

Title: Jocelyn Asistio y Consino vs. People of the Philippines and Monica Nealiga

Facts:

Jocelyn Asistio, the petitioner, was charged with a violation of Section 46 of the Cooperative Code of the Philippines (Republic Act No. 6938) for her alleged unlawful personal interest imposition in a contract with Coca-Cola while serving as the Chairperson and Managing Director of the A. Mabini Elementary School Teachers Multi-Purpose Cooperative. The prosecution claimed Asistio entered into an exclusive dealership agreement with Coca-Cola, bypassing the cooperative, leading to pecuniary losses for three consecutive school years. Following the evidence presentation by the prosecution, Asistio moved for dismissal via Demurrer to Evidence, citing jurisdictional errors among others. The Regional Trial Court of Manila (RTC) dismissed the case due to perceived lack of jurisdiction, interpreting the punishable period under the Cooperative Code to fall under the jurisdiction of lower courts. The Court of Appeals (CA), however, reversed the RTC's decision, arguing that the RTC indeed has jurisdiction, and remanded the case for further proceedings. Asistio then filed a petition for certiorari under Rule 65, raising multiple issues including grave abuse of discretion by the CA and fear of double jeopardy.

Issues:

1. Whether the CA erred in reversing the RTC's decision and in interpreting the punishable period under Section 46 of the Cooperative Code.
2. The dismissal of the criminal charge on grounds other than the violation of Section 46.
3. The remand of the case back to the RTC implicating the possibility of double jeopardy.
4. The appealability of the RTC's dismissal following a demurrer to evidence.
5. Whether res judicata applies due to a related acquittal in a separate case.

Court's Decision:

The Supreme Court upheld the CA's decision, finding no merit in Asistio's petition. It clarified that the RTC has jurisdiction over the case, correcting the legislative clerical error referenced by Asistio and asserting the CA's interpretation was in line with legislative intent. The Court also addressed concerns about double jeopardy, primary jurisdiction of cooperative disputes, and res judicata, finding none applied satisfactorily to warrant reversing the CA's decision.

Doctrine:

The Supreme Court underscored the importance of correct jurisdictional interpretation, stating clerical errors in legislative documents should not impede the true intent of the law.

In criminal proceedings, the principle of double jeopardy does not apply when the initial dismissal was not meritoriological but due to misinterpretation of jurisdictional boundaries. Also, the conciliation/mediation process is not a prerequisite for filing criminal charges in cases not considered intra-cooperative disputes.

Class Notes:

- In criminal cases, jurisdiction is determined by the penalties involved as delineated in the relevant law at the time of commission.
- Double jeopardy does not apply when the case's initial dismissal does not touch upon the defendant's innocence or guilt but concerns jurisdictional errors.
- Clerical errors in laws can be corrected by the courts to reflect the legislature's true intent.
- Conciliation/mediation is not required before pursuing criminal action if the case does not fall within intra-cooperative disputes.
- Key legislative references include Republic Act No. 6938 (Cooperative Code of the Philippines), Batas Pambansa Blg. 129, and Republic Act No. 7691.

Historical Background:

The case reflects the intricacies involved in interpreting laws with clerical errors and the judiciary's role in correcting such misprints to preserve legislative intent. It highlights procedural aspects crucial in criminal law, such as jurisdiction determination, double jeopardy, and the importance of exhaustion of administrative remedies within cooperative disputes.