

VALERIANO C. BUENO, PETITIONER-APPELLANT, VS. HON. JUDGE MONTANO ORTIZ, MACARIO C. CONDE AND PEDRO B. PATANAO, RESPONDENTS-APPELLEES. THE DIRECTOR OF FORESTRY AND THE DISTRICT F...

G.R. Nos. L-22978, L-24345 and L-24770. June 27, 1968

Ponente: CONCEPCION, C.J.

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CONCEPCION, C.J.:

These three (3) cases are interrelated.

In G.R. No. L-22978, Valeriano C. Bueno, seeks a writ of certiorari and prohibition, with preliminary pre-ventive and mandatory injunction, against Judge Montano Ortiz of the Court of First instance of Agusan, its Clerk of Court, Mariano C. Conde, and Pedro B. Patanao, to annul an order of attachment and garnishment issued, on February 7, 1964, in Special Civil Case No. 48 of said Court, en-titled "Pedro B. Patanao vs. Valeriano C. Bueno and Juanito Merin," as directed in an order of Judge Ortiz, dated February 5, 1964. After due hearing on the petition for a preliminary preventive and mandatory injunction and upon the filing of the requisite bond, on July 28, 1964, this Court issued a writ restraining the respondents, as well as their agents and representatives, from enforcing the afore-mentioned order of attachment and garnishment, as well as directing said respondents to set aside whatever attachment or garnishment they may have levied upon the properties of Bueno.

In G.R. No. L-24345, the Director of Forestry and the District Forester of Agusan apply for a writ of certiorari and prohibition, with preliminary injunction, against said Judge Ortiz, as well as against Jesus S. Ruiz, as Acting Judge of the Court of First Instance of Agusan, and Patanao, to annul another order, issued ex-parte in said Special Civil Case No. 48, on November 3, 1964, prohibiting and restraining the officials and employees of the Bureau of Forestry, and the Philippine Constabulary - hereinafter referred to as the PC - "from entering the areas subject of litigation x x x without previous authority" from said court, and to restrain and prohibit them from enforcing said order. Upon the filing of said petition, we issued the writ of preliminary injunction therein prayed for.

Upon the other hand, G.R. No. L-24770 is an original petition for certiorari and prohibition, with preliminary injunction, of the Director of Forestry and Bueno Industrial and Development Corporation - hereinafter referred to as Bueno's Corporation - to annul a "partial decision" in Special Civil Case No. 190 of the same Court of First Instance, entitled "Pedro B. Patanao vs. The Director of Forestry, the District Forester of Agusan, the Forest Officer of Bayugan, Agusan, the Secretary of Agriculture and Natural Resources and the Philippine Constabulary," in which judge Ruiz incorporated a "permanent preliminary injunction" against the PC, restraining and prohibiting the same from enforcing an order of the Director of Forestry "stopping all logging operations by Aquino and Patanao x x x for operating without license," and directing the PC to "release the impounded trucks and the confiscated logs x x x owned and belonging to x x x Patanao x x x." Upon the filing of said petition, we, likewise, issued the writ of preliminary injunction herein prayed for.

Pursuant to a decision of the Court of Appeals, dated January 24, 1962, in CA-GR No. 27271-R, which is final and executory, Patanao used to be the holder of two (2) ordinary timber licenses^[1] covering portions of the public forest located in Maygatasan, Verdu and Esperanza, Municipality of Bayugan, Province of Agusan. One of said licenses expired on June 30, 1955 and the other on June 30, 1957. On June 28, 1956, Patanao applied for the renewal of the first license; but, being in default in the payment of forest and reforestation charges, aggregating P54,147.42, he was given up to December 29, 1956, within which to pay this sum and advised that otherwise his application for renewal would be rejected without further notice.

On December 18, 1956, the District Forester of Agusan Vicente Marababol, notified Patanao that, upon advice from the then Director of Forestry, Felipe R. Amos, further operation of his (Patanao's) two (2) concessions would be "considered illegal and any production therefrom subject to surcharges," pursuant to the National Internal Revenue Code, and not exportable without Amos' prior approval, his (Patanao's) timber licenses not having been renewed. In reply, Patanao announced, however, that, in view of certain payments allegedly made on account of his debt, he would continue his logging operations. On January 22 and May 17, 1957, Marababol advised Patanao that, effective immediately, the government would impose a surcharge of 300% and that the forest area covered by the expired license would be disposed of.

