

**SUPREME COURT OF INDIA**

State of Bihar

Vs.

Deokaran Nenshi

Crl.A.No.208 of 1969

(J. M. Shelat and H. R. Khanna, JJ.)

24.08.1972

**JUDGEMENT**

**SHELAT, J.:-**

1. Section 66 of the Mines Act, 1952 provides that any person omitting inter alia to furnish any return notice etc. in the prescribed form or manner or at or within the prescribed time required by or under the Act to be made or furnished shall be punishable with fine which may extend to Rs. 1,000/- . Sec. 79, however, lays down that no Court shall take cognizance of any offence under this Act unless a complaint thereof has been made within six months from the date on which the offence is alleged to have been committed or within six months from the date on which the alleged commission of the offence came to the knowledge of the Inspector, whichever is later. The Explanation to the section provides that if the offence in question is a continuing offence, the period of limitation shall be computed with reference to every point of time during which the said offence continues. Under Regulation 3 of the India Metalliferous Mines Regulations, 1926, an owner, agent or manager of every mine is required to forward to the District Magistrate and to the Chief Inspector annual returns in respect of the preceding year in the forms prescribed therein and on or before the 21st of January in each year.

2. The respondents are the owners of a stone quarry situate in Chandiwali in Greater Bombay. They failed to furnish to the Chief Inspector the annual returns for the year 1959 by the 21st of January, 1960. On March 28, 1960, the Chief Inspector drew their attention to the said failure and warned the respondents that if they failed to furnish the returns within two weeks from the date of the said letter, that is, by April 11, 1960, proceedings would be instituted against them under the Act. On their failure to do so despite the said warning, a complaint was filed in the Court of the Magistrate, Dhanbad on April 12, 1961.

3. Two questions were agitated in the Trial Court, in the High Court and also before us. One was regarding the jurisdiction of the Court at Dhanbad, and the other was whether the complaint was barred by limitation, it having been filed more than a year after the default, which occurred on January 21, 1960. Both the questions go to the root of the matter, but in the view we take of the second question, it would not be necessary for us to go into the first question.

4. The failure to furnish the annual returns either in the prescribed forms or within the time prescribed for it, that is, by January 21, in the succeeding year, is undoubtedly an offence punishable under Section 66 of the Act. A complaint in respect of such an offence has, under Section 79, to be filed within six months from the date of such default, in the present case January 21, 1960. The question then is whether the offence in question is covered by the substantive part of Section 79, or whether it is covered by the Explanation thereto. If the offence is of the former kind, the complaint in regard to it would be clearly time barred. It would not be so if the offence is of the kind, often called a continuing offence, in which event the Explanation to Section 79 would operate.

5. Continuing offence is one which is susceptible of continuance and is distinguishable from the one which is committed once and for all. It is one of those offences which arises out of a failure to obey or comply with a rule or its requirement and which involves a penalty, the liability for which continues until the rule or its requirement is obeyed or complied with. On every occasion that such disobedience or non-compliance occurs and recurs, there is the offence committed. The distinction between the two kinds of offences is between an act or omission which constitutes an offence once and for all and an act or omission which continues and therefore, constitutes a fresh offence every time or occasion on which it continues. In the case of a continuing offence, there is thus the ingredient of continuance of the offence which is absent in the case of an offence which takes place when an act or omission is committed once and for all.

6. A few illustrative cases would help to bring out the distinction between the two types of offences.

7. In England, the Trade Union Act, 1871 by Section 12 provided that if any officer, member or other person being or representing himself to be a member of a trade union, by false representation

or imposition obtained possession of any moneys, books etc. of such trade union, or, having the same in his possession wilfully withheld or fraudulently misapplied the same, a Court of summary jurisdiction would order such person to be imprisoned. The offence of withholding the money referred to in this section was held to be a continuing offence, presumably because every day that the moneys were wilfully withheld an offence within the meaning of Section 12 was committed. (*Best v. Butler and Fitzgibbon*, (1932) 2 K. B. 108). In *Verney v. Mark Fletcher and Sons Ltd.* (1909) 1 K. B. 444 the question again was whether the offence for which the information was lodged therein was a continuing offence. Sec. 10 (1) of the Factory and Workshop Act, 1901 inter alia provided that every fly-wheel directly connected with steam, water or other mechanical power must be securely fenced. Its sub-section (2) provided that a factory in which there was contravention of the section would be deemed not to be kept in conformity with the Act. Sec. 135 provided penalty for an occupier of a factory or workshop if he failed to keep the factory or workshop in conformity with the Act, Sec. 146 provided that information for the offence under Section 135 shall be laid within three months after the date at which the offence came to the knowledge of the Inspector for the district within which the offence was charged to have been committed. The contention was that in May 1905 and again in March 1908 the fly-wheel was kept unfenced to the knowledge of the Inspector and yet the information was not laid until July 22, 1908. The information, however, stated that the fly-wheel was unfenced on July 8, 1908, and that was the offence charged. It was held that the breach of Section 10 was a continuing breach on July 10, 1908, and therefore, the information was in time. The offence under Section 135 read with Section 10 consisted in failing to keep the factory in conformity with the Act. Every day that the fly-wheel remained unfenced, the factory was kept not in conformity with the Act, and therefore, the failure continued to be an offence. Hence the offence defined in Section 10 was a continuing offence, (see also *Rex v. Taylor*), (1908) 2 K. B. 237). Section 85 of the Metropolis Management Amendment Act, 1852 prohibited the erection of a building, on the side of a new street of less than fifty feet in width which shall exceed in height the distance from the front of the building on the opposite side of the street without the consent of the London County Council and imposed penalties for offences against the Act and a further penalty for every day during which such offence should continue after notice from the County Council. The Court construed Section 85 to have laid down two offences : (1) building to a prohibited height, and (2) continuing such a structure already built after receiving a notice from the County Council. The latter offence was a continuing offence applying to any one who was guilty of continuing the building at the prohibited height after notice from the County Council. (*The London County Council, v. Worley*, 1894 (2) Q. B. 826)

