

MANILA CORDAGE COMPANY, PETITIONER, VS. THE COURT OF INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS AND MANILA CORDAGE WORKERS UNION--PAFLU, RESPONDENTS.

G.R. No. L-25943. January 30, 1971

Ponente: BARREDO, J.

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BARREDO, J.:

Petition for review on appeal from the order of the Court of Industrial Relations of November 11, 1965 denying petitioner's motion to either dismiss or suspend the proceedings in Case No. 62-IPA of said court which were started by virtue of a Presidential certification dated October 22, 1965 of "a labor dispute between the management of the Manila Cordage Company (herein petitioner) and the members of the Manila Cordage Workers Union - PAFLU (herein private respondent). . .," as well as its subsequent order dated November 26, 1965 but released much later and received by petitioner only on April 19, 1966 denying petitioner's motion for reconsideration of the denial order.

The grounds of the petition are substantially stated in petitioner's assignment of errors thus:

"I

"THE RESPONDENT COURT ERRED IN NOT INHIBITING ITSELF FROM EXERCISING JURISDICTION OVER THE CASE, THE PRESIDENTIAL CERTIFICATION, UNDER WHICH IT ASSUMED JURISDICTION, HAVING BEEN MADE WITHOUT BASIS IN FACT.

"II

"ASSUMING ARGUENDO THAT THE RESPONDENT COURT COULD HAVE ASSUMED JURISDICTION UNDER THE PRESIDENTIAL CERTIFICATION, IT ERRED IN NOT REFRAINING FROM EXERCISING ITS COMPULSORY ARBITRATION POWERS, A RETURN-TO-WORK AGREEMENT AND A COLLECTIVE BARGAINING AGREEMENT HAVING BEEN REACHED BY PETITIONER AND RESPONDENT UNION.

"III

"THE RESPONDENT COURT ERRED IN NOT DISMISSING OR AT LEAST SUSPENDING THE PROCEEDINGS IN VIEW OF THE PENDENCY OF CASES BETWEEN THE SAME PARTIES INVOLVING THE SAME ISSUES COVERED BY THE PRESIDENTIAL CERTIFICATION."

Unfortunately, the background facts upon which the legal issues in which parties joined in the lower court may be resolved are not stated in the impugned orders, and it is precisely because of the failure of the respondent court to make a finding on the principal factual issue raised by private respondent that this case is hereby being ordered returned to respondent court for further proceedings. Such failure, however, does not preclude this Court from passing now on some of the questions raised in the pleadings on the basis of the other facts in the record which are

undisputed although they appear to have been merely assumed in the orders under review, if only to guide the course of such further proceedings.

On or about May 16, 1965, respondent union which is composed of workers in petitioner company declared a strike against said company. On October 14, 1965, an agreement was signed by C. A. Carter, the President of the Company, on its behalf, and by certain persons, headed by Juanito Tabuyan, purportedly as president, vice-pres-ident, secretary, treasurer, auditor and directors of respondent Union, on behalf of the said union, providing as follows:

"1. The UNION shall, upon the signing of this Agreement, call off and withdraw the picketing at or about the COMPANY's premises and officially terminate the strike declared on May 16, 1965 and the said picketing.

"2. The COMPANY agrees to accept on a staggered basis, depending upon the requirements of the COMPANY's business and operations, all employees who have not yet returned to work as of the date of this Agreement, with the exception of em-ployees facing or involved in criminal cases and other cases pending in any court, office, agency or instrumentality of the government whose readmission for work will depend upon the resolution of said cases.

"The employees not falling within the exception above mentioned shall report to the COMPANY not later than October 31, 1965 for advice as to when they can act-ually start working. Should these employees fail to report on or before Oct-ober 31, 1965, they shall be considered to have abandoned their jobs with the COM-PANY and the COMPANY shall then be free to hire their replacements.

