

Bharat Petroleum Management Staff Pensioners and Others

Vs

Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd. and Others

Writ Petition No. 215 of 1989

(Ranganth Misra, M. M. Punchhi, K. Ramaswamy JJ)

13.03.1990

JUDGMENT

K. RAMASWAMY, J. -

1. This writ petition under Article 32 filed on behalf of about 450 erstwhile employees of M/s. Burmah Shell retired between May 1, 1979 and December 1984, is for a mandamus or direction to the respondents to restore full pension (which had been commuted) to petitioners 2 to 5 and others similarly situated upon the expiry of 12 1/2 years from date of retirement in case of those retired prior to April 1985 and after 11 1/3 years to those retired after April 1, 1985 from their respective dates of retirement. They claim that though in their previous Writ Petition No. 590 of 1987 disposed of by a Division Bench of this Court on May 11, 1988 (Bharat Petroleum Staff Pensioners v. Bharat Petroleum Corpn. Ltd., ((1988) 3 SCC 32 : 1988 SCC (L&S) 706) of which one of us (Ranganath Misra, J.) was a member, a hike in the pension effective from May 1, 1988 was granted, Consideration of the present relief had been left over for a later period. Admittedly, the petitioners in Writ Petition No. 590 of 1987 sought two reliefs, namely, (i) restoration of the commuted portion of the pension, and (ii) enhancement of pension on par with the pensioners of the Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Limited, for short 'HPCL'. During the course of hearing, claim for the first relief was given up and submission was confined to the second relief. This Court accepted the contention of the petitioners and ordered a sizeable hike in the pension. The relief in this writ petition squarely covers relief No. 1 of Writ Petition No. 590 of 1987. But the ground on which the petitioners have again come before the court within a short spell is that their hope of the respondent's sister-concern, namely, HPCL, restoring commuted portion of pension to its pensioners has been smashed as it has deferred its decision on the issue till 1992. Their learned counsel contends that in Common Cause v. Union of India ((1987) 1 SCC 142 : (1987) 2 ATC 100), this Court upheld the 15 years formula and directed that the commuted portion of the pension should be restored to all the civil servants as well as the armed forces personnel of the Central Government effective from April 1, 1985. It is maintained that as principle the same would be applicable to the petitioners as well. The respondents, it is claimed, have to bear an additional liability of only a sum of Rs. 1,02,41,635, out of its huge profits without in any manner affecting its functioning. When the employees of the Central Government and other Public Sector Undertakings are receiving the same benefits, the denial thereof to the petitioners is arbitrary, unjust and unfair and offends Article 14 of the Constitution. There is no scheme in vogue in other Public Section Undertakings like commuted pension scheme except in HPCL. Though HPCL has postponed action in this regard till 1992, the petitioners are not precluded to approach this Court for redressal and the previous decision does not operate as res judicata. This Court having accorded in equity benefits of pension, which is a legal right of the petitioner, the relief also may be granted to the petitioners.

2. Shri Pai, learned counsel for the respondents, has resisted all these contentions. The short question is whether it is a fit case for interference and issue of a direction to the respondents to give the relief as prayed for. Admittedly, the petitioners claimed this relief in Writ Petition No. 590 of 1987. This Court after appropriate consideration held that a sizable hike in pension would meet the ends of justice. Admittedly, Burmah Shell has a unique scheme known as "Burmah Shell India Pension Fund" with its own rules. This Court held that the retired personnel would be entitled to a hike in pension at par with pensioners of HPCL. Admittedly, HPCL has not accorded to its pensioners the relief of restoration of the commuted portion of pension after the expiry of 15 years. The order passed by this Court is as recent as May 11, 1988. After such a short time lag and in the absence of any substantial change in the position, in our considered view, it is not desirable to entertain the claim for restoration of commuted pension. Admittedly, the petitioners are governed by a special scheme, which is not at par with government employees or the other Public Sector Undertakings. In all fairness Shri Pai also has stated that as and when HPCL revises its scheme the petitioners would be entitled to the same benefits. Grant of the relief at this stage would create disparity between the personnel who receive pensions from HPCL and the respondents (sic petitioners). We find sufficient justification in the connection of Shri Pai. So we do not feel justified that it would be appropriate to interfere and grant the relief as prayed for. The writ petition is accordingly dismissed, but without costs.

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