group

Richard J.J defined pressure group as “an organized set of individuals either from the same social, ethnic or tribal setting induced by the feeling of neglect of interest be it social, economic or political, against the government, such that their agitations might be considered and perhaps necessary change effected.” (Richards J.J. Pressure Groups; 1999: 103). Furthermore, Ananabor an Industrial Sociologist sees pressure group as “an association or group with the same ideology coming together to influence the government by means of propaganda geared towards their selfish interest. (Ananabor, W. (1992: 17) The Trade Union Involvement in Nigeria).

The Genesis of Pressure Groups in Nigeria

In all ages, any group which lives, works or plays together has always acted collectively in asserting its identity and in protecting and promoting its interests. In spite of this natural instinct, certain writers have interpreted the emergence of pressure groups/labour unions in Nigeria as an anthropological phenomenon. Tokunboh M. A. saw it “as a response to stimulants such as tribal associations, industrial conflicts, political campaigns, foreign labour movements and labour administration”. (Ananbor W. The Trade Union; 1992: 17).

The emergence of pressure groups in labour unions as were formally known in historical perspective, is intrinsically interwoven with the risk of factory system production. In this regard the use of trade unions can be linked with the industrial revolution. The fact that Britain had been in the forefront of industrialization in the days of the industrial revolution and our colonial link will her make makes it more appropriate to look at the situation in Britain in the early days of interest unions activities. Two factors can be associated with the rise of trade unions in Britain.

1. As an opposition to the ruthlessness of government workers.
2. An effort by workers themselves to improve their conditions of service.

The first labour act allowing workers to unite was passed in Nigeria in 1939. The earliest attempt to form interest groups in Nigeria was in 1912 when the southern Nigeria civil service union was formed. This was later changed to Nigeria Civil Services union in 1914. As time went on, other unions or groups sprang up notably the union of Railways Worker and the Nigerian union of Teachers.

The agitation of “Cola Allowance” of 1942 and the formation of the federated Trade Union of Nigeria were changed to Trade Union Congress in 1943. The inadequacies of the “Cola” allowance and the 1945 strike by the militant wing (Tokunboh, M. A. (1985: 54) The Origin of Labour Movement). There is another view that the growth or emergence of pressure group in Nigeria is a challenge to the authority of a local chief, and that it grew up in the midst of a wealthy condition to the improvement of progressive interest which included tribal, clan, town, community, village and family organization.

For the Ogoni and OPC who form the point of focus here, we shall consider their emergence. Ogonis for instance agitated for a fair treatment of their citizens in the employment scheme of the oil companies sited in their community. While the Odua’s people congress aimed at emancipating the Yoruba race from its brutalization and marginalization.

OPC AND MOSOP as Case Studies of Pressure Groups

OPC:

In our society today, the question of tribal or ethnic right or wrong has been subjected to critical debate. But if it is so, does it mean that for tribal sentiments, some disgruntled members of an ethnic group should take laws into their hands? This is to be answered by Tayo Odulami in his “OPC coverage” an interview with its leader. He says “in a society where the ethnical concept of right and wrong is a subject of debate, the place of the Odua’s people Congress (OPC) in history is contentious. To many, it is made up of a bunch of terrorists who bear nuisance value” (Odulami, T., I am Invincible, no one can Arrest

me; 200 Vol. 1A: 13). Others, however, believe that “it is a revolutionary organization that is committed to freeing the Yorubas from all forms of oppression”. It is quite clear that, however viewed in either way, OPC has become an issue that can no longer be waved off with disdain. (Odulami, T., 200 Vol. 1A: 13).

Short History

The OPC was formed in 1995 with Dr. Frederick Fasehun as its leader. Part of its Agenda was the emancipation of the Yorubas from oppression. The OPC members tax themselves to finance the organization. Their paraphernalia include guns, machets and African power. Members range from intellectuals to hoodlums. As a cultural and empirical edge to OPC agenda is the proposed Odua world Centre which is to occupy 200 acres of land at Ile-Ife in Osun State, cradle of the Yoruba race.