8. In *Emperor v. Karsandas*, AIR 1942 Bom 326 the question was as to the proper construction of Section 390 Sub-s. (1) of the Bombay City Municipal Act, 1888. The sub-sec. provided that no person shall newly establish in any premises any factory in which it was intended that steam, water or other mechanical power should be employed, without the previous permission of the Commissioner, nor shall any person work or allow to be worked any such factory without such permission. The sub-section thus laid down two distinct offences : (1) establishing a new factory in which mechanical power was intended to be used without the permission, and (2) working such a factory in which mechanical power was intended to be used without permission. The High Court held that the first offence would be completed when a new factory was established without permission, an offence completed once and for all, while the other offence would be committed whenever such a factory without the permission was worked, that is, on every day that it was worked without the permission. The High Court observed that though the expression 'continuing offence' was not a very happy expression, it was very often used. A person may not continuously

work such a factory. He might work it one day and not work it the next day, and then resume its working once again. Therefore, the proper meaning to be attached to such an offence was that whenever he worked such a factory he committed an offence. The distinction between the two kinds of offences lay between an act which constituted an offence once and for all and an act which continued, and therefore, constituted a fresh offence every time on which it continued. Similarly, in *State v. Bhiwandiwala*, ILR (1955) Bom. 192 = (AIR 1955 Bom. 161) three offences were charged against the respondent : (1) failure to submit a written notice of occupation of his factory as required by Section 7 (1) of the Factories Act, 1948, (2) failure to submit an application for registration and grant of licence as required by Section 6 of the Act read with rule 4 of the Bombay Factories Rules, 1950, and (3) for using the premises as a factory without a licence. The High Court held that the first two offences were offences completed on failure to submit the notice and the application for registration and licence, and a complaint in respect of them would be barred if it was lodged beyond the period of three months from the date of the offence under Section 106 of the Act. But a prosecution in respect of the third offence would not be so barred as that offence was a continuing offence in the sense that using the premises as a factory without registration and licence was an offence committed every time that the premises were used as a factory. Likewise, in *State of Bihar v. J. P. Singh*, 1963 BLJR 782 the High Court of Patna held that conducting a restaurant without having it registered and without maintaining registers required by the Bihar Shops and Establishments Act, VIII of 1954 and the Rules framed thereunder were continuing offences as every time a restaurant was run without its being registered and without maintaining the requisite registers was an offence, and therefore, the period of limitation under Section 36 of the Act would begin to run from the date of the occurrence of each of the defaults. (see also *State v. Laxmi Narain*, AIR 1957 All 343 (2).)

9. Reg. 3 read with Section 66 of the Mines Act makes failure to furnish annual returns for the preceding year by the 21st of January of the succeeding year an offence. The language of Reg. 3 clearly indicates that an owner, manager etc. of a mine would be liable to the penalty if he were to commit an infringement of the Regulation and that infringement consists in the failure to furnish returns on or before January 21 of the succeeding year. The infringement, therefore, occurs on January 21 of the relevant years and is complete on the owner failing to furnish the annual returns by that day. The Regulation does not lay down that the owner, manager etc. of the mine concerned would be guilty of an offence if he continues to carry on the mine without furnishing the returns or that the offence continues until the requirement of Reg. 3 is complied with. In other words Reg. 3 does not render a continued disobedience or non-compliance of it an offence. As in the case of a construction of a wall in violation of a rule or a bye-law of a local body, the offence would be complete once and for all as soon as such construction is made a default occurs in furnishing the returns by the prescribed date. There is nothing in Reg. 3 or in any other provision in the Act or the Regulations which renders the continued non-compliance an offence until its requirement is carried out.

10. The High Court, in our view was right in holding that the complaint was time-barred as the offence in question fell within the substantive part of Section 79 of the Act and not under the Explanation attached to it. The appeal, therefore, must fall and is dismissed.

Appeal dismissed.

