

DIWA NG PAGKAKAISA-PAFLU, PETITIONER, VS. HON. AMADO G. INCIONG, AS ACTING SECRETARY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF LABOR, AND HON. BLAS OPLE, AS SECRETARY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF LABOR, AND...

G.R. Nos. L-46460-61. March 03, 1992

Ponente: DAVIDE, JR., J.

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DAVIDE, JR., J.:

This is a petition for certiorari under Rule 65 of the Rules of Court which seeks to nullify the Order of 22 June 1977 of the Acting Secretary of Labor[1] setting aside the Order of 9 October 1974 of the Court of Industrial Relations (CIR) in Cases Nos. 2735-ULP and 2741-ULP[2] directing the computation of backwages for members of the petitioner Diwa ng Pagkakaisa-PAFLU, hereinafter referred to as DIWA.

The facts and proceedings which gave rise to this petition are undisputed.

In 1961, two (2) labor cases were filed in the then Court of Industrial Relations (CIR) involving DIWA, a legitimate labor organization, and Filtex International Corporation (formerly the Yupangco Cotton Mills, Inc.), a textile company, hereinafter referred to as FILTEX.

In Case No. 2735-ULP,[3] DIWA charged FILTEX with unfair labor practice in that the latter refused to give work to the officers as well as the listed members of the former because of alleged illegal union activities. DIWA prayed, inter alia, that the dismissed members be reinstated to their former positions with full backwages from the time of their dismissal up to the time of their actual reinstatement.

In Case No. 2741-ULP,[4] FILTEX charged DIWA and its officers and members named therein with unfair labor practice for declaring an illegal strike on 19 February 1961 in violation of the existing collective bargaining agreement, particularly the no-strike and grievance machinery clauses.

After a joint trial of the two (2) cases, the CIR rendered a decision dated 29 August 1964, the dispositive portion of which reads:

"IN VIEW OF ALL THE FOREGOING ESTABLISHED FACTS, the Court hereby declares the strike, staged by members of the Diwa ng Pagkakaisa against the Filtex International Corporation (formerly Yupangco Cotton Mills) as illegal, and likewise declares the termination of the status of those employees and workers of the company responsible therefor. All the rest shall be reinstated. Those who have pending criminal cases connected with, or related to the deliberation of, or in carrying out the strike shall, in the meanwhile, in view thereof, be suspended."[5]

DIWA filed a motion for reconsideration of the aforesaid CIR decision, except insofar as the portion ordering the reinstatement of the rest of the workers is concerned. It likewise filed a motion for the execution of the reinstatement aspect of the decision, to wit: "All the rest shall be reinstated," in the light of *GSIS vs. Olase*. [6]

FILTEX opposed both motions.

The first motion for reconsideration filed by DIWA was denied by the CIR en banc on 23 November 1964; hence, it filed with this Court a special civil action for certiorari which was docketed as G.R. Nos. L-23960-61. In its petition, DIWA did not question that part of the CIR decision ordering reinstatement of "the rest" of the workers; it prayed that the decision, except for the reinstatement portion, be set aside and another be promulgated "x x x ordering also the reinstatement of the officers of the union and ordering further the payment of backwages to all so ordered reinstated including the officers of the petitioner union, from February 26, 1961 to date of their actual reinstatement, by the respondent company, or in the alternative, even only from March 3, 1963, supposed last day for the rendition of the decision of respondent Court according to Republic Act 875 in these cases, to date of their reinstatement." [7]

On 13 July 1967, DIWA again moved for the issuance by the CIR of a writ of execution of its decision insofar as it relates to the reinstatement of "all the rest."

On 14 September 1967, DIWA filed in G.R. Nos. L-23960-61 a motion for issuance of a writ of execution for the payment of backwages to 142 members ordered to be reinstated but not so reinstated by FILTEX. In the Resolution of 20 September 1967, this Court ordered FILTEX to comment on said motion. Complying thereto, FILTEX, on 11 October 1967, filed an Opposition alleging that the whole decision has not yet become final and executory and that not all the members and officers are entitled to reinstatement as the strike had been declared illegal. In the Resolution of 20 October 1967, this Court ordered FILTEX to reinstate within thirty (30) days from receipt of the same DIWA members not declared in the CIR decision to be responsible for the strike. For failure to comply with the Order, this Court, in its Resolution of 26 February 1968, declared FILTEX in contempt of court.

