

IN THE CENTRAL ADMINISTRATIVE TRIBUNAL
PRINCIPAL BENCH: NEW DELHI

DATE OF DECISION: 4.6.1990

1.	DA 896/88 SHRI MOHINDER KUMAR VS. UNION OF INDIA & OTHERS	APPLICANT RESPONDENTS
2.	DA 505/89 SHRI VIJAY PRAKASH & OTHERS VS. UNION OF INDIA & OTHERS	APPLICANTS RESPONDENTS
3.	1677/87 SHRI SURENDER KUMAR VS. UNION OF INDIA & OTHERS	APPLICANT RESPONDENTS
4.	DA 2109/89 MRS. SUMAN TEWARI & OTHERS VS. UNION OF INDIA & OTHERS SHRI ANIS SUHRAVARDI SHRI JAGJIT SINGH	APPLICANTS RESPONDENTS COUNSEL FOR ALL THE ABOVE APPLICANTS AT SNO. 1-4 COUNSEL FOR ALL THE ABOVE RESPONDENTS AT SNO. 1-4
5.	DA 1319/89 SHRI SANJAY SRIVASTAVA & ORS VS. UNION OF INDIA & OTHERS	APPLICANTS RESPONDENTS
6.	1397/89 SHRI SANJIV SANGAR & OTHERS VS UNION OF INDIA & OTHERS	APPLICANTS RESPONDENTS

7.	DA 1402/89 SHRI NIRUPAM PAHWA & OTHERS VS. UNION OF INDIA & OTHERS	APPLICANTS RESPONDENTS
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9.	1489/89 KUM. GEETA RANI VS. UNION OF INDIA & OTHERS	APPLICANT RESPONDENTS
10.	1490/89 SHRI VIJAY PRABHAKAR & OTHERS VS. UNION OF INDIA & OTHERS	APPLICANTS RESPONDENTS
11.	1693/89 SHRI ROHTAS SINGH VS. UNION OF INDIA & OTHERS	APPLICANT RESPONDENTS
12.	DA 1813/89 SHRI YUV RAJ SINGH & OTHERS VS. UNION OF INDIA & OTHERS	APPLICANTS RESPONDENTS
13.	DA 33/90 SHRI NARESH KUMAR VS. UNION OF INDIA & OTHERS	APPLICANTS RESPONDENTS
14.	DA 1677/89 SHRI BRIJ BHUSHAN VS. UNION OF INDIA & OTHERS	APPLICANT RESPONDENTS
15.	DA 1676/89 SHRI DINESH KUMAR VS. UNION OF INDIA & OTHERS	APPLICANT RESPONDENTS
16.	DA 1942/89 KUM. SHAHSI SHARMA VS. UNION OF INDIA & OTHERS	APPLICANT RESPONDENTS

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17. DA 2056/89
 SHRI OM PRAKASH
 VS. UNION OF INDIA & OTHERS
 SHRI B.S. MAINEE

SHRI JAGJIT SINGH

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18. DA 1376/89
 KUM. RAM PYARI
 VS. UNION OF INDIA & OTHERS

19. DA 1377/89
 SHRI AMRIT KAUR
 VS. UNION OF INDIA & OTHERS

20. DA 1379/89
 ARVIND KR. PATHAK
 VS. UNION OF INDIA & OTHERS

21. DA 1383/89
 KUM. RANJANA NARANG
 VS. UNION OF INDIA & OTHERS
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22. DA 1334/89
 SHRI SHIV MOHAN GUPTA & ORS
 VS. UNION OF INDIA & OTHERS
 SHRI A. SIDDIQUE/
 M/S. SAWHNEY & CO

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 AT SNO. 22.

