

Title: People of the Philippines vs. Wilfredo Feloteo

Facts:

The case unfolds with the conviction of Wilfredo Feloteo for the murder of Sonny Sotto and illegal possession of a firearm. On the evening of May 6, 1993, in Sitio Nagbaril, Barangay Bintuan, Palawan, Sotto along with friends Arnel Abeleda and Johnny Abrea had drinks and were on their way home. Feloteo, armed with an armalite rifle, appeared, and without warning, shot Sotto in the chest, causing instant death. It was discovered that the firearm used belonged to SPO2 Roman Adion, which Feloteo had stolen earlier. Sotto's autopsy reported a gunshot wound from an M-16 armalite rifle. Despite Feloteo's claim of the shooting being accidental, the trial court found him guilty, sentencing him to reclusion perpetua for murder and twenty years for illegal firearm possession, alongside a directive to pay damages.

Procedural Posture:

After Feloteo's plea of not guilty, a trial ensued leading to his conviction. Feloteo appealed the decision, particularly challenging the appreciation of treachery in his murder conviction, arguing it should not be considered murder. The amendment in law (R.A. No. 8294) affecting the illegal possession of firearm charge saw a legal debate, ultimately impacting the case's conclusion in the Supreme Court.

Issues:

1. Was treachery rightfully appreciated in convicting Feloteo of murder?
2. The correct imposition of penalty for illegal possession of a firearm considering the amendment by R.A. No. 8294 to P.D. No. 1866.

Court's Decision:

1. ****On Treachery****: The Supreme Court affirmed treachery's presence, noting the sudden and unexpected attack on an unarmed victim, dismissing Feloteo's defense that Sotto had been warned jokingly.
2. ****On Illegal Possession of Firearm****: Analyzing R.A. No. 8294's amendments, the Supreme Court concluded that the law, favoring the appellant regards the illegal possession charge should be reconsidered. It merged the illegal possession of a firearm with the crime of murder when the firearm is used in the commission of the latter, treating it as an aggravating circumstance rather than a separate offense.

Doctrine:

This case reiterated the doctrine where treachery occurs if the method of execution ensures the victim's defenselessness. It also elucidated the legal implications of R.A. No. 8294 on charges of illegal possession of firearms, specifically when used in committing murder or homicide, thus, treating the firearm's illegal possession as an aggravating factor rather than a separate charge.

Class Notes:

- **Treachery**: Exists even with a frontal attack if it's sudden and unexpected, preventing the victim from defending themselves.
- **R.A. No. 8294 Amended P.D. No. 1866**: The illegal use of an unlicensed firearm in committing homicide or murder is considered as an aggravating circumstance, not a separate offense.
- **Legal Statutes Involved**: Article 248 of the Revised Penal Code (Murder); Section 1 of Presidential Decree No. 1866, as amended by R.A. No. 8294.

Historical Background:

The case centered around the significant legal change introduced by R.A. No. 8294, which impacted the handling of crimes involving illegal possession of firearms used in committing grave offenses like murder. This amendment reflects the evolving legal landscape in the Philippines regarding gun control and criminal liability, integral to understanding this case's context.