On 6 March 1968, FILTEX filed a "Compliance" indicating that it had reinstated nine (9) members of DIWA; the members were not named.

On 12 February 1972, this Court promulgated its decision in G.R. Nos. L-23960-61 [8] wherein it made the following findings:

"From all the facts and circumstances, as shown by the pleadings and by the decision of the trial court itself, we find no reason to consider the stoppage of work in the night of February 19, 1961 as a strike declared in violation of the no-strike clause of the collective bargaining agreement or which should have been preceded by a recourse to the grievance procedure established, let alone a strike for which the officers of the union should be held responsible. They took steps to get the situation back to normal as soon as they were notified about it; and good labor-management relations as well as the broader imperatives of industrial peace dictated that the spontaneous recalcitrance of some employees, which after all had been settled without unnecessary delay, should not be made an excuse to punish the union officers. If the said employees were readily admitted back to work there is no reason why the officers, through whose efforts the incident was settled, should deserve a different treatment.

The trial court found that the strike of February 26, 1971 was merely a continuation of the strike of February 19. This finding is not justified. As already noted, work was resumed in the afternoon of February 20, 1961, and all the employees were readmitted except the union officers. In other words the incident of February 19 was already closed; and if a strike was called on February 26 it was because the readmission of said officers, as demanded in the letter of the union dated February 22, was refused. Since such refusal appears to be groundless, the fact that a strike was called on February 26, 1961 would not affect the resolution of this case, the only issue here being the legality or illegality of the alleged strike of February 19."

and disposition modifying the challenged decision, to wit:

"Wherefore, the decision appealed from is hereby modified by ordering the reinstatement of the officers of the union who were refused admission by the respondent, with backwages from the date of such refusal less whatever amounts earned by them from other employment during the same period or could have earned with the exercise of reasonable diligence. In assessing the backwages the guidelines indicated by this Court in the case of *Itogon--Suyac Mines, Inc. vs. Sañgilo-Itogon Workers' Union*, G.R. No. L-24189, August 30, 1968, and subsequently applied in *East Asiatic Co., Ltd., et al. vs. CIR*, G.R. No. L-29068, August 31, 1971, should be observed, as follows:

'First. To be deducted from the backwages accruing to each of the laborers to be reinstated is the total amount of earnings obtained by him from other employment(s) from the date of dismissal to the date of reinstatement. Should the laborer decide that it is preferable not to return to work, the deduction should be made up to the time judgment becomes final. And these, for the reason that employees should not be permitted to enrich themselves at the expense of their employer. Besides, there is the 'law's abhorrence for double compensation.'

Second. Likewise, in mitigation of the damages that the dismissed respondents are entitled to, account should be taken of whether in the exercise of due diligence respondents might have obtained income from suitable remunerative employment. We are prompted to give out this last reminder because it is really unjust that a discharged employee should, with folded arms, remain inactive in the expectation that a windfall would come to him. A contrary view would breed idleness; it is conducive to lack of initiative on the part of a laborer. Both bear the stamp of undesirability.'"[9]

This Court also ordered that the records of the case be remanded to the CIR with instruction to the latter to ascertain the amount of backwages due the union officers involved in accordance with the above guidelines.

On 29 March 1972, DIWA filed with the CIR a motion for computation of backwages for the employees therein enumerated, categorized under three (3) groups: (1) officers of DIWA, (2) suspended employees, and (3) the "rest" of the employees.[10]

On 9 October 1974, the CIR issued an Order[11] directing:

"(1) the Chief of the Examining Division of this Court and/or his assistant to proceed to the offices of the Filtex International Corporation and/or Yupangco Cotton Mills, Inc. to examine the payrolls and other pertinent records thereof, to compute the backwages of the union officers, as well as the other employees herein-above mentioned, in accordance with the disposition of the Court in the body of this Order, and upon termination of said computation, to submit his Report to the Court; and (2) the Yupangco Cotton Mills, Inc. and/or Filtex International Corporation to reinstate immediately the union officers and the other employees referred to in the body of this Order to their former positions or to substantially equivalent positions, and to report to the Court within five (5) days from receipt hereof compliance herewith."

