

SUPREME COURT OF INDIA

Punjab State Electricity Board and Others

Vs

Inderjit Singh

(Arijit Pasayat and L. S. Panta, JJ)

Appeal (Civil) 1255 of 2007

29.05.2007

JUDGMENT

DR. ARIJIT PASAYAT, J.

1. Challenge in this appeal is to the order passed by a Division Bench of the Punjab and Haryana High Court dismissing the writ petition filed by the appellant-Punjab State Electricity Board (for short 'the Board').

2. Background facts in a nutshell are as follows:

3. Respondent made a complaint that though he continued to work as a Carpenter, his services were illegally dispensed with from 30.4.1997 onwards. On the failure of conciliation proceedings, the dispute raised by the respondent was referred for adjudication to the Presiding Officer, Labour Court, Patiala (hereinafter referred to as the 'Labour Court'). By award dated 22.2.2005, the Labour Court held that the termination of the services of the respondent was illegal and he was entitled to be re-instated with continuity of service and also was entitled to receive 50% of the back wages. It was further directed that if the amount is not paid to the respondent-workman, he was entitled to interest on the said amount. The reinstatement was directed to be done on the workman reporting

for duty.

4. In a nutshell the stand of the workman was as follows:

He was working with the management in the maintenance sub-division as carpenter from 31.3.1993 to 30.4.1997. His duty was at the residential and other buildings of the management. The work was assigned to him by Junior Engineer Daulat Ram. The said Junior Engineer had issued several documents from which it is clear that he was working as claimed. The workman examined himself as a witness. Management produced several documents to show that the claim was absolutely frivolous. The claim that the workman was working w.e.f. 31.3.1993 to 30.4.1997 continuously was without any basis. It was further submitted that Daulat Ram was not officially competent to give any certificate as claimed to have been issued by him. The High Court accepted the claim of the workman that he was continuously working from 31.3.1993 to 30.4.1997. Accordingly, the writ petition was dismissed.

5. In support of the appeal, learned counsel for the appellant submitted that the High Court has lost sight of the fact that the workman has not adduced any evidence to establish that he was appointed w.e.f. 31.3.1993. On the contrary, he accepted that he received wages for the period from 1.4.1996 to 30.4.1997 after putting the signatures on the muster roll. He has categorically stated that he was appointed as a Carpenter by the respondent-management on 1.4.1996. It is also stated that muster rolls were produced for the entire period which clearly indicated that he had not worked for the period he claimed to have worked.

6. Learned counsel for the respondent on the other hand submitted that the statement of the witness i.e. the claimant and the materials on record clearly substantiate claim of the respondent.

7. At this juncture, it would be necessary to take note of the averments made by the claimant. In the claim petition it is stated that he worked continuously under the management from 31.3.1993 to 30.4.1997. But in his evidence before the Labour Court, he has stated as follows:

"I got vocational training for the period 31.3.1993 to 30.4.1995. I was appointed as carpenter by the respondent management on 1.4.1996. I used to get my wages after putting my signature on the revenue stamp affixed on the muster roll. I have received my wages for the period 1.4.1996 to 30.4.1997. After completion my apprenticeship of two years, I was appointed as carpenter on 1.4.1996 by the SDO. No written appointment letter was issued as I was employed on daily wage basis."

8. Thus there is categorical admission that he was appointed on 1.4.1996. No detail of the vocational training has been tendered in evidence. It was also not stated in the claim petition or in evidence as to who sent the respondent for training. There is not even reference to the so called vocational training in the claim petition. It is also to be noticed that the evidence tendered by the respondent was contradictory in terms. At one place he stated that he got vocational training for a period from

31.3.1993 to 30.4.1995. Nothing has been stated for the period from 1.5.1995 to 31.3.1996. At another place the respondent stated that after completion of apprenticeship of two years he was appointed. No material has been brought on record to substantiate the claim of apprenticeship.

9. Above being the position, orders of the Labour Court and the High Court are clearly unsustainable and are set aside. The appeal is allowed without any order as to costs.