23. DA 1908/89
 SHRI A.K. TEWARI
 VS. UNION OF INDIA & OTHERS
 SHRI V.P. SHARMA
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24. OA 1499/89
SHRI BRIJESH KUMAR & OTHERS APPLICANTS
VS. UNION OF INDIA & OTHERS RESPONDENTS
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SNO. 24

CORAM:

THE HON'BLE MR. T.S. OBEROI, MEMBER (J)

THE HON'BLE MR. I.K. RASGOTRA, MEMBER (A)

JUDGEMENT

(Delivered by Hon'ble Mr. I.K. Rasgotra, Member (A))

This application has been filed by Shri Mohinder Kumar along with fifty other Mobile Booking Clerks (MBCs) under Section 19 of the Administrative Tribunals Act, 1985. Before we delve into this case, we feel it proper and imperative to delineate the historical perspective in which the present application and rest of batch of applications are being considered. The applicants were appointed as MBCs on the Northern Railway on various dates from the year 1985 onwards on temporary and hourly rate of payment per day. They had worked for varying periods when their services were sought to be terminated by a telegram dated 15.12.1986, Annexure P-I (page 31 of the paper book) to the effect that:

"all Mobile Booking Clerks working at yours should be discharged forthwith as desired by the Board."

2. Challenging the above orders as illegal and arbitrary, an application No. 1174/86 under Section 19 of the Administrative Tribunals Act, 1985 was filed. (Applicants No. 1 to 43 of the present OA 896/88 were also party to OA 1174/86 also). The Tribunal Vide Interim Order dated 24.12.1986 stayed the operation of the said discharge order. The petitioners in that application had prayed that:-

They are entitled for regularisation of their service and absorption against regular vacancies in terms of Ministry of Railways circular No. E(NG)-III/77/RCI/80 dated 21st April, 1982 which envisages that "those volunteers/MBCs who have been engaged on the various Railways on certain rates, per hour, per day may be considered by you for absorption against regular vacancies provided that they have the minimum qualifications required for direct recruits and have put in a minimum of three years service as Volunteers/MBCs." The said circular further provides that:-

(i) "Screening for their absorption should be done by each Board by a Committee of Officers including the Chairman or a Member of the Railway Service Commission concerned".

(ii) to assist in this regard, no enquiry should be held

3. The scheme of employing MBCs was conceived in pursuance of the recommendations of the Railway Convention Committee 1971 (hereinafter referred to as the Convention Committee) which was in their third report on commercial and allied matters, Annexure P-4 (pages 37-40 of the paper book). The relevant extract of the scheme is reproduced hereunder:-

"The committee appreciate the idea of requisitioning the services of volunteers from

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amongst students sons/daughters and dependents of railway employees as mobile booking clerks to work outside their college hours on payment of some honorarium during peak season or short rush periods. Such an arrangement would not only help the low paid railway employees to supplement their income but also generate among the students an urge to lend a helping hand to the railway Administration in eradicating ticketless travel.

The Committee would, therefore, like the Ministry of Railways to take active steps to extend this system wherever it may be warranted. At the same time care will have to be taken to see that vested interest do not develop and that the objective of curbing the incidence of ticketless travel is efficiently sub-served with due regard to the need for effecting economy in all areas of Railway operation." (Emphasis supplied)

4. The Railway Board accepted the above recommendation and directed the Railways vide circular No. 70-TGI/106/68 dated 17.10.1970 to develop a scheme for employment of volunteers from amongst the student, sons/daughters and dependents of Railway employees during the period for peak rush hours on the pattern obtaining on some railways, in consultation with their respective FA & CAOs. The scheme was later decided to be discontinued on 14.8.1981. However on reconsideration of the matter at the instance of National Federation of Indian Railwaymen, the Railway

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Board took a decision vide their circular letter No. E(NG)II/84/RC-3/B dated 21.4.1982 to absorb these MBCs against regular vacancies subject to the conditions referred to therein. The Railway Board on a further representation by the same labour federation asked the Railways vide their circular No. E(NG)II/84/RC3/B dated 20.4. 1985, that Volunteers/MBCs engaged prior to 14.8.1981 and who have since completed three years service be also considered for regular absorption against regular vacancies on the same terms and conditions as stipulated in the circular dated 21.4.1982, except that to be eligible for screening, a candidate should inter alia be within the prescribed age limit after taking into account the total period of engagement as volunteer/MBCs. In actual practice the scheme was not discontinued w.e.f. 14.8.1981 but continued thereafter with implicit or explicit approval of the competent authority. This is apparent from the fact that in spite of the cut off date being 14.8.1981 a large number of MBCs were engaged in or after 1984. These MBCs thus, became ineligible to take the benefit of the aforesaid provision for absorption against regular vacancies. The Central Administrative Tribunal considering all the relevant facts allowed the petition filed by the petitioners in OA 1174/86 and fixed the cut off date as 17.11.1986 in lieu of 14.8.1981. In its judgement the Tribunal observed:

