

KOPPEL (PHILIPPINES) INC., RECURRENTE, CONTRA EL TRIBUNAL DE RELACIONES INDUSTRIALES Y KOPPEL EMPLOYEES ASSOCIATION, RECURRIDOS.

G. R. No. L-6508. April 25, 1955

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PABLO, M.:

Trátase de una apelación interpuesta por la recurrente contra una resolución del Tribunal Industrial.

Los hechos admitidos por ambas partes son los siguientes:

"In Case No. 154—V in which Koppel Employees Association declared a strike and after conciliation conferences held by the Court, the management of Koppel (Philippines) Incorporated and the Koppel Employees Association entered into an agreement dated October 18, 1948 which is attached to this case as Annex A (pages 28-31) in the records approved by this Court on October 18, 1948.

"In case No. 323-V, in which another strike was declared between the Koppel Employees Association, another agreement was entered into between the same parties on June 14, 1949, attached hereto as Annex C, and approved by this Court on June 15, 1949.

"Agreement dated October 18, 1949, Annex "A", and agreement dated June 14, 1949, Annex "C", were renewed by the parties for another year, expiring on October 18, 1950 (See Annex "E"); on September 27, 1950, said agreements were again renewed for another year beginning October 19, 1950 and expiring on October 18, 1951 (See Annex "F"); on October 19, 1951, the same agreements (Annexes "A" and "C") were renewed by the parties for another year (See Annex "G"), beginning October 19, 1951 and expiring on October 18, 1952."

Un párrafo del Anexo "C" al Apéndice "C", aprobado por el Tribunal Industrial, en lo de junio de 1949, es del tenor siguiente:

"4. It is further stipulated between the parties herein that they shall negotiate with each other within sixty days before the expiration on October 18, 1949, of the present collective bargaining agreement for the succeeding collective bargaining agreement * * *."

Un párrafo del Anexo "G" es del tenor siguiente:

"This will serve to confirm the understanding reached at a conference held between the officers of Koppel Employees Association and the management of Koppel (Philippines) Inc. the evening of October 18th, to the effect that the labor agreement of October 18, 1949, is to be extended for a further period of one year, from October 19, 1951 to October 18, 1952 * * *"

En 3 de septiembre de 1952 la Koppel Employees Association presentó a la recurrente una petición (Anexo "H" al Apéndice "C"), demandando un aumento general de jornal. El patrono denegó el aumento general, pero notificó a la Asociación que la administración estaba dispuesta a considerar el aumento del jornal de aquellos obreros que lo merecían. Se concedió a diez obreros un aumento en sus jornales (Anexo "I" al Apéndice "C"). Los obreros

insistieron en que se concediera un aumento general, demanda que fue denegada por el patrono.

En 18 de septiembre de 1952 la Asociación envió otra carta a la recurrente, manifestando su deseo de que se hiciera un aumento general y que, si no se accedía a su petición, haría valer sus derechos; y como no se concedió la demanda, los obreros se declararon en huelga en 22 de septiembre de 1952.

La recurrente acudió al Tribunal Industrial, pidiendo que la huelga se declarase ilegal.

Oídas ambas partes, el presidente del tribunal, Comisionado Roldan, dictó decisión declarando ilegal la huelga. Los obreros presentaron moción de reconsideración, y tres miembros del tribunal el Comisionado Jiménez Yanson, el Comisionado Lanting y el Juez Amparo, declararon legal la huelga, contra cuya decisión disintieron los Comisionados Roldan y Castillo.

En recurso de certiorari la recurrente acude a esta Tribunal y contiene que la huelga declarada por los obreros en 22 de septiembre de 1952 era ilegal, invocando las decisiones de este Tribunal en *Manila Oriental Sawmills vs. National Labor Union*, (91 Phil., 28), y en *Liberal Labor Union vs. Philippine Can Company*; (91 Phil., 72). Ambas causas no tienen aplicación al caso presente. Analicémoslas.