FILTEX moved for its reconsideration. On 20 March 1975, the National Labor Relations Commission (NLRC), which took over the functions of the CIR, denied the motion.[12]

Thereafter, DIWA filed a motion for the implementation of the 9 October 1974 Order.[13]

In compliance with the CIR's 9 October 1974 Order, the NLRC examiner, Ricardo Atienza, filed a report, dated 1 August 1975, on the computation of the backwages of members and officers of DIWA who were earlier ordered reinstated.[14] The total amount involved was P2,877,124.00. FILTEX filed an Opposition to the report.

DIWA then filed on 1 August 1975 a motion for a writ of execution[15] contending therein that it was denied due process of law when it was not afforded an opportunity to adduce evidence on deductions consisting of earnings

obtained elsewhere by the parties to be reinstated.

On 30 September 1975, the NLRC, thru Labor Arbiter F. de los Reyes, issued a writ of partial execution directing FILTEX to pay P1,963,703.40 in backwages to the employees who were ordered reinstated.[16]

Following an Appeal[17] interposed by FILTEX from the Labor Arbiter's order of partial execution, the NLRC promulgated on 29 December 1975 a decision modifying the appealed order.[18] The Commission also ordered that the records of the case be remanded to the Labor Arbiter for reception of evidence on the proper deductions.

Not satisfied, DIWA appealed the NLRC decision to the Secretary of Labor.[19] Then Acting Secretary Amado Inciong, in his decision of 20 February 1976, affirmed the assailed ruling, stating thus:

"While the evidence on record is persuasive that respondent had resorted to dilly-dallying maneuvers in several stages of the proceedings, we hold that the interests of justice and equity will be served best by affording respondent a final opportunity to submit evidence on the computation of back wages awarded to complainants.

ACCORDINGLY, let the entire record of this case be remanded to the Labor Arbiter a quo for the reception of evidence bearing on the computation of back wages, pursuant to the guidelines set by the Supreme Court in this case. Respondent Filtex International Corporation (Formerly Yupangco Cotton Mills, Inc.) is hereby ordered to present its evidence within one (1) day from receipt of this Order and two (2) days for the complainants Diwa ng Pagkakaisa-PAFLU, et al., and the Labor Arbiter a quo is hereby directed to render his computation within three (3) days after the reception of evidence. Thereafter, let execution issue immediately.

SO ORDERED."[20]

In pursuance of this Order, Labor Arbiter De los Reyes issued an Order on 18 March 1976,[21] the dispositive portion of which reads:

"WHEREFORE, in view of the foregoing, the respondent company upon the finality of this Order is required to deposit with this Commission the amount of P205,417.40 plus the amount equivalent to one year backwages for 12 employees (sic) referred, herein, which under decisions by the Commission in numerous cases is based on rates at the time of termination which in this case will be P4.00 and hence a total of P14,544.00, making a final total of P219,961.40, to be so deposited."

DIWA and FILTEX filed separate motions for the reconsideration of the above Order with the NLRC. However, on 5 October 1976,[22] the NLRC en banc promulgated a Resolution finding the Order of 18 March 1976 to be in "adherence to the Supreme Court decision sought to be implemented and the backwages due the employees arrived at in accordance with the guidelines set therein, except in the case of 3 officers, namely: Erlinda de Leon, Ismael Dionisio and Celso Santiago who were awarded full backwages x x x," which the NLRC reduced at the rate of 30% each because it did not believe that they were unable to find any means of livelihood in 15 years; the total award was reduced from P219,961.40 to P196,907.00.

Subsequently, DIWA and FILTEX both appealed to the Secretary of Labor.