"Once the Railway Board had introduced a scheme of regularisation in respect of the Volunteers/Mobile Booking Clerks and the scheme had in effect continued till 17th November, 1986 with the tacit approval, express or implied, of the Railway Board when they came out with alternative measures for coping with rush

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of passengers during peak season, restricting the scope of the regularisation scheme to those who were employed prior to 14.8.1981, the so called cut off date when the decision for discontinuing the scheme was taken, but actually not implemented, would be clearly discriminatory, arbitrary and violative of Article 14 of the Constitution. All volunteers/mobile booking clerks who were engaged on or before 17.11.1986 would be entitled to regularisation of their services on completion of three years of service subject to fulfilment of other conditions as spelt out in circular No. E (NG) III-77/RCI/80, dated 21.4.1982 and E (NG) II/84/RC3/8, dated 20.4.1985 issued by the Ministry of Railways.*

5. The respondents, (the Railways) preferred an SLP against the judgement of the Tribunal in OA No. 1174/86 dated 28.8.1987 in the Supreme Court challenging the said order, which was registered as SLP(C)No.14618/87 between Secretary, Ministry of Railways and others, petitioners, Vs. Ms. Neera Mehta and Others, respondents. The Hon'ble Supreme Court passed the following order in the said SLP on 18.3.1988:

"We see no merit in the petition. But after hearing both the sides we would clarify that for the sake of removing doubts the date 17.11.1986 as accepted by the Tribunal shall be the cut off date but those who have qualified by putting three years service by 31.3.1987 are entitled to the benefit of the order". (Emphasis supplied)

*ATR 1989(1)SC 380 Ms. Neera Mehta & Others Vs. UOI & Others. 284

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Apprehending that their services will be terminated the applicants filed Civil Miscellaneous Petition no. 10296/88 seeking directions/clarification of the orders passed by the Hon'ble Supreme Court on 18.3.1988. After hearing the matter the Hon'ble Supreme Court passed the following orders in the C.M.P. 10296/88 of 9.5.1988:

"It is open to the petitioners to lay their claim in an essay serial to petition or write an independent petition if they so choose."

6. After the above orders were passed by the Hon'ble Supreme Court, the respondents vide Divisional Railway Manager, Northern Railways letter No. CIID/34-CN-MT/Insp/84 dated

12.5.1988 decided that:

"the Mobile Booking Clerks who were engaged prior to 17.11.1986 and who have not completed three years service (to be counted in days, i.e. 1095 days of actual working days upto 31.3.1987, or repeat 31.3.1987), their further engagement should be stopped forthwith."

As a result the services of those Volunteers/Mobile Booking Clerks who were engaged prior to 17.11.1986 and who had not completed the requisite service of three years upto 31.3.1987 were either proposed to be dispensed with or actually terminated vide DRM, Northern Railway's letter No. CIID/34-CN-MT/Insp dated

12.5.1988.

The present application No. 896/88, was filed on 16.5.1988 under Section 19 of the Administrative Tribunals Act, 1985 and the applicants prayed for directions to the respondents to regularise their service after completion of three years.

service as per the judgement of the Tribunal dated 28.8.1987 in DA No. 1174/86 and to restrain them from implementing their orders dated 5.5.1988 and 12.5.1988, contemplating termination/terminating their services. The said DA 896/88, however, was dismissed in limine by the Tribunal on 17.5.1988. An SLP(C) 7830/88 along with several other writ petitions was thereafter filed by the applicants in the Hon'ble Supreme Court which culminated in the Hon'ble Court's recalling their order dated 30th September, 1988 to the effect that:

"We recall our order dated 18.3.1988 and direct the said SLP to be listed on 5.10.1988 for preliminary hearing along with connected writ petitions." (emphasis supplied)

The matter was finally heard on 20.2.1989 when their Lordships of the Hon'ble Supreme Court passed the following order:

"The Tribunal disposed of the claim by referring to the directions of this Court dated 18th of March, 1988 in Special Leave Petition No. 14618/87. In the meantime the order dated 18th March, 1988, has been recalled and the Special Leave Petition is yet to be heard. In the circumstances the impugned order of the Tribunal dated 17.5.1988, is vacated and the matter shall stand restored before the Tribunal for disposal in accordance with law. (Emphasis supplied)

7. The matter was thereafter brought up before the Tribunal through Misc. petition No. 516/89 on 10.5.1989 when DA 896/88 was

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restored to its position. By way of interim order the Tribunal directed the respondents that the applicants who are engaged prior to 17.11.1986 and whose services had been terminated w.e.f 12.5.1988 be restored to the position as it was prior to 17.5.1988 and that this would be subject to the final decision in the OA. One month's time was given to the respondents to comply with its order.