"3. The COMPANY hereby reserves its right, which the UNION hereby expressly recognizes, to prosecute all the cases it (the COMPANY) has filed and are pend-ing, and to file and prosecute any other cases, in any court, office, agency and/or instrumentality of the government, in connection with the said strike and picketing and to take such action as the COMPANY sees fit upon the resolution of these cases. It is hereby understood and agreed that this Agreement shall not be construed, in any manner and for any reason, as a condonation by the COMPANY of any and all acts committed by the em-employees during the said strike and picketing subject of the cases already filed and to be filed against said employees.

"4. The UNION assures and guarantees the reestablishment and maintenance of industrial peace in the COMPANY.

"5. Any grievance of the UNION and the employees, represented by the UNION, shall be processed in accordance with the prov-isions of the Collective Bargaining Agree-ment existing between the UNION and the COMPANY.

"6. The UNION guarantees that this Agreement has been duly ratified by its membership."

There seems to be no controversy as to the fact that this above return-to-work provision was immediately duly implemented by the Company as well as the members of the Union, other than those herein purportedly acting for the Union, "200" in number, represented by Atty. Israel Bocobo.

It was at this juncture that the aforementioned presidential certification was issued, and pursuant thereto the respondent court assumed jurisdiction over this case.

As a first step to take the case out of the indus-trial court, petitioner requested the President in a letter dated October 30, 1965 to withdraw or recall the certification. This request was endorsed by the Executive Secretary to the Secretary of Labor and the latter, in a 2nd indorsement dated November 12, 1965, recommended to the President favorable action on petitioner's request, but no action appears to have been taken by the President on this recommendation.

In the meanwhile, on December 23, 1965, a new collective bargaining agreement was signed between the same persons who signed the above-mentioned return-to-work agreement of October 14th, except that, on behalf of the Union, a certain Adolfo Espano signed additionally as Executive Vice-President and, on the other hand, none of the directors were included, in this later agreement.

In two successive motions, the first on October 30, 1965 and the second on November 5, 1965, petitioner sought again to take the case out of the court by asking for either the dismissal or suspension of the proceedings upon the grounds that:

(A) it was seeking recall of the presidential certification and

(B) 1. This Honorable Court has no jurisdiction over this case because -

(a) The presidential certification is not valid and conclusive;

(b) In any case, there is doubt as to the propriety of the presidential certification and/or the exercise by this Court of compulsory arbitration powers for the reasons that -

(i) There is no labor dispute between the petitioner and the respondent;

(ii) The business of respondent is one not indispensable to the national interest;

(iii) The so-called "dispute", granting, arguendo, that there is any, is one involving a small faction in the petitioner union, which "dispute" does not warrant presidential certification and/or operation of compulsory arbitration.

2. Granting, without admitting, that this Court has jurisdiction, this Court should not exercise its compulsory arbitration powers for such exercise would -

(a) Modify, alter or weaken, if not impair, the existing collective bargaining agreement between the petitioner and the respondent;

(b) Violate the letter and the spirit of the Industrial Peace Act and destroy the fabric of free and voluntary collective bargaining.

In connection with said motions, on November 15, 1965, the same persons who signed the collective bargaining agreement of December 23, 1965, as aforesaid, filed over their signatures a manifestation to the effect that "there exists no labor dispute between the petitioner and the respondent company, that the strike declared last May 16, 1965 has been officially terminated last October 14, 1965, and that petitioner has instructed its members to stop picketing."

In the foregoing circumstances, the orders of denial of the respondent court would indeed seem to be less than justified. It appears, however, albeit not in the said orders nor in the answer but, in the petition itself, (Par. 13, pp. 8-9) that a so-called "small group of strikers --- being represented by Atty. Israel Bocobo", evidently the one referred to in the questioned order of November 11, 1965 as "200" others, (Exhibits "A" - "A-1", Strikers), [p. IV Appendix A, Petitioner's Brief actually took part in the hearing of petitioner's two motions for dismissal or suspension and thereat alleged that:

"During the initial hearings, a certain group headed by Mr. Tabuyan (who had even at the early stages of the strike, crossed the picket lines) through counsel, made representations to this Honorable Court that even before the issuance of the presidential certification, there had been a 'return to work agreement' between them and the respondent management. The implication therefore is that they were not on strike at the time of the presidential certification. Obviously therefore they have nothing to do with the strikers and the strike certified by the President.

