

Revision Notes
Class 8 Political Science - Civics
Chapter 10 – Law and Social Justice

In order to protect against exploitation in any form, the government makes laws that would control the unfair deeds. In this chapter, the enforcement and implementation of laws are explained through 2 case studies. Case study 1 explains the problems in a market situation and the need for law. Some basic laws of the country are explained. Case study 2 explains about problems faced in the implementation of laws. The compromises made by government officials in both enforcement and implementation are discussed.

Case Study:

Imagine a market situation. A major issue is the issue of workers' wages.

- Private companies, contractors, and businesspersons to achieve profit might deny workers their rights and they might not pay them wages which is illegal according to the law.
- Furthermore, to warrant those workers are not underpaid, there is a law on minimum wages to protect them.
- Just like the law on minimum wages protects workers, some laws protect producers' and consumers' interests in the market.
- There are laws to protect workers, consumers, and producers.

Laws:

Step 1: Forming laws

- Minimum wages act: Wages should not be below the specified minimum wage, which gets revised every year by the government. This law is meant to protect workers of all sorts.
- The law specifies that there should be adequate safety measures in workplaces. Like the alarm system, emergency exits, properly - functioning machinery, etc.

- The law requires that the quality of goods should meet certain standards. Like the electrical appliance should meet safety standards. Poor quality of products may cause damage to consumers.
- The law requires that the prices of essential goods are not too high. To make sure that the poor will be able to afford these goods.
- The law requires that factories do not pollute air or water.
- Laws against child labor in workplaces. No kid below the age of 14 should be employed to work in factories, mines, or other hazardous employment.
- Laws to form workers' unions or associations. Unions or associations help the workers to form a group and thus the power to demand better wages and working conditions.

Step 2: Implementing laws

- The government has to periodically examine worksites and take necessary action when laws are violated.
- On a large scale, controlling the malpractices may reassure social justice.

Case Study:

Bhopal gas tragedy

On 2 December night 1984, an American company, Union Carbide (UC) had a factory in the city in which it produced pesticides whose methyl- isocyanate (MIC) - a highly poisonous gas - started leaking. In a matter of three days, more than 8,000 people were dead, and many were affected by the gas. Those who survived numerous developed critical respiratory disorders, eye problems, and other health disorders. Even Children developed strange abnormalities.

What is a worker's worth?

Why did Union Carbide establish its plant in India?

To cut down costs. Less cost, more profit.

- Cheap labor - As compared to other developed countries, developing countries like India have cheaper labor.
- Companies can extract longer hours of work for lower pay.

- Supplementary expenses such as the money spent on housing facilities of workers also reduce.
- Cutting costs can also be done by lowering the quality of working conditions which includes lower safety measures.

Case Study:

Between the years 1980-1984, the number of workers in the MIC plant was halved risking people's safety. The workers were given safety training for only 15 days, in the place of 6 months. These risked the safety of the workers.

Comparison of safety protocols in Virginia, USA and of Bhopal, India:

In Virginia, USA—

- Computerized warning and monitoring systems were present to ensure safety in the plant and monitor accidents like gas leaks.
- Emergency evacuation plans were well organized.
- Proper treatment of polluted resources was mandatory.

In Bhopal, India—

- No automated monitoring systems were present. It was utterly reliable on manual gauges and the human senses to detect gas leaks or any accident.
- No pre-planned emergency evacuation systems.
- The environmental pollution caused due to the production was not an issue of the UC plant.

Why is there a difference in these safety standards?

Reduced safety standard means less investment money. In developed countries like the USA, no labor would be available if the safety standards are compromised. In a developing country like India, where the unemployment rate is high people compromise safety over employment. There was not even proper compensation for the victims of the Bhopal gas tragedy. The employers misuse the need for income of the people.

Enforcement of Safety laws

What was the government doing when there have been such blatant violations of safety standards within the UC plant?

- The safety laws in the Indian constitution are not very strong or legit.
- Even those weak laws are not implemented properly.

In the case of the Bhopal gas tragedy:

1. Problem: The hazardous nature of the UC plant was ignored by the officials.

Reason: Despite many municipal officials' objections against the UC plant pointing out the unsafe working environment; it was ignored by higher officials as the UC plant was a very large investment that could give more employment opportunities.

2. Problem: The government officials continued approval of the plant, though repeated gas leaks were evidently dangerous.

Reason: It was illogical for the officials to ask the UC plant to switch to a safer working environment. Here both government and private companies ignored the interest of the citizens.

New Laws to Protect the Environment:

- In the case study of the Bhopal gas tragedy, many localities with the workers were affected. The gas leak caused death and health hazards to everyone who inhaled it that is everyone who lived in that area.
- Other than just protecting the workers, the law has to be enforced to also protect the environment for which no proceedings are taken by the government.
- Up until the 1980s Environment was a free entitlement to be used by anyone without thinking about the consequences in India.
- Environmental activists emphasized the points and demanded the government to take immediate action.
- Laws were enforced by the government, to not exploit the environment for mere industrial usages. The polluter is held accountable for any such pollution caused by his/her industry.

- The right to a healthy environment was brought under the laws of the Right to Life.
- The Supreme Court held that the Right to Life is a Fundamental Right under Article 21 of the Constitution and it includes the right to the enjoyment of pollution-free water and air for full enjoyment of life.
- The government is accountable for checking pollution levels, maintaining clean rivers, and introducing heavy fines for those who pollute.

Important Questions and Answers:

1. What laws were in practice by the US government on industries to ensure safety?

Ans: To ensure safety in the plant there were systems to monitor accidents like gas leaks. Emergency evacuation plans were well organized. Proper treatment of polluted resources was mandatory.

2. Who are a consumer and producer?

Ans: Consumer is an individual who buys a product for their personal use and does not resell it. A producer is a person or organization that produces goods for sale in the market. Sometimes the producer may reserve the product for his own use. For example, a farmer would reserve a part of his agri-produce for his usage.

3. Why do we need a law on minimum wages? Why do you think enforcement of safety laws is significant in any factory?

Ans: We need a law on minimum wages to protect the interest of the workers. The employer may fail to provide workers with enough wages for the work extracted. To stop this from happening, the law on Minimum wages is established where the government decides the minimum wage every year. Enforcement of safety laws is significant in any factory to protect the workers and the environment. The essential needs of the workers and their safety should

be satisfied and monitored. The environmental pollution by industries has to be controlled.

4. A 'clean environment is a public facility.' Can you explain this statement?

Ans: For the well-being of the citizens, a clean environment is vital. A public facility is one that is essential for survival and peaceful living. The unclean or polluted environment may mean increased levels of disease and health issues. It also causes the degradation of the environment and primary resources. These resources, like water and soil, are biologically important. Thus, it needs to be preserved.

5. What are the advantages and disadvantages of foreign companies setting up production in India?

Ans: The advantages and disadvantages of foreign companies setting up production in India are listed below.

Advantages: Better employment opportunities for all classes of people. Country's economic development.

Disadvantages: The companies take advantage of the workers. The government officials don't question the industry in case of poor safety measures. This results in drastic accidents. The environment's well-being is compromised by the officials.

6. What is a worker's union?

Ans: An association of workers. Workers' unions are common in factories and offices but might be a part of other kinds of workers, say domestic workers' unions. All these leaders of the union bargain and negotiate with the employer in support of its members. The problems include wages, work rules, rules governing hiring, firing, and promotion of workers, benefits, and workplace safety.