En la causa de la Manila Oriental Sawmill contra la National Labor Union y Corte Industrial, este Tribunal dijo:

"The record shows that the local chapter of the respondent union is composed entirely, except one, of members who made up the total membership of the United Employees Welfare Association, a registered union in the petitioner's company. To be exact, thirty-six of the thirty-seven members of said association tendered their resignations and joined the local chapter of the respondent union without first securing the approval of their resignations. The new union then sought to present a seven-point demand of the very same employees to petitioner, which in many respects differs from their previous demand. It is evident that the purpose of their transfer is merely to disregard and circumvent the contract entered into between the same employees and the petitioner on May 4, 1950, knowing full well that that contract was effective for one year, and was entered into with the sanction of the Court of Industrial Relations. If this move were allowed the result would be a subversion of a contract freely entered into without any valid and justifiable reason. Such act cannot be sanctioned in law or in equity as it is in derogation of the principle underlying the freedom of contract and the good faith that should exist in contractual relations."

En la causa de la Liberal Labor Union contra la Philippine Can Company, este Tribunal dijo:

"It appears that because of a labor dispute that had arisen between petitioner and respondent a case was filed in the Court of Industrial Relations, which was docketed as case No. 229-V, and, by way of compromise, a collective agreement was entered into between them on February 26, 1949. One of the provisions agreed upon therein concerns the procedure that should be followed in the settlement of a labor dispute which in substance consists as follows: If a worker has a complaint the same shall first be submitted to a grievance committee, which shall be composed of six members, three representing the union, and three the company. If the complaint is not satisfactorily settled, it shall next be taken up by the top officials of both the union and the company. And if still no settlement is reached, the matter shall be submitted to the Court of Industrial Relations, which shall determine it in accordance with law."

En la primera causa, los huelguistas, como miembros de la United Employees Welfare Association, tenían convenio con el patrono, cuyo cumplimiento dentro de un año era sagrado para ambas partes; pero se separaron de dicha asociación y, adhiriéndose a la National Labor Union, pidieron, por medio de ésta, nuevas condiciones de trabajo. Con esta nueva petición, los obreros infringieron el convenio que tenían con el patrono; debían de haber tenido en cuenta que su cambio de afiliación obrera no les relevaba de cumplir con su convenio.

Durante la vigencia del contrato ninguna de las partes podía alterarlo; los obreros, individualmente, estaban

obligados a cumplir sus términos sin importar para nada la asociación a que estaban aceliados. Por medio de le huelga, los obreros querían imponer su voluntad infringiendo el convenio; hicieron mal uso de la huelga, y con ella quisieron obligar al patrono a sancionar la infracción de los términos del convenio.

En la segunda causa, los huelguistas, si tuviesen alguna reclamación, tendrían que someterla—según convenio—(a) al comité de quejas; y, si no estuviesen satisfechos con la resolución de este comité, (b) deberían formular su reclamación por medio de sus jefes a los funcionarios del patrono; y, si no estuviesen satisfechos con la resolución de éstos (c) deberían acudir al Tribunal Industrial. Los obreros no siguieron el procedimiento gradual convenido, e inmediatamente se declararon en huelga. Abusaron, pues, de su derecho a la huelga.

En ambas causas, este Tribunal declaró ilegal la huelga.

Pero en el caso presente, los huelguistas no infringieron el convenio que estaba en vigor hasta el 18 de octubre de 1952; al contrario, sólo hicieron uso del derecho que les concedía el convenio Apéndice "C", el cual les autorizaba a negociar sobre nuevas condiciones de trabajo dentro de sesenta días antes de expirar el convenio. Como el patrono denegó la petición debidamente formulada dentro del plazo convenido de 60 días y sólo concedió un aumento a unos diez individuos, era justo que los obreros se declarasen en huelga. La huelga no fue más que un simple incidente de la petición formulada por los obreros, de la cual hicieron uso para hacer valer su derecho de negociar nuevas condiciones de trabajo para el año siguiente.

La huelga es un arma económica. Cuando se recurre a ella para violar un convenio vigente, la huelga debe ser declarada ilegal; pero si se acude a ella para hacer cumplir un convenio, esa huelga está justificada, y debe ser declarada legal.

