

Supreme Court of India

Carborundum Universal Ltd. vs Central Board Of Direct Taxes, New ... on 5 October, 1989

Equivalent citations: (1990) 1 CompLJ 219 SC, 1989 (25) ECR 466 SC, 1989 180 ITR 171 SC, JT 1989 (4) SC 56, 1989 (2) SCALE 799, 1989 Supp (2) SCC 462, 1990 (1) UJ 90 SC

Bench: G Oza, R Misra

ORDER

1. These two applications under Article 136 of the Constitution are directed against two separate orders made by the Central Board of Direct Taxes and communicated on 2nd March, 1987, declining to waive the demand of interest made by the Income Tax Officer, Central Circle XVI, Madras, under Section 220(2) of the Income Tax Act, 1961 (hereinafter 'Act') in exercise of powers under Section 220(2A) of the Act. The claim related to assessment years 1979-80 and 1982-83.

2. The assessee-petitioner applied for waiver on 5.11.1986 when the Income Tax Officer by his separate orders dated 9.9.1986 claimed in respect of assessment year 1979-80 interest of Rs. 2,06,547/- and for the other a sum of Rs. 1,63,080/-. The Income Tax Officer raised the demand for interest as provided under the law taking into account the finally sustained demands for the two years and interest was calculated from the date when the payment covered by assessments was due and the date when the demand of interest was made.

3. Notice was issued in the special leave petitions confined to the question as to whether the petitioner was entitled to a hearing before the Board declined to exercise its power.

4. Section 220 of the Act deals with collection and recovery of income-tax. The Income Tax Officer's orders were in exercise of powers under Section 220(2) read with rules 118 and 119A of the Act and the Rules made thereunder. The assessee-petitioner had invoked the power under Sub-section (2A), a provision which was inserted into the Act with effect from 1.10.1984. It provides :

Notwithstanding anything contained in Sub-section (2), the Board may reduce or waive the amount of interest payable by an assessee under the said sub-section if, on the recommendation made by the Commissioner in this behalf, it is satisfied that-

(i) payment of such amount would cause genuine hardship to the assessee;

(ii) default in the payment of the amount on which interest was payable under the said sub-section was due to the circumstances beyond the control of the assessee; and

(iii) the assessee has cooperated in any enquiry relating to the assessment or any proceeding for the recovery of any amount due from him.

5. It is not disputed that the power under Sub-section (2A) is discretionary. The petitioner has not produced a copy of its petition before the Board. There is, however, an averment in the special leave petitions that request had been made to the Board to afford a personal hearing before the petitions under Sub-section (2A) were disposed of. Sub-section (2A) indicates that the decision of the Board in

regard to the three aspects mentioned therein is to be made on the basis of the report of the Commissioner. The order shows that the report of the Commissioner has been taken into consideration. It is not even the petitioner's assertion that the Commissioner's recommendations have not been accepted by the Board.

6. There is no procedural statutory requirement of a hearing for the disposal of an application under Section 220(2A) of the Act. The legal position is that where a statutory provision does not exclude natural justice the requirement of affording an opportunity of being heard can be assumed, particularly when the proceedings are quasi-judicial. Exclusion, however, can either be by a clear provision inferred from the scheme, as also the nature of power which is being exercised. We have : already noticed that the power of the Board which was invoked was discretionary. It was to be exercised on the basis of the recommendation of the Commissioner and the material provided by the assessee. Personal hearing in every situation is not necessary and there can be compliance of the requirements of natural justice of hearing when a right to represent is given and the decision is made on a consideration thereof. Keeping the nature of the power invoked for exercise, the fact that the petitioner had an opportunity to represent its case in writing and the further fact that the Board had taken into consideration the report of the Commissioner in the background that it is not the allegation of the petitioner that the Commissioner's recommendations were different, we do not think in the facts of the case it can be held that the petitioner was entitled to a right of being personally heard before the petition under Section 220(2A) of the Act was disposed of as aforesaid. The petitioner has claimed that he was entitled to a notice of the Commissioner's report and an opportunity to canvass that the contents thereof, to the extent they went against it, were incorrect. We do not think there is scope to contend that the assessee is entitled to such a procedural safeguard. Our conclusion is, however, confined to the facts of the case and as and when the question arises in a different situation, the matter may be open to examination.

7. An objection has been taken by the Revenue to the maintainability of the petitions under Article 136 of the Constitution as the petitioner instead of going before the High Court has directly come. Reliance was placed by Dr. Gauri Shankar for the Department on the observations of this Court in P.N. Kumar and Anr. v. Municipal Corporation of Delhi . We do not propose to examine that aspect in this case taking into consideration the facts that notice has already been issued on the special leave petitions and the matters have been pending for more than two years in this Court. We are satisfied that the petitioner would be prejudiced if at this stage it was required to move the High Court.

8. Both the special leave petitions [are for the reasons indicated above, dismissed. There would be no order as costs.