On February 6, 1958, Amos notified Patanao that, before any action could be taken on his application for renewal, he should present a certificate, from the City Treasurer of Butuan, to the effect that he (Patanao) had no pending accounts for forest and reforestation charges, and that, unless notice to this effect was received not later than March 5, 1958 - which was subsequently extended for thirty days - said application for renewal would be rejected, without further notice. On March 6, 1958, Amos advised Patanao that owing to his failure to apply for a renewal of his second license, which expired on June 30, 1957, the area covered by it would be disposed of in accordance with law, if no notice was received from him on or before April 6, 1958.

On April 10, 1958, Patanao, accordingly, applied for the consolidation of his two (2) ordinary timber licenses, for a five-year term. Amos was seemingly in favor of a renewal for a term of one-year only, to expire on June 30, 1959; but, before he could forward the pertinent papers to the Secretary of Agriculture and Natural Resources, for the latter's approval, Bueno asked Amos to withhold action upon the ground that Patanao was not qualified to engage in logging operations; that his application for renewal had not complied with some requirements therefor, and that Patanao had committed certain specified irregularities.

As a consequence, Amos informed Marababol that he (Amos) had withheld action on Patanao's application for renewal and instructed Marababol to notify Patanao that further operations would be illegal. Marababol transmitted this information to Patanao and directed him to stop immediately his operations, the same being illegal. Patanao sought a reconsideration, and, subsequently, protested against the refusal of Marababol to clear his logs for export and the imposition of a 300% surcharge. The Office of the District Forester of Agusan replied stating that it was merely carrying out instructions and policies of the Bureau of Forestry. "Despite official advices to the contrary", Patanao "persisted in his logging operations in defiance of the order of Director Amos". [2] Moreover, on June 17, 1958, Patanao commenced Special Civil Case No. 50 of the Court of First Instance of Agusan, for injunction and damages, with preliminary injunction, against Amos and Marababol, including his assistant forester, Pedro B. Salvador.

Patanao alleged, in his petition, that he is the holder of a timber license, which had been renewed from year to year, and that Salvador had seized 70 pieces of logs cut by Patanao in the area covered by said license, allegedly upon orders of Amos and Marababol, upon the ground that his (Patanao's) application for renewal of license had not been approved and that he had not paid the surcharges imposed upon him. Patanao, prayed, therefore, that respondents therein be sentenced to pay damages, and restrained from interfering with his logging operations, and

from imposing surcharges upon him, as well as directed to release the aforementioned logs and to allow him to dispose of the logs cut in the forest area covered by his alleged ordinary timber license.

After appropriate proceedings, the Court of First Instance of Agusan rendered judgment for Patanao, prohibiting respondents therein from interfering with his logging operations, restraining them from imposing surcharges, ordering them to allow the transportation, sale and shipment of all logs cut under his timber license(?) and sentencing them to pay P25,000 by way of damages, in addition to the costs. On appeal taken by said respondents, this judgment was, on January 24, 1962, reversed by the Court of Appeals in CA-GR No. 27271-R, for the reason that Patanao "has no duly issued and valid timber license to operate in the areas in question from July 1, 1958 to June 30, 1959;" that he was delinquent in the payment of taxes and surcharges aggregating P163,066.46; that the writ of preliminary injunction issued by the lower court was "manifestly erroneous"; and that there was no justification, therefore, for the award of damages. The decision of the Court of Appeals became final and executory on March 28, 1962.

A little over a month prior to the institution of said Case No. 50, or on May 5, 1958, Patanao had instituted Special Civil Case No. 48 of the same Court of First Instance, against Bueno and one Juanito Merin, to recover damages resulting from their alleged illegal entry into the area covered by the timber license that he (Patanao) claimed to have and the cutting of logs therein by said respondents, as well as to restrain them from interfering with his logging operations within said area. In the course of said proceedings, the Clerk of Court of Agusan, Mariano C. Conde, had issued, on February 7, 1964, in compliance with an order of Judge Ortiz dated February 5, 1964, a "writ of attachment and garnishment," addressed to the Sheriff of Manila, directing him to "attach the estate, real and personal, of Bueno, x x x to the value" of Patanao's "demands" in said case "and costs of suit." Pursuant to said writ, the Sheriff of Manila attached and garnished properties of Bueno. Thereupon, [3] the latter filed Case CA-GR L-33604-R of the Court of Appeals, for a writ of certiorari and prohibition, with preliminary injunction, against Judge Ortiz, his Clerk of Court (Conde) and Patanao. After giving due course to the petition and issuing the writ of preliminary injunction therein prayed for, the Court of Appeals, dismissed the petition, [4] upon the ground that the amount involved therein is beyond its jurisdiction, and within that of the Supreme Court. The action thus taken by the Court of Appeals was sustained by us in L-22948.