"This group during the hearings submit-*ted* to court the purported 'agreement', a document showing the list of their 'mem-*bers*' and a certification by the company that several of these workers had returned to work.

"To this, the petitioner union made the following manifestations and observations, among others:

"1. The Tabuyan group is a spurious group headed by 'strike-breakers';

"2. It does not recognize the agreement;

"3. Since the hearing was for a possible return-to-work order by the court, it was pre-mature to go into the merits as to the validity of the claims of Tabuyan who after all admits they are not strike at all.

"With these observations, petitioner union reserved the contesting of the claims of Tabuyan. Tabuyan however was allowed to hand over the documents to the court, but without benefit of a hearing on the merits. There could possibly be no judicial finding then as to the existence of such a return-to-work agreement.

"It may also be considered that if there was such a return-to-work agreement then there was no strike at all that could be certified to the court by the President of the Philippines. Indeed, the respondent management raised this contention on several occasions.

"We hasten to add also that respondent management aside from claiming falsely that there is no more strike has used this spur-i-ous agreement to sow confusion and demorali-*zation* among the strikers by announcing that those who would not follow the return to work provided in the agreement are subject to dismissal."

It was on the backdrop of these circumstances that respondent court issued the first challenged order which reads thus:

"This refers to respondent company's motion to suspend proceedings filed with the Court on November 3, 1965, and to its motion to dismiss for lack of jurisdiction which it verbally interposed at the hear-*ing* of the same date and formally filed on November 6, 1965, under the heading 'Motion to Dismiss and to Suspend Proceed-*ings*.'

"In assailing the jurisdiction of the Court, respondent questions the wisdom and propriety of the presidential certi-*fication*. This is no concern of the Court but exclusively devolves upon the President (Pampanga Sugar Development Co. Inc. vs. CIR, et al., G.R. No. L-13178, March 25, 1961). The existence of a labor dispute between the parties is not disputed; hence, the Court should proceed to exercise jurisdiction under Sec. 10, of R. A. 875. Con-*fronted* with the same issue, this Court, in 'Central Ma-ao Workers Amalgamated - PAFLU vs. Ma-ao Sugar Central Company, Inc.,' Case No. 56-IPA, upheld jurisdiction. There is no reason to deviate from that stand and from the ruling of the Supreme Court.

"The number of employees involved in a certified case, whether great or small, is immaterial. Section 10 of Republic Act 875 merely requires that the labor dispute involve an industry indispensable to the national interest. The business of respon-*dent* company has been found to be one such industry.

"It is also argued that under the theory of exhaustion of administrative remedies, the Court should suspend proceedings pend-*ing* action on respondent's letter to the President for the recall of his certifica-*tion*. While respondent may avail itself of administrative remedies, the Court, whose function to arbitrate without delay is clear, may meantime legally proceed to exercise jurisdiction provided the rights of the parties are not thereby prejudiced and vital industrial peace as well as pre-conflict operation of the business concerned, restored. In the event the President recalls his certification, the parties may revert to their positions prior thereto.

"Anyway, at this stage, the Court is most concerned with the return to work of the strikers. Respondent has entered into a return-to-work agreement with the Manila Cordage Workers Union - PAFLU, and has admitted back to work the striking employees who were represented by the signatories on behalf of the union. Such an agreement does not bar a presidential certification of the dispute inasmuch as 'the relations between capital and

labor are not merely contractual. They are so impressed with public interest that labor contracts must yield to the common good. x x x' (Art. 1700, Civil Code.). In virtue of said certification it will be discriminatory under the circumstances for respondent not to readmit the other strikers not so represented. There is therefore no harm if a return to work of the striking members is effected.

"The Court is aware of the pendency of Cases Nos. 175-INJ and 4325-ULP, involving the same parties and, among others, the issue of illegality of strike arising from the means employed during the picketing. Some strikers were criminally charged for acts allegedly committed during the strike. And were it not for the return-to-work agreement earlier adverted to, the issue of illegality of the strike would take preference over the reinstatement of the workers still on strike. Likewise the Court notes that were it not for the matter of the reinstatement of the workers criminally charged, there would have been complete accord between the parties as to the return to work of the other striking workers. For this reason, in order that the issues raised in those two cases be not prejudiced by the exercise of jurisdiction in the instant case, the strikers who have been charged with criminal offenses in the conduct of the strike should not, in the meanwhile, return to work.