In its Memorandum,[23] DIWA claimed that the NLRC committed grave abuse of discretion in sustaining with modification the 5 October 1976 Order of the Labor Arbiter; it then prayed that the questioned ruling be set aside and a new one be entered awarding backwages to the DIWA officers and members named in the list of movants with computation of their wages in the total sum of P1,306,623.50. Upon the other hand, FILTEX, in its Notice and Memorandum,[24] contended that the NLRC Order of 5 October 1976 and that of the Labor Arbiter of 18 March 1976 are contrary to law and the facts of the case and, in support thereof, asserted that pursuant to the decision in G.R. Nos. L-23960-61, promulgated on 12 February 1972, this Court directed the remanding of the

case to the CIR only to ascertain the amounts of backwages due the union officers involved in accordance with the guidelines therein set forth, and to nobody else. In short, it is the position of FILTEX that this Court did not grant any award of backwages to the employees involved.

In his Order of 22 June 1977, Hon. Amado Inciong, then Acting Secretary of Labor, after quoting the dispositive portion of this Court's decision in G.R. Nos. L-23960-61, the last paragraph of which is underscored by him and hereby reiterated for emphasis:

"The record of this case is ordered remanded to the Court of Industrial Relations with instruction to ascertain the amount of backwages due to the union officers involved, in accordance with the guidelines hereinabove set forth. (Underscoring ours)"

and alluding to the CIR's Order of 9 October 1974, made the following findings:

"From the foregoing circumstances, it is crystal clear that the defunct Court of Industrial Relations acted with grave abuse of discretion amounting to lack of jurisdiction when it expanded the tenor of the Supreme Court Decision by including in the award of back wages those employees not contemplated in the said Supreme Court Decision. While it is conceded that the Order of reinstatement of all employees directed to be reinstated in the Decision of August 29, 1964 was within the jurisdictional competence of the CIR to pursue for the reason that this aspect of the Decision had already become final and executory, it was, however, bereft of any authority to grant back wages to employees other than those ordered by the Supreme Court to be reinstated with back wages. It is in this context, that we are setting aside the CIR decision of October 9, 1974."

and then resolved the appeals, thus:

"WHEREFORE, with the modification above indicated, the Resolution appealed from is affirmed. Accordingly, the CIR Decision of October 9, 1974 is hereby set aside, with respect the (sic) award of backwages to the members of the union and respondent is ordered to reinstate the officers of the union with backwages amounting to NINETY-NINE THOUSAND and TWENTY-SEVEN (P99,027.00) PESOS in accordance with the Commission's Resolution of October 5, 1976.

SO ORDERED."

On 11 August 1977, DIWA filed a special civil action for certiorari alleging therein, as principal ground therefor, that Acting Secretary Inciong "erred gravely as to amount to a deliberate disregard of law and jurisprudence and to want of jurisdiction" when, in his above Order, he set aside the award of backwages to the members of DIWA on the ground that it expanded the tenor of the abovementioned decision of this Court and failed to rule on the issue of backwages as regards the three (3) officers.

On 28 December 1977, FILTEX filed its Comment to the Petition[25] while the Office of the Solicitor General, as counsel for public respondents, filed its Comment on 4 February 1978.[26]

In its Comment, FILTEX contends that after the decision of this Court in G.R. Nos. L-23960-61 was promulgated, nothing more but that decision could be executed because as early as 1 August 1969, the reinstatement of the strikers-members of DIWA other than the officers and members found responsible for the strike had already been complied with; hence, the Acting Secretary of Labor was correct in holding that the CIR acted with grave abuse of discretion when it extended the tenor of the said decision.

The Office of the Solicitor General asserts that this Court, in G.R. Nos. L-23960-61, convinced that the employees affected had already been admitted back to work shortly thereafter, directed the payment of backwages and reinstatement only of the officers; hence, the CIR cannot extend its application to others.

On 24 February 1978, this Court considered the Comments as Answers and required the parties to file their respective Memoranda.

The principal issues raised are whether or not (a) the employees ordered reinstated by the CIR are entitled to backwages from the date the decision became final and until they were reinstated and (b) respondent Acting Secretary committed grave abuse of discretion in setting aside the CIR Order of 9 October 1974.

