

Title:

Myra M. Moral vs. Momentum Properties Management Corporation

Facts:

Myra M. Moral filed a complaint for illegal dismissal against Momentum Properties Management Corporation and its CEO, Steve Li, on March 5, 2014. Hired on June 26, 2013, as a probationary Leasing Assistant, Moral was dismissed on December 27, 2013, without prior notice or reason. Momentum claimed Moral was evaluated and found unqualified for regularization due to poor performance. Despite requests to discuss her evaluation, Moral ceased reporting, leading to a Notice of Absence Without Official Leave (NAWOL) issued on January 7, 2014. Moral then filed a Request for Assistance with the NLRC.

The Labor Arbiter ruled in Moral's favor, awarding backwages, separation pay, and damages, citing illegal dismissal due to lack of due process and evidence of abandonment. Momentum appealed to the NLRC, resulting in the modification of the decision — excluding moral and exemplary damages. Unsatisfied, Momentum filed a certiorari petition with the Court of Appeals, which eventually annulled the NLRC's decision, highlighting Moral's subpar performance and procedural missteps in her dismissal, awarding her nominal damages instead.

Issues:

1. Whether or not Moral was illegally dismissed.
2. If the dismissal procedures complied with legal standards.
3. The appropriate relief for any procedural missteps in the dismissal process.

Court's Decision:

The Supreme Court denied Moral's petition, affirming the Court of Appeals' decision. It highlighted that probationary employment is subject to reasonable standards known to the employee and that the employer has the discretion to not regularize based on substandard performance. However, it conceded that the dismissal process deviated from legal requirements but justified nominal damages for this procedural flaw.

Doctrine:

This case reiterated the doctrines surrounding probationary employment, emphasizing the employer's obligation to communicate regularization standards and evaluating employment based on those standards. It also enunciated the principle that procedural shortcomings in a justifiable dismissal for failing to meet regularization standards warrant nominal damages,

not reinstatement or backwages.

Class Notes:

- **Probationary Employment**: Subject to standards known to the employee at hiring.
- **Employer's Right**: Discretion to not regularize based on performance.
- **Legal Compliance**: Dismissal process must adhere to procedural requirements.
- **Remedies for Procedural Shortcomings**: Nominal damages for procedural lapses in dismissal.

Relevant Statutes:

- **Labor Code, Article 292(b)**: Due process in termination.
- **Department Order No. 147-15, Section 6(d)**: Regularization standards must be communicated at hiring.

Historical Background:

This case occurs within the broader context of evolving labor laws and judicial interpretation in the Philippines, particularly focusing on probationary employment and procedural requirements for termination. It demonstrates the judiciary's role in balancing employer prerogatives with employee rights, and the nuanced approach to procedural defects in dismissal cases.