Consequently, on May 28, 1964, Bueno filed, against the same respondents in CA-GR No. 33604-R, the petition in L-22978, for a writ of certiorari and prohibition, with preliminary injunction, to annul the aforementioned writ of attachment and garnishment in Case No. 48 and to restrain the enforcement thereof. Upon the filing of a P20,000 bond, we issued a writ of preliminary injunction and ordered the respondents to set aside such attachment or garnishment as may have been levied upon the properties of Bueno.

In a seeming effort to settle the conflict between Patanao and Bueno, the Director of Forestry sought to conduct a survey of the common boundary of the areas covered by their respective claims; but, on motion of Patanao, Judge Ruiz issued, on November 3, 1964, an order prohibiting the officials and employees of the Bureau of Forestry, including the Philippine Constabulary, "from entering the areas subject of litigation x x x without previous authority from" the Court of First Instance of Agusan. This order was, on motion for reconsideration filed by Bueno and Merin, sustained by Judge Ortiz.

Accordingly, on March 25, 1965, the Director of Forestry and the District Forester of Agusan instituted Case G.R. No. L-24345, for certiorari and prohibition, with preliminary injunction, against Judges Ortiz and Ruiz, as well as Patanao, to annul said order of November 3, 1964, and restrain its enforcement, alleging that said order is void for want of jurisdiction over the officials and employees of the Bureau of Forestry and the Philippine Constabulary, who are not parties in Case No. 48. Upon the filing of the petition in said Case, or on March 29, 1965, we issued the writ of preliminary injunction therein prayed for.

In the meantime, the issue raised by Patanao's application for renewal and the opposition thereto filed by Bueno had, on June 17, 1960, been decided by the Bureau of Forestry in favor of Patanao. On motion for reconsideration filed by Bueno, on June 27, 1960, the Bureau of Forestry, issued on October 11, 1960, an order suspending the effects of said decision, as well as the resolution of said motion, until certain criminal and civil cases pending against Patanao "are finally resolved by the corresponding authorities x x x."

On June 6, 1961, the Director of Forestry rendered another decision rejecting Patanao's application for renewal and declaring the areas covered by the same vacant, upon the ground that said cases were prima facie evidence of violations of the terms and conditions of his timber license. Later on, one of the criminal cases against Patanao was dismissed and he was acquitted in another criminal case. Moreover, the Bureau of Forestry found that two (2) civil cases against Patanao did not refer to the logging operations under his timber license. Hence, on October 3, 1963, the then Acting Director of Forestry, Estanislao Bernal, rendered a decision giving due course to Patanao's application for renewal, "upon satisfactory showing that all his accounts consisting of forest charges and surcharges and reforestation funds, if any, shall be first settled before the issuance of the corresponding licenses and that he possesses sufficient financial capabilities and adequate logging equipment." No new timber License was, however, issued to Patanao.

On March 3, 1964, the acting Director of Forestry, Apolonio Rivera, who had succeeded Director Bernal, issued an order holding in abeyance the execution of the latter's decision, "pending verification of the truth of the allegation that the area covered thereby had already been de-forested and had long been under cultivation." On May 31, 1965, the Director of Forestry ordered the District Forester of Agusan to stop all logging operations of Patanao because he was "operating without licenses", and "to secure PC assistance if necessary and prosecute criminally to make Patanao respect forestry authority." Upon being advised of this development, on or about June 3, 1965, Patanao instituted Special Civil Case No. 190 of the Court of First Instance of Agusan, against the Director of Forestry, the District Forester of Agusan, the Forest Officer of Bayugan, Agusan, the Secretary of Agriculture and Natural Resources and the PC, to prevent - first by a writ of preliminary injunction, and later by permanent injunction - the enforcement of the aforementioned instructions of the Director of Forestry, and to compel him to issue and release the renewed timber license applied for.