La legalidad o ilegalidad de una huelga se determina por su fin, su propósito y por la manera cómo se realiza. Es ilegal si se la emplea para obtener un fin ilegal, para atropellar los derechos del capitalista, para destruir la empresa o para violar un convenio.

"A strike to force the discharge of an employer's helper, oh the ground that there was not enough work to go around, was held legal." *Minasian vs. Osborne*, 210 Mass. 250, 96 N. E. 1036, 37 LRA N. S. 179, Ann Cas. 1912C, 1299).

"A strike because of an employer's failure to keep an engagement to discuss a closed shop agreement has been held legal." (*Walton Lunch vs. Kearny*, 236 Mass. 310; 128 N. E. 429).

"The strike for higher wages, shorter hours, or better working conditions is recognized as legal." (*Cornellier vs. Haverhill Shoe Mfg. Ass'n.*, 221 Mass. 554, 562, 109 N. E. 643, LRA 1916C, 218).

"It is no longer in question that organized labor lawfully may strike for higher wages, shorter hours, and improved shop conditions." (*Minasian vs. Osborne*, 210 Mass. 250, 37 LEA. (N. S.) 179, 96 N. E. 1036, Ann. Cas. 1912C).

"Peaceful effort to bring about cessation of work in order to enforce demand for betterment of wage or living conditions is lawful" (*Jefferson & Indiana Coal Co. vs. Marks, et al.*, 134 Atl. Rep. 430).

"The respondent laborers do not dispute this ruling, for in their brief they admit that a strike may be illegal '(1) when it violates a positive law or a judicial decree, (2) when the means employed is illegal, or (3) when its purpose is illegal.' And since the strike here in question did not violate any express provision of law or judicial decree and was not carried out through illegal means, the only question for determination is whether the said strike was declared for a trivial, unjust or unreasonable cause and was for that reason illegal. * * * The majority of the judges of the industrial court did not find the strike declared under those circumstances illegal. We find no reason for adopting a different view, aware as we must be that if the members of the Gumaca

Labor Union had not struck but had allowed themselves to be pressured into joining the foreman's union, their petition in the Court of Industrial Relations would have died a natural death for lack of support." (Standard Coconut Corporation vs. Court of Industrial Relations and Felipe Morales, et al., G. R. No. L-3733, July 30, 1951).

No existe regla fija para determinar la legalidad o ilegalidad de una huelga. Por eso al decidir el Tribunal debe tener en cuenta las circunstancias especiales de cada caso particular.

En el caso presente, se reconoce su legalidad porque está de acuerdo con el convenio de las partes y porque su propósito es bueno. El aumento general de jornal que los obreros habían solicitado no era para el plazo anual convenido que terminaba en 18 de octubre de 1952, sino Dará el año siguiente; privar a los obreros del derecho de formular su petición dentro de 60 días antes del 18 de octubre de dicho año—y privarles del derecho de declararse en huelga cuando no existe prohibición de huelga en los convenios,—es despojarles del derecho que les concedía el convenio del 14 de junio de 1949 (Anexo "C" al Apíndice "C"),

La recurrente contiene que se le privó de su derecho constitucional de debido proceso" de ley cuando el Juez Amparo concurrió pro forma con la opinión del Comisionado Jiménez Yanson. Esta contención carece de base. El Juez Amparo, del Juzgado de Primera Instancia de Manila, fue designado para tomar parte en la resolución de la moción de reconsideración presentada por los obreros, en sustitución del Comisionado José S. Bautista, que se había inhibido con buen fundamento. El Juez Amparo no tenía necesidad de oír otra vez a las partes, porque no se trataba de una vista ordinaria de la causa sino de la simple resolución de una moción de reconsideración; solamente estaba obligado el Juez Amparo a estudiar el expediente, esto es, las alegaciones, las pruebas, la decisión del Comisionado Roldan del 21 de Octubre de 1952, los argumentos a favor y en contra de la moción de reconsideración, la opinión de la mayoría (impropiamente llamada disidencia), preparada por el Comisionado Jiménez Yanson, y la disidencia del Comisionado Roldan (impropiamente titulada Resolución). La moción de reconsideración es una cuestión que se resuelve en la cámara de deliberaciones del tribunal y no en sesión abierta con audiencia de las partes. El Juez Amparo no tenía necesidad de escribir su opinión personal porque está conforme con los puntos de vista de la mayoría. Cuando el Comisionado Jiménez Yanson escribió su ponencia, ello demuestra que fue designado por sus compañeros de la mayoría para prepararla, y la concurrencia del Juez Amparo no puede considerarse como pro forma como tampoco lo es la del Comisionado Lanting.