"From manifestations before the Court, there are only 33 of these employees so charged criminally, as against 200 others, (Exhibits 'A' - 'A-1, Strikers) who will not stand to be benefited by a return to work. The records also show that respondent management, if there would be a return to work at all, would be willing to reduce their number. Respondent manifested however, that because of the difficulty of determining the degree of culpability of each, it may not be in a position to reduce their number meantime.

"WHEREFORE, upholding jurisdiction, the motion to dismiss and/or suspend proceedings, is hereby DENIED. Consequently, the strikers represented by Atty. Israel Bocobo are hereby directed to lift their picket lines and re-turn to work forthwith, excepting the 33 strikers who have been charged criminally and who should not return to work as yet. Respondent is hereby directed to accept back to work the strikers whose names appear in the payroll of the company immediately preceding the strike, excepting those criminally charged.

"The above-entitled case is hereby set for hearing on November 17, 1965, at 2:00 P.M., to find out whether management would be able to reduce the number of those who would not return to work meantime.

"SO ORDERED."

On these premises, the main target of petitioner's attack is the respondent court's refusal to declare it-self without jurisdiction to give due course to the presidential certification above-mentioned. Petitioner's theory in support of this posture is that the said certification "appears to have been made on (the) erroneous factual bases" of the existence of "a labor dispute between the COMPANY and the UNION", "that the business of the COMPANY is not indispensable to the national interest" and if, at all, "the 'dispute' involves only a minority faction in the UNION." Alternatively, petitioner contends that the industrial court's assumption of jurisdiction in this case would "set at naught the return-to-work agreement ... between the COMPANY and the UNION, impair the obligation of an existing collective bargaining agreement and violate the Industrial Peace Act and weaken the system of free and voluntary collective bargaining." (p. 12, Petition)

As far as this Court is concerned, there can be no argument against the validity and efficacy of the presidential certification here in issue. Petitioner argues that the President's action was issued on erroneous factual bases. Whether it was so issued or not, this Court is not constitutionally permitted to inquire into, in exactly the same manner that the Executive cannot refuse to accord respect and sanction to a decision of this Court merely for the reason that in his opinion the same is without sufficient factual or legal basis. Otherwise, the principle of separation of powers among the three great departments of our government, the legislative, the executive and the judicial, with its necessary implications of independence from and interdependence upon each other, would be a myth wherein it is most likely that the judiciary would be supreme, a role naturally to be relished but firmly not to

be desired, if it will cause the abandonment of a juridical and constitutional formula that has served through the de-cades as the invulnerable bastion of individual liberties as well as the indestructible cornerstone of the rule of law in this country.

As We see it, the root issue of jurisdiction in this case related to the validity of the challenged presidential certification cannot be resolved on the factual premises assumed by the industrial court. There is here a vital issue of fact, which unfortunately, as stated at the outset of this opinion, the respondent court omitted to resolve. It is the question of whether or not Juanito Tabuyan and his co-signers of the disputed agreements were legitimate officers of the respondent Union.