Alleging that the area claimed by Patanao overlaps over and encroaches upon the forested area covered by a timber license in favor of Bueno's Corporation, the latter filed on June 17, 1965, a motion to intervene in Said Case No. 190. It, likewise, moved to dismiss Patanao's complaint therein. Neither motion was, however, acted upon by the lower court.

Upon the other hand, on June 25, 1965, the Director of Forestry and the other respondents in Case No. 190 filed their opposition to the issuance of the writ of preliminary injunction sought by Patanao. Under date of July 2, 1965, said respondents in Case No. 190 filed their answer with affirmative defenses, reiterating, in effect, the allegations made in their aforementioned opposition to a preliminary injunction.

It appears that the day before, the Court of First Instance of Agusan, presided over by Judge Ruiz, had - on motion of Patanao, based upon the allegation that the PC had not as yet filed its answer, although it had been served with summons on June 7, 1965 - declared the PC in default and authorized Patanao to present his evidence against the PC on July 2, 1965, and the day following the presentation of said evidence, or on July 3, 1965, Judge Ruiz rendered a decision against the PC and issued against the same and "any person or persons acting in their x x behalf" a writ of "permanent preliminary injunction", restraining and prohibiting them from enforcing the aforementioned order of the Director of Forestry, dated May 31, 1965, and from stopping, delaying, molesting or disturbing Patanao's logging operations in the disputed area, as well as directing the PC, its officers and soldiers to release certain trucks and logs of Patanao that had been impounded and confiscated upon receipt of the order

afore-mentioned.

On July 6, 1965, the Provincial Commander of the PC in Agusan filed an Urgent Motion for Reconsideration of said decision. On July 21, 1965, the Director of Forestry and Bueno's Corporation commenced Case G.R. No. L-24770, for a writ of certiorari and prohibition, with preliminary injunction, against Patanao and Judge Ruiz, alleging that said partial decision of July 3, 1965, constituted a gross violation of the Rules of Court and of established prece-dents; that said motion for reconsideration of the PC had not as yet been acted upon; that the delay in its resolution "irretrievably and irreparably works damage and prejudice to the Government in terms of forest and reforestation charges unpaid and public forest denuded as a result of the unabated night and day logging done by Patanao x x x who holds no timber license" therefor and has defied the orders of the Director of Forestry directing him to stop his ille-gal logging operations; and that, in acting as he did, Judge Ruiz had acted without jurisdiction and/or with grave abuse of discretion.

On July 23, 1965, we issued the writ of preliminary injunction prayed for. Subsequently, respondents herein filed their answer, admitting some allegations of the peti-tion, denying other allegations thereof and setting up special and/or affirmative defenses, to which reference will presently be made.

The main issue in L-22978 is whether or not the lower court had committed a grave abuse of discretion in issuing a writ of attachment and garnishment against the properties of Bueno, to answer for the damages he had allegedly caused to Patanao by entering into the forest area covered by his alleged timber license and cutting logs therein. This is-sue must be resolved in the affirmative, for Patanao's alleged cause of action in Case No. 48 is anchored upon the claim that he had a timber license on said area, which he does not have, and it has been so declared by the Court of Appeals in its decision in CA-GR No. 27271-R, promulgated on January 24, 1962, which became final and executory on March 28, 1962. Although Bueno's Corporation was not a party in that case, Patanao was, and, hence, said decision is conclusive against him.

It is true that Patanao had had two (2) licenses, but the same had expired, one on June 30, 1955 and the other on June 30, 1957. Although he had applied for the renewal of said licenses, he never went beyond getting a ruling of The Director of Forestry[5] giving due course to his (Patanao's application for renewal, the consideration of which had bee held in abeyance owing to Patanao's delinquency in the payment of forests charges and surcharges, as well as reforestation charges. In any event, giving due course to his application for renewal is not tantamount to granting the same, for which the approval of the department head is necessary. Again, the due course given to his application for renewal was subject to a condition precedent - submission of proof of payment of his debt to the government - which had not been complied with.