Se confirma la resolución apelada con costas contra la recurrente.

Jugo, Bautista Angelo, Concepción, y Reyes, J. B. L., MM., están conformes.

COCURRING

LABRADOR, J.,

I concur. Paragraph 4 of the agreement in which it is stipulated that "they shall negotiate with each other within 60 days before the expiration on October 18, 1949, of the present collective bargaining agreement for the succeeding collective bargaining agreement * * *" did not bar association from utilizing in the negotiation the legitimate weapon the law recognizes it to possess, namely, the strike. There seems to be no provision in the agreement prohibiting the association or its members from declaring a strike during the period of negotiation and in the absence of such express agreement to that effect the right to declare a strike or to strike cannot be said to have been waived by the association. The strike is a legitimate weapon recognized by law; it could not have been the intention of the association to deprive itself of its use during the negotiation. Had it waived the right to strike, it would have been rendered impotent to enforce its legitimate demands upon the other side in the negotiation. No

such waiver can be implied.

DISSENTING

MONTEMAYOR, J.,

The facts in this case may be briefly stated as follows. As a result of a strike declared by the Koppel Employees Association hereafter referred to as the Association whose members were employees or laborers of Koppel (Philippines) Inc., an agreement was entered into between the said association and the management dated October 18, 1948, which was approved by the Court of Industrial Relations. That was in Case No. 154-V. In another case No. 323-V of the same court in which another strike was declared by the same association, an agreement was entered into between said association and the Koppel (Philippines) Inc. on June 14, 1949, and also approved by the court the following day. Both agreements in the two cases were renewed by the parties for another year to expire on October 30, 1950. On September 27, 1950, said agreements were again renewed for another year to expire on October 18, 1951. On October 19, 1951, the same agreements were renewed by the parties for another year beginning October 19, 1951 and expiring on October 18, 1952. This renewal agreement is the one involved in this case. Paragraph 4 of this agreement stipulated that the parties shall negotiate with each other within 60 days before the expiration of the agreement, that is to say, 60 days before October 18, 1952, for the succeeding collective bargaining agreement which should take effect on October 19, 1952.

On September 3, 1952, within the period of the 60 days above-mentioned, the association presented a petition demanding a general increase in wages. Koppel Inc. denied the petition but notified the Association that the management was disposed to consider increase in salary in favor of those laborers who were deserving, and the increase was given to 10 laborers. The Association, however, insisted in a general increase which was again denied by the management. On September 18, 1952, the Association sent a letter to the management reiterating its demand for general increase in wages, and that if the same was not granted, it would enforce the rights of its members. Because the petition was not granted the laborers declared a strike on September 22, 1952.

The management filed a petition with the Court of Industrial Relations (CIR) asking that the strike be declared illegal. After hearing, Presiding Judge Roldan rendered judgment declaring the strike illegal. On motion for reconsideration by the Association, Judges Roldan and Castillo voted to deny the petition. Judge Yanson in a dissenting opinion voted to grant the motion for reconsideration and to reverse the judgment. Judge Amparo who was detailed to sit in that court because Judge Bautista had disqualified himself, concurred in the dissent. Judge

Lanting concurred in the result of the dissent. So, the dissenting opinion of Judge Yanson became the majority opinion, thereby practically declaring the strike legal. Koppel Inc., then filed the present petition for certiorari to annul the resolution of the respondent CIR which declared the strike legal and valid.

