

****Title:**** AIR TRANSPORTATION OFFICE (ATO) vs. HON. COURT OF APPEALS (NINETEENTH DIVISION) AND BERNIE G. MIAQUE

****Facts:****

In May 2001, the Air Transportation Office (ATO) filed an unlawful detainer complaint against Bernie G. Mique in the Municipal Trial Court in Cities (MTCC) of Iloilo City, due to unpaid rental and concessionaire privilege fees for spaces Mique occupied at the Iloilo Airport. The MTCC, on May 27, 2002, ruled in favor of the ATO, ordering Mique to vacate the premises and pay the outstanding fees.

Mique appealed to the Regional Trial Court (RTC) of Iloilo City, which affirmed the MTCC's decision on June 7, 2003. Undeterred, Mique further elevated the case to the Court of Appeals via a petition for review. The Court of Appeals, on April 29, 2005, dismissed Mique's petition, affirming the RTC's decision, which became final and executory upon the Supreme Court's denial of Mique's subsequent appeal.

Parallel to these events, a separate legal battle over the execution of the RTC decision ensued. The RTC, prompted by the ATO's motion, issued writs of execution in August 2004 and June 2005 to enforce its decision. However, the Court of Appeals intermittently issued orders to prevent the execution from proceeding, citing ongoing appellate proceedings. This tug-of-war continued until the ATO filed a new motion in March 2006, after the appellate court's decision became final, leading to yet another issuance of a writ of execution by the RTC. The Court of Appeals responded by granting Mique a Temporary Restraining Order (TRO) and a preliminary injunction, effectively halting the execution of the RTC's decision.

****Issues:****

1. Whether the Court of Appeals committed grave abuse of discretion by issuing a TRO and a preliminary injunction preventing the execution of the RTC's decision despite its final and executory status.
2. Whether the issuance of the writs of execution by the RTC during the appellate process was valid under the Rules of Court.
3. The extent of the appellate court's discretion in staying the execution of a final and executory judgment.

****Court's Decision:****

The Supreme Court granted the petition by the ATO, voiding the Court of Appeals' resolutions that halted the execution of the RTC's decision. The High Court held that the

Court of Appeals committed grave abuse of discretion by interfering with the execution of a final and executory judgment, emphasizing that the judgment of the RTC in ejectment cases should be immediately executory, and such execution is not to be stayed by a pending appeal unless exceptional circumstances warrant such intervention.

The Supreme Court clarified that the RTC was acting within its jurisdiction and rights when it issued the writs of execution, underlining the amendments in the Rules of Court that envisioned the immediate execution of judgments in ejectment cases to prevent undue delays. The appellate court's stance—blocking the execution and grounding its decision on perceived jurisdictional overreach by the RTC—was deemed a misinterpretation of the law and procedural rules.

****Doctrine:****

The Supreme Court reiterated the doctrine that judgments in ejectment cases are immediately executory and not stayed by appeal, as per Section 21, Rule 70 of the Rules of Court. This principle aims to prevent injustice to the lawful possessor of the property and curtails undue delay in the enforcement of decisions in such cases.

****Class Notes:****

1. ****Immediate Executory Nature of Ejectment Case Judgments:**** Judgments in ejectment (unlawful detainer and forcible entry) cases are immediately executory, allowing the rightful possessor to regain property without undue delay. This principle underscores the balance between judicial appeal processes and the prompt enforcement of justice.
2. ****Roles of RTC and Court of Appeals in Execution Process:**** While the RTC has the ministerial duty to issue writs of execution in ejectment cases, the Court of Appeals possesses the discretionary power to stay such executions under exceptional circumstances. However, this discretion should be exercised sparingly and grounded in solid legal justifications to avoid undue interference with final and executory judgments.
3. ****Grave Abuse of Discretion:**** Defined as actions that are contrary to the law or jurisprudence or those executed whimsically, capriciously, or arbitrarily out of malice, ill will, or personal bias. This case exemplifies how appellate court overreach into the execution process can constitute grave abuse of discretion, particularly when it thwarts the enforcement of a final and executory judgment.

****Historical Background:****

This case highlights the evolving response of Philippine judiciary procedures to the

challenges of enforcing judgments in ejectment cases. By reaffirming the immediate executory nature of such judgments, the Supreme Court stresses the critical balance between upholding the appellate process and ensuring that justice is not unduly delayed. The decision serves as a pivotal reinforcement of the procedural rules designed to streamline the resolution of property disputes, reflecting the judiciary's commitment to both procedural integrity and timely justice.