It will be recalled that petitioner's principal objection to the assumption of jurisdiction by the respondent court was that there was no longer any labor dispute which said court could arbitrate at the time of the issuance of the presidential certification on October 22, 1965 because as early as October 14, 1965, petitioner Company and respondent Union had already forged a return to work agreement that put an end to the strike declared by the latter against the former in May of that year and that, furthermore, the parties were already negotiating and were well on the way to formalizing a renewal of their collective bargaining agreement which was due to expire on December 6, 1965, as, in fact, such an agreement was signed by the Union and the Company on December 23, 1965. Putting aside the question of whether or not the alleged return-to-work agreement of October 14th and the claimed actual termination of the strike on said date should be considered as having foreclosed the legality or propriety of the issuance of any presidential certification of the dispute between petitioner and the respondent Union, it being clear that compulsory arbitration may be certified by the President as long as, in his opinion, a "labor dispute", which this Court has defined as "any controversy concerning the terms, conditions and tenure of employment,"[1] exists in an industry indispensable to the national interest, whether a strike therein be impending, going on or already terminated without a final settlement of the dispute, We are of the opinion that the conclusion of the negotiations for a collective bargaining agreement on December 23, 1965, if entered into by those properly authorized to do so, could have ousted the jurisdiction of the CIR, except to determine whether or not said agreement was not contrary to law, morals or public policy, in line with the dominant policy of the Industrial Peace Act of favoring unionism and free bargaining between labor and management as against compulsory arbitration with governmental intervention. (Section 1, Republic Act 875). It does not appear, however, that, although the petitioner's motion for reconsideration was still pending in the CIR at the time of the said agreement on December 23, the same was brought to its attention, much less made the basis of any pleading.

In other words, as matters stood in the respondent court when it denied petitioner's motion for reconsideration, there was already signed between the petitioner and, purportedly, the respondent Union a collective bargaining agreement, and, if, contrary to the allegations of Atty. Bocobo, the persons who signed the same as officers of the Union were the legitimate officers they represented themselves to be, it would be quite clear that the industrial court should have declared itself without further basis or authority to continue trying to arbitrate between parties who have already settled the differences between themselves, precisely in the manner sought to be encouraged and protected by the Industrial Peace Act - free collective bargaining - or, it should have, at least, suspended the proceedings until the decisive issue of who were the genuine and legitimate officers of the Union had been settled by it. If, as contended by herein respondents, Juanito Tabuyan and the others who signed the agreement as officers of the Union "had no right to represent the Union and the strikers" (p. 5, Respondents' Brief) and that the agreement signed by them "was unauthorized, spurious, illegal and immoral, (p. 8, Id.) there can be no question that the jurisdiction and authority of the respondent court remained unaffected by the said collective bargaining agreement relied upon by petitioner. The purpose of a presidential certification is nothing more than to bring about soonest, thru arbitration by the industrial court, a fair and just solution of the differences between an employer and his workers regarding the terms and conditions of work in the industry concerned which in the

opinion of the President involves the national interest, so that the damage such employer-worker dispute might cause upon the national interest may be minimized as much as possible, if not totally averted by avoiding the stoppage of work as a result of a strike or lock out or any lagging of the activities of the industry or the possibility of these contingencies which might cause detriment to such national interest. This is the foundation of that court's jurisdiction in what may be termed as a certification case. Naturally, if the employer and the workers are able to arrive at an amicable settlement by free and voluntary collective bargaining preferably thru a labor union, before the court is able to use its good offices, it is but in consonance with the objective of the Industrial Peace Act to promote unionism and free collective bargaining that the court should step out of the picture and declare its function in the premises at an end, except as it may become necessary to determine whether or not the agreement forged by the parties is not contrary to law, morals or public policy. This is clear from the terms of Section 10 of the Act, from which the industrial court derives its jurisdiction in a certification case, since it expressly provides that "the Court may issue an order fixing the terms and conditions of employment", "if no other solution to the dispute is found." Besides, a pre-sidential certification to the industrial court automatically makes operative in regard to the certified dispute all the provisions of Commonwealth Act 103 needed to carry out the intent of said section of the Industrial Peace Act,[2] and among the provisions which so come into play is the second paragraph of Section 4 which reads thus:

"The Court shall, before hearing the dispute and in the course of such hearing, endeavor to reconcile the parties and induce them to settle the dispute by amicable agreement. If any agreement as to the whole or any part of the dispute is arrived at by the parties, a memorandum of its terms shall be made in writing, signed and acknowledged by the parties thereto before the Judge of the Court or any official acting in his behalf and authorized to administer oaths or acknowledgments, or, before a notary public. The memorandum shall be filed in the office of the Clerk of the Court, and, unless otherwise ordered by the Court, shall, as between the parties to the agreement, have the same effect as, and be deemed to be, a decision or award."