8. The applicants in OA No. 896/88 have pleaded that the Hon'ble Supreme Court while accepting 17.11.1986 as cut off date intended to enlarge the benefit conferred by the Tribunal to all those who had been engaged prior to 31.3.1987. It has been urged that the Hon'ble Supreme Court's order was not restrictive but extensive. The respondents however have chosen to interpret the order of the Hon'ble Supreme Court of 18.3.1988 in a prejudicial manner with a view to terminating the services of the petitioners and to deny the benefit of regularisation. It is further averred that the Supreme Court has nowhere directed the respondents to dispense with the services of the petitioners who have not completed three years of service as on 31.3.1987.

9. The respondents in their written statement have submitted that the applicants No. 44-51 in OA 896/88 were never party in Neera Mehta's case viz. OA No. 1174/86. They cannot, therefore, take the benefit of the judgement of the Tribunal dated 28.8.87. The applicants No. 15 and 27 were not disengaged in terms of orders dated 12.5.1988 and that they are continuing to work as they had completed three years. (1095 days)

of service as MBCs. It has been urged by the respondents that the Supreme Court had modified the orders of the Tribunal dated 28.8.1987 vide their judgement dated 18.3.1988 to the extent that only those persons would be entitled to regularisation who have put in three years of service by 31.3.1987 and who had been engaged prior to the cut off date of 17.11.1986. The railway respondents accordingly took steps to disengage those MBCs who had not completed three years of service upto 31.3.1987, even when they were engaged prior to 17.11.1986. Consequent to the interim orders of the Tribunal dated 10.5.1989 all the petitioners were however put back on duty. It is also contended that petitioners at SNo. 1 - 43 who were party in Neera Mehta Vs. UOI case, OA No.1174/86 were in any case taken back on duty after the Hon'ble Supreme Court had recalled its orders dated 18.3.1988. The petition, therefore, was infructuous. The petitioners at serial Nos. 44-51 were not entitled to these benefits as they were not party in Neera Mehta Vs. UOI, OA No.1174/86. They should, therefore, set up their claim independently, if they are aggrieved. It has been further stated that petitioner at S.No. 46 had left the job on his own accord on 6.10.1987, though he was engaged on 16.3.1985. The petitioners S.Nos. 47,48, and 49 were disengaged on 13.5.1988, the petitioner No. 51 on 14.5.1988, the petitioner No.50 on 6.7.1985, after having worked only about three months.

10. In their rejoinder the applicants have averred that the proceedings in OA No. 1174/86 and OA 896/88 are separate and

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distinct from the other groups.

11. The points of law and fact raised in OA No. 896/88, are also raised in OA No. 1174/86. Both the facts and the points of law are generally the same or similar, which have been covered in the Tribunal's judgement dated 28.8.1987 in OA No. 1174/86. In this OA No. 896/88 the applicants have by way of relief prayed for regularisation of their service after completion of three years' of service from the date of engagement which is on or before 17.11.1986, as per the Tribunal's orders dated 28.8.1987 passed in OA No. 1174/86. The additional prayer is that the operation of the order dated 5/12.5.1988,contemplating termination of services of the MBCs, who were engaged prior to 17.11.1986 and have not completed three years' of service, be stayed.

The second group of OAs viz. OA Nos. 33/90; 1319/89 and 1334/89 are those, where the services were terminated consequent to the Supreme Court's orders dated 18.3.1988. They were also employed prior to 17.11.1986. The relief prayed for in these OAs are similar to the reliefs in OA No. 896/88 and others except that the additional relief prayed for is reinstatement with backwages for the period from the date of termination to the date of reinstatement.

