

ANDRES P. GOSECO, PETITIONER, VS. THE COURT OF INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS, ROMAN BELLEZA ET AL., RESPONDENTS.

G.R. No. 46673. September 13, 1939

Ponente: LAUREL, J.

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LAUREL, J.:

This is an original petition for certiorari to annul the order of the Court of Industrial Relations of February 28, 1939, on the ground that the same was issued when the respondent court was without power or jurisdiction to do so.

It appears that on August 27, 1937, the Secretary of Labor certified to the Court of Industrial Relations the dispute between Roman Belleza and 72 other tenants, on the one hand, and Martin Gonzales and Andres P. Goseco, owner and lessee, respectively, of the hacienda "El Prado", on the other, over the former's share in certain sugar-cane crops. After trial, the said court rendered a decision on December 28, 1937, with the following: dispositive part:

"The respondent Andres Goseco is hereby ordered and directed to pay his tenants for the 1937-1938 crop, and succeeding crops, a minimum of P1.70 per ton of cane for new plant and for the ratoon crop the sum of P1 per ton if the tenant had actually cultivated the same, without charging his tenants with the cost of fertilizer."

The parties were notified of the decision on January 18, 1938, and on February 11, 1938, counsel for the tenants put in a motion for the reconsideration thereof. This motion was by the court set for trial on February 28, 1938, but on February 24, 1938, counsel for the said owner and lessee petitioned to postpone the trial to March 3, 1938, and the tenants having signified their conformity to the postponement, the court granted the same. On March 10, 1938, counsel for the owner and lessee filed an opposition to the tenants' motion for reconsideration, wherein it was prayed that the latter be denied. The said motion for reconsideration having come up for hearing, at which both parties adduced evidence and arguments, the court entered the questioned order on February 28, 1939, amending its decision of December 28, 1937, and concluding as follows:

"After weighing all the facts on hand, the evidence on record and the arguments of the parties, the court believes and so holds, that the price of P1.50 is a fair and reasonable value of the labor of the tenant in producing one ton of ratoon cane. In the interests of justice and to afford to the tenants an equitable share in the product of their labor, the decision rendered in this case is hereby amended accordingly and the respondent Andres Goseco is hereby ordered and directed to liquidate the ratoon crop of the petitioners for the crop year 1938-1939, at the rate of P1.50 per ton."

On March 10, 1939, counsel for the owner and lessee put in an exception to and motion to reconsider the said order of February 28, 1939, wherein, for the first time, they questioned the jurisdiction of the respondent court "to reconsider its decision of December 28, 1937, copy of which was furnished the petitioners (now respondents) on January 20, 1938, because the period of ten days had elapsed and the parties concerned did not ask for the reconsideration of said decision; nor did they appeal, through certiorari, to the Supreme Court of the Philippines."

This motion for reconsideration was denied by the respondent court, with the following observation on the question of jurisdiction:

"A copy of the decision rendered in this case on December 28, 1937, was received by the attorney for the petitioners on January 20, 1938. The motion for reconsideration was filed only on February 14, 1938, or after the decision had become final. An answer to the aforesaid motion for reconsideration was filed by the respondent on March 10, 1938, but no objection to its consideration for late filing was made. It is just now that the issue is raised. In view of the substantial merits of the case and in the interest of justice and equity, we are inclined to disregard in the present instance in favor of the laborers the application of the rigid rules of procedure and to declare, as we hereby do, without merit the second ground of the motion."

Hence, this original petition for certiorari instituted alone by Andres P. Goseco, lessee of the hacienda "El Prado". Against his principal contention that the order of February 28, 1939, was issued in excess or in abuse of jurisdiction, the respondent Court of Industrial Relations, through counsel, answered alleging (a) that it is a court of equity and justice and as such is by law authorized, during the effectiveness of an award, order or decision, to alter or modify the same in accordance with the procedure marked out by law, which was complied with in this case, and (b) that as the petitioner himself had filed various petitions for affirmative relief with the respondent court, after the latter's decision of December 28, 1937, had allegedly become final, he cannot now be heard to question the jurisdiction of said court to amend that decision. The respondent Roman Belleza and others, in their, separate answer to the petition, made common cause with the respondent court and contended further that there is a nonjoinder of parties, the owner of the hacienda "El Prado", Martin Gonzales, or his intestate, not having been included as petitioner.

In support of the petition, reliance is placed upon section 14 of Commonwealth Act No. 103, reading as follows:

"Finality of Award.—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 Supreme Court in its discretion, may, in any case involving a question of law, upon petition of the party aggrieved by the decision of the Court of Industrial Relations and under rules and conditions that it may prescribe, require by certiorari that said case be certified to it for review and determination."