Otherwise stated, in the case at bar, We need not decide whether or not the return-to-work agreement of October 14, 1965 rendered the presidential certification on October 22, 1965 factually and legally baseless or inoperative. Neither is it incumbent upon Us to rule here whether or not a presidential certification once issued can be withdrawn, and, consequently, whether or not the presidential certification herein involved may be considered as withdrawn in view of the favorable recommendation to such effect by the Undersecretary of Labor. All that We hold now is that the entering into a voluntary and valid collective bargaining agreement between an employer and a labor union of its workers before or after a presidential certification is issued under Section 10 of the Industrial Peace Act ousts the jurisdiction of the Court of Industrial Relations, except as to the question of whether or not the agreement is contrary to law, morals or public policy, should such question be raised by any of the parties, and in this connection and with respect to the laborers or workers, whether the question be raised by the Union as such or by any of the members thereof.

Petitioner contends that the workers represented by Atty. Bocobo constitute a mere "minority faction" and as such they do not have legal personality to obstruct the course of the return-to-work and collective bargaining agreements entered into by the majority. The trouble with this argument is that except for the casual reference in the order of November 11, 1965 to "200 others" which seem to indicate the number of workers who did not return to work pursuant to the return-to-work agreement of October 14th, the record is remarkably bare of any facts or evidence on which this Court may make a factual finding in connection with the point raised by petitioner. In any event, the majority rule is not an absolute one in labor cases of this kind.[3] More importantly, as already indicated above, any number of members of a labor union may question, in the appropriate cases, any agreement entered into by its officers or the majority if it is contrary to law, morals or public policy. Thus, even if We do not consider respondents' contention that strictly speaking, the presidential certification here refers expressly not to

the Union but to the members thereof as being the ones having a dispute with petitioner, a point which, to be sure, We cannot decide since there are not enough facts in the record for the purpose, it is quite clear that the pivotal issue in this case is the due representation of the Union in the collective bargaining agreement in question.

Accordingly, what the respondent court should have determined was whether or not Juanito Tabuyan and the others who signed the agreements relied upon by petitioner, as officers of respondent Union, were duly chosen by the majority of the members as such. After this important factual point is decided, the respondent court may proceed to resolve the rights of the parties in line with views expressed in the above opinion.

WHEREFORE, the order of November 11, 1965 of respondent court is affirmed in so far as it ordered the return to work of all the workers of petitioner, except the 33 strikers who have been charged criminally, and their acceptance by the petitioner, but this case is ordered returned to respondent court for further proceedings in accordance with the above opinion regarding the effect of the purported renewal collective bargaining agreement of December 23, 1965 upon its jurisdiction acquired by virtue of presidential certification. Without costs.

Concepcion, C.J., Reyes, J.B.L., Dizon, Makalintal, Zaldivar, Castro, Fernando, Teehankee, Villamor, and Makasiar, JJ., concur.

[1] Caltex (Phil.) Inc. vs. Katipunan Labor Union, L-7496, January 31, 1956, 98 Phil. 340.

[2] PAFLU vs. Tan, L-9115, Aug. 31, 1956, 52 O.G. 5836; National Garments & Textiles Workers' Union vs. Caluag, L-9104, Sept. 10, 1956; Allied Free Workers' Union vs. Apostol, L-8876, Oct. 31, 1957, 54 O. G. 981; SMB Box Factory Worker's Union vs. Victoriano, L-12820, Dec. 20, 1957; Benguet Consolidated Mining Co. vs. Coto Labor Union, L-12394, May 29, 1959; Chua Workers' Union vs. City Automotive Co., L-11655, April 29, 1959; Rizal Cement Co. vs. Rizal Cement Workers' Union, L-12747, July 30, 1960; Rizal Cement Workers Union vs. CIR, L-18442, Nov. 30, 1962.

[3] La Campana Food Products, Inc. vs. CIR, L-27907, May 22, 1969, 28 SCRA 314; Heirs of Teodoro M. Cruz vs. CIR, L-23331-32, Dec. 27, 1969, 30 SCRA 917.

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