Inasmuch as the facts before the court of first instance of Agusan showed that Patanao has no timber license, his lack of cause of action againts Bueno was apparent. Consequently, it committed a grave abuse of discretion, amounting to excess of jurisdiction, in issuing the writ of attachment and garnishment complained of in L-22978.

It is even more obvious that said court exceeded its jurisdiction in issuing the writ of preliminary injunction involved in L-24345, because the Bureau of Forestry and the PC, against which the writ was addressed, were not parties in said Case No. 48. Hence, the lower court had no jurisdiction over them.

As regards L-24770, it is urged that Bueno's Corpora-tion and the Director of Forestry have no personality or cause of action against the respondents therein, because the partial decision rendered in case No. 190 is directed against the PC, not the Director of Forestry, and because Bueno's Corporation is not a party in said case, his motion to intervene therein not having been granted or acted upon. Respondent's pretense is manifestly devoid of merit. The Director of Forestry was one of the defendants in Case No. 190 and, although partial decision rendered and the injunction issued by Judge Ruiz were directed against the PC, it sought to restrain the latter from

enforcing an order of said Director of Forestry.

Bueno was not a party in Case No. 190, because his motion to intervene therein was not resolved by Judge Ruiz, several months after it had been filed.

In their answer, respondents herein allege that there "is no showing that the area covered by the license (?) of respondent Patanao is applied for" by Bueno. Patanao has, however, no license as yet. In his own petition in Case No. 190, he prays that the Director of Forestry and the Secretary of Agriculture and Natural Resources "be ordered to act on and release petitioner's (Patanao) ordinary timber license". It is thus impliedly admitted that no license has, as yet, been issued in his favor.

Moreover, Bueno's Corporation alleged in its motion to intervene, and reiterated in the petition herein, that Patanao is and has been logging in the former's licensed forest area. Bueno can not possibly prove the truth of this allegation until after its motion to intervene has been granted or acted upon. Moreover, the existence of an actual conflict between Patanao and Bueno is attested to by Patanao's action for damages against Bueno in Case No. 48. At any rate, since the "permanent preliminary injunction" issued by Judge Ruiz runs counter to the license that Bueno claims to have, it is obvious that it has a right to seek in L-24770 a relief against the injury said injunction causes upon the corporation.

It is next urged that the petition in L-24770 is pre-mature because the PC's motion for reconsideration in Case No. 190 has not yet been acted upon. It should be noted, however, that the "permanent preliminary injunction" complained of is part - in fact, the main part - of the partial judgment complained of. This judgment partakes, therefore, of the nature of a writ of preliminary injunction and is effective immediately. Being forthwith injurious to public interest, represented here by the Director of Forestry, and to the interest that Bueno claims to have over the area in which Patanao is engaged in logging, and, considering the lower court's delay in acting on said motion for reconsideration, petitioners herein were fully justified in filing the present action without waiting for the resolution of the aforesaid motion.

In answer to the charge that respondent Judge had committed a grave abuse of discretion in rendering a default judgment against the PC, respondents allege that, not having filed its answer within the reglementary period, the PC was in default, so that it was proper for Patanao to forthwith present his evidence and for respondent Judge to render said judgment. It should be noted, however, that, in entering the area in question and seeking to prevent Patanao from continuing his logging operations therein, the PC was merely executing an order of the Director of Forestry and acting as his agent. Patanao's cause of action against the PC is, therefore, common with its cause of action against the other respondents in Case No. 190, namely, the Director of Forestry, the District Forester of Agusan, the Forest Officer of Bayugan, Agusan, and the Secretary of Agriculture and Natural Resources. Pursuant to Rule 18, Section 4, of the Rules of Court, "when a complaint states a common cause of action against several defendants some of whom answer and the other fail to do so, the court shall try the case against all upon the answer thus filed^[6] and render judgment upon the evidence presented." In other words, the answer filed by one or some of the defendants inures to the benefit of all the others, even those who have not seasonably filed their answer.

Indeed, since the petition in Case No. 190 sets forth a common cause of action against all of the respondents therein, a decision in favor of one of them would necessarily favor the others. In fact, the main issue, in said case, is whether Patanao has a timber license to undertake logging operations in the disputed area. It is not possible to decide such issue in the negative, insofar as the Director of Forestry, and to settle it otherwise, as regards the PC, which is merely acting as agent of the Director of Forestry and is, therefore, his alter ego, with respect to the disputed forest area.