The third group comprises: OA No. 1481/89; 1813/89; 1676/89; 1397/89; 1908/89; 1677/89; 1379/89; 1377/89; 1693/89; 1376/89; 2109/89; 1490/89; 1402/89; 1489/89; 1383/89; 1499/89; 1042/89; and 2056/89. The services of the petitioners in these OAs were terminated in accordance with the Railway Board's Order

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No. E(NG)II/86/RC3/87 dated 17.11.1986, according to which the scheme of employing MBCs was finally discontinued.

In OA No. 505/88 and OA No. 1677/87, the applicants were engaged in 1981 and 1984 in different spells. They have prayed for their reengagement as they were engaged prior to 17.11.1986.. Since no written replies to both the OAs have been filed, it is not possible for us to divine the reason for their disengagement, except that varying instructions issued from time to time for engagement/disengagement of MBCs, might have led to their disengagement.

The common stream in all the above OAs is that all the petitioners were employed prior to 17.11.1986. They were disengaged on various dates either in accordance with the order dated 17.11.1986 issued by the Railway Board, discontinuing the scheme of employment of MBCs finally or in terms of orders dated 12.5.1988 consequent to the Hon'ble Supreme Court's order dated 18.3.1988. The main reliefs claimed in various OAs are generally identical, i.e.

- a) regularisation of service after completion of three years of engagement in terms of Tribunal's order dated 28.8.1987 in OA No. 1174/86;
- b) conferring of temporary status after completion of four months of service; and
- c) payment of wages for the period when the services of some MBCs were disengaged in May, 1988 consequent to Hon'ble Supreme Court's orders

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dated 18.3.1988 upto the date of reengagement, following the recall of their Lordship's order dated 18.3.1988.

In view of the above, we are dealing with all the above OAs through this common judgement.

12. The legal position in this case has already been clearly set out in the judgement of the Tribunal dated 28.8.1987, when it was observed that

"While the applicants might have no legal right as such in terms of their employment for regularisation on absorption against regular vacancies, we see no reason why they should be denied this benefit if others similarly placed who were engaged prior to 14.8.1981 have been absorbed subject to fulfilment of the requisite qualification and length of service".

Having regard to the above the Tribunal fixed the cut off date as 17.11.86 i.e. the date on which the scheme of employment of MBCs was finally discontinued and allowed the benefit of regularisation to all those who had been engaged prior to 17.11.1986. It is, therefore, unambiguously clear that all those MBCs who were engaged at certain rate of honorarium per hour, per day shall be entitled to regularisation on absorption against regular posts on completion of three years service and subject to fulfilment of other conditions as laid down in the Railway Board's letter of 21.4.1982 and 20.4.1985.

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The respondents should therefore go into the details of the case of each applicant viz. date of engagement, date of disengagement and date of reengagement etc. and regularise the service of all applicants as were engaged prior to 17.11.1986 after they complete 3 years service from the date of engagement. The translation of 3 years into "1095 actual working days" (as stated in order dated 12.5.1988) is an afterthought and cannot be sustained as in the case of casual labour only 240 days (6 days week) are reckoned to constitute a year for purpose of regularisation and not 365 days. The condition laid down in Railway Board's letter dated 21.4.1982 is 3 years and not 1095 actual working days. The applicants shall therefore be allowed the benefit of Sundays and gazetted holidays when reckoning the period of 3 years for the purpose of regularisation.

13. The second point urged before us by the learned counsel for the applicants is that the order of the Hon'ble Supreme Court dated 18.3.1988 had been prejudicially interpreted by the respondents in detriment to the interests of the applicant.

The Hon'ble Supreme Court had disposed of the SLP (C) 14618/87 with the order that

"We see no merit in the petition" It has been accordingly prayed that the respondents should make payment of the full wages due to such MBCs as were disengaged from the date they were disengaged vide respondents' order dated 12.5.1988 to the date they were taken back on duty consequent upon the Supreme Court's orders dated 30.9.1988 recalling its order dated 18.3.1988.

That the Hon'ble Supreme Court did not find any merit in the SLP (C) 14618/87 while disposing of the said SLP(C) constitutes valid evidence in support of the case of the applicants. Later, when the problems arising from the order of Hon'ble Court and confronting the MBCs were placed before the Hon'ble Supreme Court through SLP (C) 7830/88 and other writ petitions. The Hon'ble Court recalled its order dated 18.3.1988 and has allowed its decision to be moulded in accordance with the justice of the case.