How it affects Politics and Economy

However, since things fell apart between the leader Frederick Fasehun and his Secretary General, Gani Adams over internal disagreement since March 1st, 1999, Gani Adams now became the leader by self-installation. Since the separation of leadership and installation of Gani Adams as the leader, the nation especially the South-Western part of Nigeria has not known peace and quiet. They have been accused of so much mayhem which the leader has denied in an interview with “The News”, January 31, 2000. This includes insinuation of violence at their meeting venues in September 1998, where a school boy was killed by the police, the Sagamu saga between the Hausas and the Yorubas, the Mile 12 market fracas, etc.

Their goal which was the fostering of unity among the Yorubas have been seen as defeated as some Yoruba elites condemn their nefarious activities. For instance in the Punch issue of Wednesday, 1st December, 1999, the Afenifere of the Pan-Yorubas group, Adesanja A. was accused by another Yoruba minister for internal affairs, Sunday Afolabi of insinuating and fuelling OPC activities. This was clear as “... Adesanya’s comments were in reaction to Sunday’s call by the Internal Affairs Minister, Chief Sunday Afolabi that he and other top Yoruba leaders should publicly denounce the OPC.” (Felix O., The Punch, 2001: 2) They have been incessant destruction of lives and properties thus in stagnation of economic progress and political affairs. We know that zealotry abhors moderation, after the seizure of power from Frederick Fasehun, Adams Gani wasted no time in registering his group in the nations consciousness, therefore “a skirmish in Ajegunle, between Ijaws and Yorubas, a bloodbath in Mile 12 market, Ketu attack on police stations, an assault against robbers in their den in Mushin, all exploits credited to OPC, have sent shivers down the spines of the central government in Abuja and leaders of the Hausa Fulani people in Northern Nigeria.” (Chukwudi A. OPC To The Infant Democracy: 1999: 7). This is the case of political unrest and tribal strife between the Hausas and Yorubas, the Ijaws and the Yorubas. In a further note it has distorted democratic coordination of peace that should flow between the federal government and state government. “OPC forces itself into public consciousness and brings about a clash of men and interests”, (Chukwudi A. 1999: 7) is a substitute of another page in “The news” on OPC. This was done by triggering a disputing match between president Olusegun Obasanjo and Governor Bola Tinubu, the former Lagos State Governor over the desirability or otherwise of declaring a state of emergency.

This was a big snare to entrap the democracy newly instituted by the sacrifice and struggle of many Nigerians which is being marred by sectional interest. Hence Chimezie remarks, “For the sake of democracy, I implore the leaders of the OPC to think of what they have been fighting for. Many of the people have shed their blood as sacrificial lambs to buy us democracy, many were separated from their families for a long time, still others suffered a lot of deprivation in prison. Their bodies were crushed that we may be free. Do we exchange all these just for unknown parochial causes? (Inyakora C.; This Day, The OPC Venon; 1999: 6)

These mayhem and activities embarked by handlooms impair safety of movement, lives and properties. Movements of civil servants are impaired by coiffeurs placed in war ring areas. This goes a long way to cripple economic activities.

Buyers and sellers stay away, companies are closed down, some even relocate to peaceful areas or perhaps countries. We can continue on and on to infinity on the harm caused by the OPC politically and economically ad infinitum. For every paper or news headlines carry about this same story or news which have become the interest of the nation.

MOSOP

The plague that has befallen our nation now, seeming quite inexplicable is traceable to the Ogoni crisis 1993 and the death of her leader Ken Sarowiwa two years later, precisely in November 10, 1995.

Short History

The movement for the survival for the Ogoni people started precisely on the 10th of November, 1990. At the inaugural meeting headed by Ken Saro-Wiwa its founding father, playwright and environmental activist, two members lost their lives in the bane of the struggle with armed soldiers. Each year, after inauguration, the Ogoni people celebrate an anniversary to mark this significant event and stride in their community. But this was often halted by the military then in power. Sam Olukoya alludes to this as he remarks that “the Ogoni count their losses as solders held the first anniversary of the campaign for health environment and right to self-determination”. (Olukoya S.; Newswatch; Setback for the Ogoni; 1994: 2).

