

IN THE TRADE DISPUTES PANEL)
OF SOLOMON ISLANDS.)

Case No. L9/15 of 1995

IN THE MATTER of the Trade
Disputes Act 1981

AND IN THE MATTER of a referral
of a trade dispute.

BETWEEN: SOLOMON ISLANDS NATIONAL
UNION OF WORKERS
Applicant (Union)

AND: RUSSELL ISLANDS PLANTATIONS
ESTATES LIMITED.
Respondent

Enquiry: 11th of August 1995, Honiara.

Award: 11th of August 1995.

Panel: A. N. Tongarutu - Chairman
J. Korinhona - Employer Member
D. Bale - Employee Member

Appearances: J. Ilifanoa, Legal Officer, for the Applicant.
P. Hane, for the Respondent.

FINDINGS

On the 19th of June 1995 the applicant (hereinafter referred to as the union) referred a trade dispute to the Panel between itself representing its members who are employees of the respondent company (hereinafter referred to as the employer) pursuant to section 4(1) of the Trade Disputes Act 1981. The issues in dispute are as follows:

- " 1. Whether or not the targets (daily) for copra cutters and cocoa harvesters be increased by a further five and six kilograms respectively.
2. Whether or not the daily targets, if increased could reasonably be met by the employees concerned.
3. Whether or not it is fair and reasonable to expect the employees concerned to increase the daily targets given the current agreed targets expected of the employees."

The crux of this case hinges on the employer's plan to increase the harvesting targets for coconut and cocoa and the employees refusal to accept the increase. The daily targets for individual copra cutters is 275 kg per day irrespective of group assistance. This amounts to 540 nuts . A 5 kg increase would mean an increase of about 10 nuts. A cutter is usually assisted by nut collectors who work 8 hours daily. Now, 108 collectors are engaged to reduce

a cutters job. This programme has been implemented since 1990. With this assistance it is possible to achieve the increased target. A bonus is paid on excess of the target at 70% per kilogram and most of the cutters are in the bonus bracket. The copra assessment sheet submitted and related documents showed that more than 90% of the copra and cocoa harvesters exceed the normal target and are paid accordingly. The difference on the target is based on the area of cutting. Some copra cutters are usually assisted by their family members . The problem encountered by those who fail to meet the target is because they leave the plantations early before achieving the target. It was argued for the employer that the financial situation of the country has made this increase a necessity for the company, otherwise it will experience a substantial loss and will not be able to take care of the 6% wage increase requested by the employees.

The union's argument is that some of the employees are not able to meet the present target of 275 kg per day because being human they have their limitations. They are not machines and most individual copra cutters cannot meet the individual target and an increase on the current target will be unfair on them. The excess as recorded in the document submitted by the respondent could only be achieved by the individual cutter with his family.

This is a simple and clearcut case. With the assistance of documents submitted by the company's representative the Panel has no doubt in its mind that the employees argument has no sound basis. The majority of the employees according to the records shown were able to achieve the target let alone the bonus. Apart from this the cutters are assisted by collectors and an increase of 10 nuts seems insignificant. It is far more plausible in view of the financial situation of the respondent for the employees to settle for the 6% wage increase rather than wasting their time arguing about meeting targets. The Panel is convinced that the increase is reasonable and fair and is achievable by the employees.

Award

That it is fair and reasonable for the daily target for copra cutters and cocoa harvesters to be increased by five (5)kg and six (6)kg respectively and that this daily targets can reasonably be achieved by the employees.

Panel Expenses

That the Panel requires the respondent to pay \$100.00 and the applicant \$30.00 towards panel expenses to be paid to the Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs within fourteen days of receipt of this Findings.

On behalf of the Panel

A. N. Tongarutu

CHAIRMAN/TRADE DISPUTES PANEL