FILTEX and the public respondents maintain that since this Court, in the decision of 12 February 1972 in G.R. Nos. L-23960-61, did not award backwages for employees other than the officers of the union from the date they were refused admission, less whatever amounts they earned from other employment during the same period or which they would earn with the exercise of reasonable diligence, it goes without saying that all others ordered reinstated in the CIR decision of 23 November 1964 should not be granted backwages, there being no specific award therefor. The dispositive portion of the CIR decision reads:

"IN VIEW OF ALL THE FOREGOING ESTABLISHED FACTS, the Court hereby declares the strike, staged by the members of the Diwa ng Pagkakaisa against the Filtex International Corporation (formerly Yupangco Cotton Mills) as illegal, and likewise declares the termination of the status of those employees and workers of the company responsible therefor. All the rest shall be reinstated. Those who have pending criminal cases connected with, or, related to the deliberation of, or in carrying out the strike shall, in the meanwhile, in view thereof, be suspended."

As stated earlier, this Court, in the decision of 12 February 1972, found no reason to consider the stoppage of work on the night of 19 February 1961 as a strike and accordingly modified the decision appealed from by likewise ordering the reinstatement of the union officers.

It must be emphasized that DIWA did not include in its Appeal the reinstatement aspect of the CIR decision. Upon the other hand, FILTEX did not appeal therefrom. Accordingly, the matter of reinstatement became final after the lapse of ten (10) days from receipt of the decision by FILTEX. FILTEX admits in its Comment that "[a]s early as August 1, 1969, the reinstatement of the strikers-members of petitioner DIWA, other than officers and members found responsible for the strike, had already been complied with." [27]

Section 14 of Commonwealth Act No. 103, otherwise known as the Court of Industrial Relations Act, as amended by Commonwealth Act No. 559, which is the governing law in this case, provides:

"SECTION 14. Enforcement of Awards, Orders, and Decisions. At the expiration of ten days from the date of the award, order, or decision, in cases brought under the provisions of section four hereof, judgment shall be entered in accordance therewith, unless during said ten days an aggrieved party shall appeal therefrom to the Supreme Court of the Philippines by writ of certiorari as hereinafter provided. The institution of such an appeal shall not, however, stay the execution of the award, order, or decision sought to be reviewed, unless for special reasons the Court shall order that execution be stayed, in which event the Court, in its discretion, may require the appellant to deposit with the Clerk of the Court such amount of salaries or wages due the employees, laborers, tenants, or farm-laborers concerned under the award, order, or decision appealed from or require him to give bond in such form and of such amount as to insure compliance with the award, order, or decision in case the same is affirmed. The Court may also require the appellant to deposit with the Clerk of the Court every week, on a day therein to be fixed by the Court, an amount equivalent to the salaries or wages to be earned during the time of the appeal by the employees or laborers, or tenants or farm-laborers whose reinstatement in, or readmission to, their employment has been decreed by the Court. The failure to make such deposit shall vacate the order for stay of execution. When writs of execution are so issued the proceeds thereof shall be kept by the Clerk of the Court of Industrial Relations in his custody, pending decision of the appeal, to be disposed of in conformity with the final judgment of the

Supreme Court."

In accordance with the abovementioned statute, this Court, in *Rizal Cement Co. vs. Bautista, et al.*,^[28] held that an order of the CIR requiring the reinstatement of discharged employees following the company's receipt of the resolution denying its motion for reconsideration, became executory ten (10) days thereafter and backwages should be awarded to the employees to be reinstated effective the day following said tenth day:

"x x x As regards decisions of the Court of Industrial Relations, appeal from a judgment of the court shall not stay the execution of the award, order or decision sought to be reviewed, unless the court itself shall order said stay. In instant (sic) case, it did not do so. The company was notified of the resolution of the court en banc denying its motion for reconsideration, on March 16, 1955. The period of ten days for the appeal ended ten days thereafter, namely, March 26, 1955. The payment of back wages to Balignasay and Aponio should therefore start the day following, that is, on March 27, 1955, instead of July 14, 1954."