The Ogonis are situated in the Niger-Delta area of Nigeria. They have a community in Rivers state with so many villages including Ukanah, Ken Khana, Bori, Boni, etc. As Sam tells us in another page of the Newswatch of 17th January, 1991. “The Ogoni country in Rivers State suffered a major setback last week in their campaign against environment pollution and alleged exploitation when their much publicized Ogoni week to mark the one year anniversary of struggle was disrupted by solders. (Olukoya S.; 1994: 2)

The week-long celebration according to Sam which was scheduled for December 28 of 1993 to this 4th of January the next year was to renew the Ogoni demand for political autonomy, payment of oil royalties and mining rents. It was also to work the burial of two Ogoni men who lost their lives during the struggle. Initially, unlike the OPC, members who have arms as their paraphernalia, the MOSOP members were peaceful in their demonstration. They only reacted by means of peaceful demonstration with placards and appeals through delegations to the companies, boards of directors, state governor and ultimately the head of state. When they were not heeded to and violent restraints were meted to them, they seized arms to protect themselves from aggressive army who were deployed into the community in troops by Abacha, the then head of state.

How Ogoni struggle affected the politics and economy

Politically, the military action against the Ogoni had drawn criticisms from the Ogoni themselves as well as a number of human right groups. These called for the release of those arrested and detained by the military. International bodies concerned with affairs of Nigeria disengage their concentration and support. Government workers or civil servants in the community are endangered by this crisis, hence crippling governmental procedures or progress in the area.

Economically, the affects have been so gross that one wonders if Ogoni community would live up to expectation as a community again. Because there are no job again ranging from civil to company and even the menial farm work, since the area is besieged with armed men. For instance James Deji reports that “military involvement in the one-year old Ogoni –struggle is almost as old as the struggle itself. The army moved into the area March 1993 when the protests by Ogoni disrupted the activities of the oil companies operating there. In just one month after moving there, the army shot dead one Ogoni farmer and injured eleven others, who were protesting the occupation of their farmland by shell”. (Deji J.; Tell; Ogoni Invaded by Military; 1995: 20)

In that process many lives and properties have been lost. For security, oil companies and firms situated in the crisis torn community started deserting the area for safety. Some of their top officials were injured,

and some even lost their lives. This becomes a serious impairment on the nation's main source of income-crude oil and natural gas.

In the wake of the violent clashes between Ogoni and their neighbours, Andoni, the army went back as a peace keeping force. But since they moved into Ogoni land the second time, Ogoni people knew no peace again. According to John Kpuien, Vice president of the National Youth Council of Ogoni People (NYCOP) in an interview granted by Vanguard in June 1995., "the soldiers have left the warfronts where they were supposed to be creating a buffer zone with the Andoni..... Their new location is mainland where they mount road blocks to extort money from motorists and harass travelers." (Deji J.; 1995: 20)

Constitutionally, the soldier's action is an infringement on the people's right to free movement, and threat to passengers and drivers alike A number of people had also been killed and injured by these peace-keepers. This is pure deprivation of human life and properties. On a more serious economic note, the Ogonis have served as a sensitizer to their neighboring communities to rise and also fight for their rights. In their own case, violence have predominated even from the onset of the struggle unlike their mentors, the Ogonis. Prominent in the Niger-Delta struggle after the Ogonis are the Ijaws, and Odi Youths activities. In these areas, civil tranquility has been slaughtered since it has become the abode of rancor and civil disorder. Economic activities have been basterdized by the activists mostly youths who are found with weapons. For instance,. "the managing director of Delcon Engineering Company Mr. Godfrey Igobin was captured by armed youths as they invade the firm" as reported by Olusegun Bamishe in Vanguard. (O. Bamishe; Vanguard; Armed youths invade firm K.; 1999: 7)

Both human and natural resources have been destroyed by the raging Ijaw and Odi youths in their struggle for a fair share in the nation's sources of economic strength oil being gotten from areas. The questions here posed are must they be given almost everything accruing? Is it their birth right or should they merit it? For the ringed combatants, raw is war, but for the people of the Niger Delta area of Nigeria, war is raw. Thus Akpandem James exposed the damages so far caused to the economy and to the nation's human resources as "almost on a daily basis new of conspiracy, confrontation and casualties emanates from the troubled zone just like crude from the burst of oil pipelines that dot their landscape." (Deji J.; 1995: 22) Here and then we hear, seven police men killed by Ijaw youths, three policemen killed by Odi youths. Another two policemen killed by Ijaw youths. The incident of Choba and WillBros oil rape. Willbros after the raid to the company by Choba youths in Port Harcourt disembarked and accused the Rivers State Government for damages and sabotage, killing of innocent people both citizens and employees by armed youths. This crippled the economy as such the company folded and went into silence.