The question, therefore, before us is whether in the circumstances obtaining, it was fair and just on the part of the respondents to contemplate termination/terminate the services of the applicants keeping in view the attending circumstances and development of the case of the MBCs. The decision taken to terminate the services, to say the least, was an attempt to raft against the current of justice and fairplay. Admittedly, the Supreme Court, while recalling its order dated 18.3.1988 did not define the extent and scope of the retroactivity of its decision. But even if one was to go by the dictionary meaning of the word 'recall', such as "cancelling order", "signal to ship etc. to return to base" etc., it means that status quo ante has been restored. The word 'recall' does not merely mean resummon.

(Mulla Vs. Shoraj Singh - 1911 ALJ 707).

In the totality of the circumstances the consideration for dispensing with the services of the MBCs does not appear to be endowed with any merit. The denial of livelihood to the MBCs who come generally from the low paid section of the railway

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employees would have caused them avoidable hardship. In the interest of justice and fair play, we are therefore of the view that full wages should be paid to such MBCs as were disengaged for the period from the date of termination till the date they were reengaged, i.e. between 5/12.5.1988 and till the date of reengagement after 30.9.1988, at the rates which were applicable to them before their services were disengaged.

14. In accordance with Rule 2318 of the Indian Railway Establishment Manual, casual labourers are given temporary status after working for 4 months (authorised absence and discontinuance of work for want of productive work will not constitute a break). Accordingly the MBCs should also be conferred temporary status after they have worked for four months (authorised absence and discontinuance of work will not constitute a break).

15. In view of the above discussion, we order and direct that respondents shall:

(i) regularise the Mobile Booking Clerks who were engaged prior to 17.11.1986 by absorption against regular vacancies on completion of three years service and not 1095 actual working days.
(emphasis supplied)

This will be however, subject to the fulfilment of other conditions as provided in the Railway Board's letters dated 21.4.1982 and 20.4.1985.

ii) confer temporary status with all attending

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benefits on the applicants after they have completed four months service as Mobile Booking Clerks in accordance with the terms of their engagement. The period of four months shall be counted irrespective of number of hours put in on any particular day, having regard to the fact that the services of the Mobile Booking clerks were available for full day.

iii) make payment of back wages from the date of termination of service in accordance with orders dated 5/12.5.1988, till the date they were taken back on duty, consequent to the recall of the Hon'ble Supreme Court's order dated 18.3.1988 at the same rates at which they were employed prior to the date of termination of the services. This will be applicable only to those Mobile Booking Clerks whose services were disengaged and reengaged in consequence of Hon'ble Supreme Court's orders dated 18.3.1988 and recall of the said order vide Hon'ble Court's order dated 30.9.1988.

16. Before we part with this case we would observe that the respondents had earlier introduced a scheme for appointing volunteers on muster role of a fixed rate of Rs. 8/- per day on the Eastern Railway. This case came up for adjudication before the Calcutta Bench of the Tribunal in Samir Kumar Mukherjee Vs.

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General Manager, Eastern Railway and others. (ATR 1986(2)CAT-7). That scheme was also introduced with the same objectives as the scheme of Mobile Booking Clerks, viz. curbing ticketless travel and clearing seasonal rush of traffic in the most economical manner and to supplement the income of low paid railway employees by obtaining the volunteers from amongst the student sons/daughters of railway employees. The Railway Convention Committee, 1971 while considering the launching of such a scheme had cautioned the respondents by observing that care will have to be taken to see that "vested interests do not develop." We feel that the respondents did not take adequate care to avoid such a situation which eventually resulted in giving preferential treatment to a particular section of the society in finding employment, ignoring the provision of equality of opportunity in matters of public employment enshrined in Article 16 of the Constitution. We do not however propose to deal with that aspect of the matter as the decision of this Tribunal in Neera Mehta's case and similar matters have become final after the Hon'ble Supreme Court has dismissed the Special Leave Petition filed by the Union of India. We trust that the experience gained from the two schemes will be kept in view by the respondents in future.

There shall be no orders as to the costs.

(I.K. Rasgotra)
Member (A)

4/6/90

(T.S. Oberoi)
Member (J)