I agree with the majority in its citation of authorities to the effect that a strike is an economic weapon available to laborers, and that a strike for higher wages, shorter working hours or better working conditions is recognized as legal; but when the majority holds that the strike in this case was to force compliance with the agreement between the management (Koppel) and the Association which was to expire on October 18, 1952, I emphatically disagree. Said majority seems to go on the theory that although the agreement between the parties to be observed for a period of one year and to expire on October 18, 1952, was a valid and solemn contract to be faithfully observed by them, still inasmuch as the parties were given the right to negotiate for a working agreement for the following year, that right of negotiation authorized the laborers to go on strike anyway even before the expiration of the agreement, if their demands for higher wages for the following year were not granted by the management. I fail to

follow that reasoning. The only purpose in authorizing the parties to negotiate within 60 days from the expiration of the agreement was for them to have a working agreement ready the day following the expiration of the agreement, this is October 19, 1952, because if the parties waited until that date to enter into negotiations which might take days or weeks, then it would be too late; for in the meantime, the laborers unwilling to continue working without any definite agreement as to wages, working conditions, vacation leave, etc., may be unemployed and idle and the work of the company paralyzed. That was all the purpose of the negotiation contemplated in the agreement. It could not have meant that it was an authority for the laborers to violate their agreement before it expired just because the negotiation fell through. The negotiations were entirely and absolutely independent of the contract or agreement which bound the parties from October 19, 1951 to October 18, 1952. Under that agreement, the management was bound to allow the laborers to work until October 18, 1952, under the schedule of wages, working conditions, etc. agreed upon, and in turn the laborers were bound to continue working under said schedule of wages, working conditions, working hours, vacation and sick leave if any, etc. In other words, during that period, there could be no occasion or reason for any strike by the laborers regarding wages for the simple reason that they had expressly and solemnly agreed to work under the wages mentioned in the agreement. In spite of all this, however, Judge Yanson who penned the majority opinion of the CIR and counsel for the Association assert the agreement did not contain a "no-strike" clause, for which reason, the laborers may legally go on strike, even during the period of said agreement. I hold that it was unnecessary to embody a non-strike clause in the agreement because under a bargaining agreement between management and the laborers for a certain period, it is understood that there neither be strike or lockout during the period. The very purpose of and the whole philosophy of bargaining agreements are to avoid strikes on the theory that when management and laborers are agreed and have signed a solemn contract for certain period during that time at least, there is industrial peace. Ludwig Teller, a recognized authority on labor disputes and collective bargaining agreements in his work entitled "Labor Disputes and Collective Bargaining", April Supplement to Vol. II, pp. 39-40 says:

"Regarding the condition that the contract should contain a no-strike clause, this too seems unnecessary. Whether a collective bargaining agreement does or does not contain a no-strike clause, a strike called during the term of the agreement would be a breach of the agreement. The no-strike clause is simply inserted so that all employees may be appraised clearly of their obligation, but it is not legally necessary. This seems clear from the fact that continuity of production is one of the main reasons for the execution of a collective bargaining agreement for a specific term." (Italics supplied)

Both the majority opinion of the Court of Industrial Relations and the memorandum of counsel for the Association cite and in great measure rely on the case of *Wilson & Co., Inc.* (New York, N. Y.), *United Packinghouse Workers of America (CIO)*, reported in 89 ULRB No. 82. Although just now we do not have in Baguio the library facilities to read the decision in said case, we may accept the statement of the case made by counsel for the Association on pages 5 and 6 of his memorandum, which we reproduce below:

"The facts of this case are as follows:

"About October 13, 1947, employer and the unions signed a collective bargaining agreement for a term of two years, from May 24, 1947 to May 24, 1949. The contract contained a provision permitting reopening for wage rate adjustment 'once during the term of this Agreement, 12 months from the date of signing this Agreement, by written notice of 60 days prior to the date on which it is desired to commence negotiation.' The contract did not contain a 'no-strike' clause. About December 26, 1947, the unions served written notice on the company of their desire to open the agreement on the subject of a general wage increase, stating that the notice was given pursuant to the contract as well as to section 8 (d) of the Act. The employer rejected the demand for reopening of the wage provisions on the ground that the demand was premature under the terms of the contract. A strike began on March 16, 1948.