Patanao says that the Director of Forestry, the District Forester, the Forest Officer of Bayugan, Agusan, and the Secretary of Agriculture and Natural Resources were, also, in default in Case No. 190, because their answer then in had been, similarly filed beyond the reglementary period. This is, however, an allegation which has not been so far substantiated. In fact, Patanao's motion of July 1, 1965, to declare the PC in default, suggests that the movant did not believe the other respondents to be in the same predicament.

In his answer to the petition herein, Patanao has annexed a carbon copy of a motion he claims to have filed in Case No. 190[7] to strike off the answer of said respondents therein, and to declare them in default. As of August 3, 1965, when Patanao's answer in the case at bar was filed, said alleged motion had not seemingly been granted or acted upon by Judge Ruiz. At any rate, when he rendered a partial judgment and issued a "permanent preliminary injunction" against the PC, there was no order declaring the other respondents in Case No. 190 in default.

The main question for determination in this case is whether respondent Judge had acted without jurisdiction and/or committed a grave abuse of discretion, amounting to excess of jurisdiction, in proceeding to hear Case No. 190 ex-parte on July 2, 1965, as regards the PC, and in rendering its partial judgment of July 3, 1965, permanently restraining and prohibiting the PC, its officers, soldiers and other persons acting on its behalf, from enforcing the order of the Director of Forestry of May 31, 1965, and directing the release of the trucks of Patanao and the logs cut by him, which had been respectively impounded and confiscated by the PC, upon receipt of said order.

We hold that the issue must be decided in the affirmative, because:

1. The order declaring the PC in default, as well as the subsequent hearing on the merits and the partial judgment against the PC contravenes the above-mentioned provision of the Rules of Court, concerning cases involving a common cause of action against several defendants;
2. It is patent from the petition in Case No. 190 and the partial judgment therein that the PC had acted as agent of the Director of Forestry;
3. It is apparent from said petition that Patanao has not as yet secured the requisite timber license, although he claimed to be entitled to one and, accordingly, sought to compel the respondents in Case No. 190 to issue said license;
4. The decision of the Director of Forestry dated October 31, 1963, on which Patanao relies, merely gives due course to his application for a license, and even this action is conditioned "upon satisfactory showing that all of his accounts consisting of forest charges and surcharges and reforestation funds, if any, shall first be settled x x x and that he possesses sufficient financial capabilities and adequate logging equipment," aside from the fact that there is no allegation or proof that this condition has been fulfilled;
5. On January 24, 1962, the Court of Appeals rendered in CA-G.R. No. 27271-R thereof, a decision, which is now final and executory, as well as binding and conclusive upon Patanao, declaring that his logging operations, after the expiration of his timber licenses, are illegal;
6. In L-24345, we issued, on March 28, 1965, a writ of preliminary injunction restraining respondents therein, including Patanao and Judge Ruiz, from enforcing an order of the Court of First instance of Agusan dated November 3, 1964, restraining the officers of the Bureau of Forestry and the PC from entering the forest area which was soon later involved in Case No. 190, and the "permanent preliminary injunction" therein issued by Judge Ruiz on July 3 1965, had the effect of nullifying our injunction in said Case L-24345.

WHEREFORE, the writ of attachment and garnishment issued in said Special Civil Case No. 48, of the Court of

First Instance of Agusan, on February 7, 1964, the writ of preliminary injunction issued in the same case, on November 3, 1964, and the partial decision, with a writ of "permanent preliminary injunction", rendered in the aforementioned Special Civil Case No. 190 of the same Court, on July 3, 1965, are hereby annulled, and our writs of preliminary injunction in L-22978, L-24345 and L-24770, accordingly, made permanent, with costs against respondent, Pedro B. Patanao.

IT IS SO ORDERED.

Reyes, Dizon, Makalintal, Zaldivar, Sanchez, Castro, Angeles and Fernando, JJ., concur.

[1] Nos. 1247-55 and 1750-57.

[2] Decision in CA-GR No. 27271-R.

[3] On February 20, 1964.

[4] On April 29, 1964.

[5] On October 3, 1963.

[6] By some.

[7] On or about July 11, 1965.

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