The petitioner argues that thereunder "the decision or the Court of Industrial Relations dated December 28, 1937, copy of which was received by the respondents Roman Belleza, et al., on January 20, 1938, had become final and definite after 5 (10) days from the date when the attorneys for the respondents received copy, in other words on January 25, 1938," and "that the Court of Industrial Relations has exceeded its jurisdiction, therefore, in acting upon the motion for reconsideration of the attorneys of the respondents Roman Belleza, et al., dated February 13, 1938, and in reconsidering its decision (that) had become final and executory after 5 (10) days in accordance with Commonwealth Act No. 103." (Pars. 9 and 10 of the petition.)

The narrow construction suggested by the petitioner is perhaps justified if we adopt but a fragmentary view of the law. The petitioner's contention completely puts out of consideration the express proviso of section 17 of the said Act—" * * * That at any time during the effectiveness of an award, order or decision, the court may, on application of an interested party, and after due hearing, alter, modify in whole or in part, or set aside any such award, order or decision, or reopen any question involved therein." If the respondent court may, at any time, alter, modify or set aside an award, order or decision, then the reconsideration of its decision of December 28, 1937, upon application, in the form of a motion for reconsideration filed by the respondents Roman Belleza and others, and after due hearing, was in compliance almost to the letter with the proviso just quoted. It would appear idle, therefore, to contend that in so doing, the respondent court overstepped its jurisdiction. Upon the other hand,

section 7 of the same Act empowers the Court of Industrial Relations "* * * to conduct hearing in any place for the determination of a question, matter or controversy within its jurisdiction, * * * correct, amend or waive any error, defect or irregularity, whether in substance or in form; extend any prescribed time; give all such directions as it may deem necessary or expedient in the determination of the dispute before it; * * *." It would seem that the act of the respondent court in entertaining a motion allegedly filed outside of the statutory period, is consistent with, if not indeed tantamount to, its power thus expressly granted to "extend any prescribe time." And from section 18 of the Act, providing that "Whenever a doubt shall arise as to the meaning or interpretation of an award, order or decision of the Court of Industrial Relations, any interested party may petition the court to determine such meaning or interpretation and the court, upon receiving such petition, shall set a date for the hearing of the case and shall dispose of the same as soon as practicable"—follows the valid inference that, since no time is fixed within which the said court may clarify or unravel the meaning or interpretation of an award, order or decision, it may do so at any time, thus inducing the further conclusion that no such award, order or decision is meant to be definitive in the sense that it is beyond recall.

Commonwealth Act No. 103 has for its major and salutary objective the settlement of disputes, between employers and employees, between landlords and tenants. Justice, equity and the substantial merits of their cases are the keynote and controlling considerations of the law. Thus, by its section 13, it is provided that "In making an award, order or decision, under the provisions of section four of this Act, the court shall not be restricted to the specific relief claimed or demands made by the parties to the industrial or agricultural dispute, but may include in the award, order or decision any matter or determination which may be deemed necessary or expedient for the purpose of settling the dispute or of preventing further industrial or agricultural disputes." By its section 20, it goes on to provide that "The Court of Industrial Relations shall adopt its rules of procedure and shall have such other powers as generally pertain to a court of justice: Provided, however, That in the hearing, investigation and determination of any question or controversy and in exercising any duties and power under this Act, the court shall act according to justice and equity and substantial merits of the case, without regard to technicalities or legal forms and shall not be bound by any technical rules or legal evidence but may inform its mind in such manner as it may deem just and equitable." It is clear that the law has placed and expressed solicitude for the greater interests of justice, equity and the substantial merits of the cases of the disputants in cases of this nature.

It is in this obvious spirit of the law that the respondent court denied the petitioner's motion for reconsideration assailing its jurisdiction, in the following words: "In view of the substantial merits of the case and in the interest of justice and equity, we are inclined to disregard in the present instance in favor of the laborers the application of the rigid rules of procedure and to declare, as we hereby do, without merit the second ground of the motion." It is in this identical spirit that it concluded the appealed order with the statement: "In the interests of justice and to afford to the tenants an equitable share in the product of their labor, the decision rendered in this case is hereby amended accordingly and the respondent Andres Goseco is hereby ordered and directed to liquidate the ratoon crop of the petitioners from the crop year 1938-1939, at the rate of P1.50 per ton." To rule, therefore, that the decision of the respondent court of December 28, 1937, attained finality ten days after its rendition in the sense that it became immune from further and subsequent revision or amendment, and that the respondent court, in so amending what it thought was not reflective of justice and equity, went beyond the bounds of its jurisdiction, is to uproot the very purpose of the law and to countenance the very mischief which it seeks to avoid, namely, the subjection of the respondent court to the technicalities of procedure. This is one of the cases where this court, by self-imposed limitation, should decline to override the judgment of the Court of Industrial Relations.

The petition for certiorari is denied, with costs against the petitioner. So ordered.

Avanceña, C. J., Villa-Real, Imperial, Diaz, Concepcion, and Moran, JJ., concur.

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