"The question of legality of the strike having been brought to (the attention of) the National Labor Relations Boards, that body on April 12, 1950, ruled that although it was declared during the effectivity of the agreement, it did not violate the same, and held the strike was legal. Accordingly, the Board stated:

'* * * If section 8 (d) (4) is read so as to prohibit a strike for modification of a contract until that contract expires, the concept of contract modification is rendered almost meaningless, and the act will have destroyed the effectiveness of provisions contained in hundreds of collective bargaining agreements whereby the parties have agreed to consider wage and similar adjustments during the term of the agreement, and, in the absence of a no-strike clause, have further recognized that demands made pursuant to reopening clauses may be supported by the traditional modes of economic pressures. Such a result would constitute a serious deterrent to the execution of collective bargaining agreements of any substantial duration, and would thereby remove a most important encouragement to stability in industrial relation.' "

Then, said counsel says:

"There seems to be no question about the similarity of the facts in the foregoing case and the instant case."

He continues: .

"In the Wilson case, the contract was for a specified period of 2 years while in the case at bar; it is for one year. In the Wilson case, as in this present case, there is no 'no-strike' clause. In the former, there is a provision allowing reopening for wage adjustment during the term of the contract and within twelve months from date of signing of the agreement; while in the instant case, the parties stipulated to negotiate during the lifetime of the award, and within 60 days before the expiration of the contract. In the Wilson case, as in the instant case, the union served notice on the company to negotiate on the subject of general wage increase which was denied. In the first case, the company rejected the demand on the ground that it is premature under the contract;" * * * (Italics supplied).

Both the majority of the Court of Industrial Relations and counsel for the Association apparently overlooked the great difference between the bargaining agreement in the Wilson case and the working agreement between the Koppel Inc. and the Association, which difference renders the ruling in the Wilson case completely inapplicable to the present case. It will be noticed from the very narration and statement of counsel for the Association as above reproduced that the agreement in the Wilson case was for a period of two years while the period in the present case is only for one year. Furthermore, and this is the most important, in the Wilson agreement there was a provision allowing the reopening of the agreement for wage adjustment during the term of said agreement. There, that clause was proper because two years was quite a long time and within that relatively long period of time, conditions may change justifying wage adjustment and modification. In other words, the adjustment and modification contemplated in the clause in the Wilson case was for and applicable to the period of the agreement; that is why it was called wage adjustment and modification agreement. Naturally, if in the course of the negotiations the demands for say, increase in wages by the workers was not granted by the management, the former to enforce the demand may go on strike. The clause for negotiations in the present case, however is far different. The negotiations were not for any wage adjustment or modification of the agreement or for any change in the conditions of work, to be made part of and to apply to the agreement then in force and which was to expire on October 18, 1952, but they were negotiations for a future agreement, and for another period of one year, October 19, 1952 to October 18, 1953. In other words, the bargaining agreement to be negotiated in the present case separate from, independent of, and had nothing to do with the subsisting bargaining agreement which was expiring on October 18, 1952, which latter agreement the laborers had unfortunately breached before its expiration. This is quite clear from the context of clause 4 of the agreement itself which is reproduced below:

"4. It is further stipulated between the parties herein that they shall negotiate with each other within 60 days before the expiration on October 18, 1949 (1952), of the present collective bargaining agreement for the

succeeding collective bargaining agreement which should take effect on October 19, 1919 (1952)." (Italics supplied)

The reason why the year 1949 appears in the above clause 4, and for which I am substituting the year 1952 in parenthesis, is because clause 4 is contained in the 1949 agreement, which agreement was accepted by the parties to continue from year to year, the last period being from October 19, 1951 to October 18, 1952.

From all the foregoing, to me it is evident that as found and held by Judges Roldan and Castillo, the strike was in clear violation of the bargaining agreement between the parties and, consequently, it was unwarranted and illegal. The decision or resolution appealed from should therefore be reversed.

Bengzon and Reyes, A., JJ., concur in this dissent.

Se confirma la resolución apelada.

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