In *Government Service Insurance System vs. Olase, et al.*,^[29] this Court likewise ruled that where an employee is ordered reinstated, he shall be entitled to backwages from the day immediately following the tenth day provided for in the aforesaid Section 14 of C.A. No. 103, regardless of any appeal which the parties may interpose:

"Appellant's contention that because of the appeal taken by Pedro Olase (the employee) from the CIR decision there was no decision to be enforced pending said appeal, is against the express provision of Section 14 of Commonwealth Act 103.

x x x

Regardless, therefore, of the pendency of the appeals, taken both by GSIS (the employer) and Pedro Olase, the CIR decision became effective and self-executory on July 27, 1960, after the lapse of the ten-day period stated in the law."

This Court therefore rules that the reinstatement portion of the CIR decision of 29 August 1964 became final and executory ten (10) days following its promulgation. The employees concerned should have been reinstated as early as 9 September 1964. If reinstated at a later date, they will be entitled to backwages from 9 September 1964 until their actual reinstatement.

The foregoing does not, however, apply to those who remained suspended by virtue of a CIR declaration to that effect. Since this Court did not declare the work stoppage a strike, they should likewise be reinstated. However, their reinstatement would only be effective from the finality of this Court's decision in C.R. Nos. L-23960-61.

The CIR then acted correctly in issuing the Order of 9 October 1974.

The Acting Secretary of Labor committed grave abuse of discretion when he partially set aside, as abovestated, the CIR Order of 9 October 1974. Such abuse is attended with capriciousness considering that such Order had long become final as *FILTEX* did not appeal to the Secretary from the NLRC Resolution of 20 March 1975 denying its motion to reconsider it. What it subsequently appealed was the Labor Arbiter's Order of 30 September 1975 concerning the report of the examiner made pursuant to the 9 October 1974 Order principally on the ground of violation of due process.

As to the en banc Resolution of the NLRC of 5 October 1976, this Court is at a loss to find any acceptable justification for the arbitrary reduction by 30% of the computed backwages for the three (3) officers therein mentioned. Such reduction then was capriciously and whimsically imposed. Hence, the NLRC committed grave abuse of discretion.

WHEREFORE, the foregoing premises considered, this petition is hereby GRANTED. The assailed Order of

respondent Acting Secretary of Labor dated 22 June 1977 is SET ASIDE, and the Order of the CIR of 9 October 1974 is hereby REINSTATED. Furthermore, the Resolution of the NLRC of 5 October 1976 is AFFIRMED, subject to the foregoing modification. As modified, the reduction of the computed backwages of union officers Erlinda de Leon, Ismael Dionisio and Celso Santiago is SET ASIDE.

IT IS SO ORDERED.

Gutierrez, Jr., Feliciano, Bidin, and Romero, JJ., concur.

[1] Rollo, 352-356.

[2] Id., 131-138.

[3] Entitled Diwa ng Pagkakaisa-PAFLU, et al. vs. Filtex International Corp. (formerly Yupangco Cotton Mills, Inc.).

[4] Entitled Filtex International Corp. (formerly Yupangco Cotton Mills, Inc.) vs. Diwa ng Pagkakaisa-PAFLU, et al.

[5] Rollo, 16.

[6] 19 SCRA 1 (1967).

[7] Rollo, 75-76.

[8] Rollo, 115-120.

[9] Rollo, 119-120.

[10] Rollo, 122-124.

[11] Id., 131-138.

[12] Id., 139.

[13] Rollo, 140-141.

[14] Id., 143-144.

[15] Id., 150.

[16] Id., 152-159.

[17] Id., 160, et seq.

[18] Rollo, 152-159.

[19] Id., 196, et seq.

[20] Id., 228.

[21] Rollo, 230, et seq.

[22] Id., 306, et seq.

[23] Rollo, 310, et seq.

[24] *Id.*, 345, et seq.

[25] *Rollo*, 398, et seq.

[26] *Id.*, 428, et seq.

[27] *Rollo*, 404.

[28] 101 Phil. 1254.

[29] *Supra*.

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