The army sent to these areas did not help issues as they worsened matters by almost erasing the existence of lives and properties in the area. Even the present democratic government regretted the harm caused. Hence in a paper, Tuesday Vanguard, titled "Beyond Obasanjo's regret remarks "the regret expressed by President Olusegun Obasanjo over November attack that year on Odi community could open the way for restoration of peace and confidence. The action he said was unavoidable. He hoped soldiers will never be deployed in future to perform civil functions in communities." (Oyun E.; The Guardian; Beyond Obasanjo's Regret; 2000: 26)

Critical evaluation and conclusion

The various pressure groups in Nigeria have an aim in view. The Ogoni, OPC and INC (Ijaw National Congress) all were formed as a result of two or more misnomer or lacuna in their community. For MOSOP, their reasons were quite cogent. Their environment and land were ravaged and barred by wastages from company products, their water was polluted, trees were cut down, children were dying of hunger and starvation, yet it is from their soil that the greater economic strength of the nation relies. That is why environmental groups such as Green Peace and Rain Forest Movement have expressed their concern over the degradation of the Ogoni Environment. At the United Nations Committee on Minority Issues, in Geneva, the Ogonis issues were presented twice. The Ogonis were also admitted into the

unpresented nations (UNPO). At its third general assembly held at Netherlands, Saro-Wiwa was elected Vice Chairman of the assembly.

The OPC's point of quarrel is very negligible. They feel marginalized and sought for a resettlement with the government for a fair deal in the Nigerian federation. For instance, the cancellation of the just victory of their son in the pools in 1993 precisely M.K.O. Abiola by the dominating Hausa-Fulani Group through the instrumentality of late Sani Abacha. The Ijaws and the Odi people respectively might be just in their demands. It must be noted that the reasons perhaps for the protected war which started really in the pre-colonial days leading to the institution of the Willinks Commission in 1957 and the eventual recommendation of a Niger Delta Development Board in 1958 is that the enemy is not strictly defined, and because this was done, in the first place, the battle is fought on many fronts; thus government multinational companies, the elite within the society, interest groups and neighboring communities are all enemies at the same time.

The government through multinational oil and oil services companies are seen as agents through which government employs to rape and abandon them in their current state of physical and psychological despair. Elites within the communities pretend to act as intermediaries but indirectly projecting their self-aggrandizement and achieve their self-interests through collection of bribes at the expense of the community. In spite of the natural rape we see the government and companies inflicting on them, the means these organizations employ are detrimental to the political and economic interest of the nation. For instance having lost products to the tune of 30.50 barrels of crude oil per day in the Ogoni axis alone since 1993, Shell would not take further chances again Mobil Producing Nigeria Unlimited (MPNU) which has enjoyed fair weather in areas of production has also decided to change its approach to community, having suffered setbacks from the communities' agitations and confrontations. The oil giants Italian conglomerate, Nigerian Agip Oil Company (NADC) in 1998 in Bayelsa State almost grounded to a halt because of youth restiveness, vandalization of properties and disruption of operations. These and many other damages have been caused by violence. But should violence be the solution? "No." Akpandem James quickly answered. Even the present leader of MOSOP, committee, rejected violence as a solution and blamed the Ijaw and Odis.

Conclusion

It is pertinent therefore, to note here that these pressure groups therefore became the fulcrum and foundation upon which sectarian activism and cessionist agitation stemmed up in Southern Nigerian and spread to other parts of the country as well. I will quickly conclude here that, if we are not to live in anarchy, then we have to devise some means by which society can agree both on a set of institutions and processes by which laws and rules binding the different productivity are to be decided in order that the different interest groups and institutions may equitably benefit.

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