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[PART 1

COURT OF APPEAL.

May 16, 17, 20, 1957.

BROWN, JENKINSON & CO., LTD. v.
PERCY DALTON (LONDON), LTD.

Before Lord EVERSHED (Master of the
Rolls), Lord Justice MORRIS and Lord
Justice PEARCE.

Bill of lading—Shipment “in apparent good order and condition” — Cargo admittedly shipped in damaged condition—Issue of clean bill against shippers’ letter of indemnity — Enforceability — Illegality — Commercial practice.

Sale of barrels of orange juice by defendants to Dutch firm—Resale by buyers to German firm—Consignment shipped by defendants in motor vessel *Titania* from London to Hamburg — Shippers, shipowners and Dutch buyers aware that barrels were old, frail and leaking on shipment—Acknowledgment by shipowners in bill of lading that goods were received “in apparent good order and condition,” such bill being issued against shippers’ letter of indemnity admitting the condition of the goods and providing (*inter alia*):

We [the shippers] do hereby irrevocably authorize the said master, vessel, the owners and their representatives, in the event of third parties bringing forward any claims against them, to make any arrangements with said parties for our account, which said master, shipowners or representatives may deem advisable.

Shipowners estopped to deny damaged condition of shipment—Claim brought by consignees for loss in transit paid by shipowners’ agents (plaintiffs)—Claim by plaintiffs to be indemnified by defendants under letter of indemnity — Plea by defendants (1) that letter was issued in pursuance of a conspiracy between themselves and shipowners to misrepresent the condition of the barrels and therefore was

unenforceable; and (2) that Dutch buyers, being aware of the true condition of the barrels on shipment, had no right of recovery against plaintiffs based on the issue of a clean bill of lading, and accordingly that there was no obligation on plaintiffs to settle the claim made by the consignees—Evidence of commercial practice concerning the issue of letters of indemnity.

—*Held*, by His Honour Judge L. K. A. Block, (1) that although the parties had conspired to make a false statement on the bill of lading, the tort of deceit was not complete as neither of the parties had sustained any loss as a result of such conspiracy; and that accordingly the indemnity was not illegal and was enforceable against defendants; (2) that plaintiffs had full authority to settle and were in the circumstances justified in meeting a claim which on the bill of lading was almost unanswerable, and that accordingly they were entitled to reimbursement by defendants under their letter of indemnity.

—Appeal by defendants.

—*Held*, by C.A. (MORRIS and PEARCE, L.J.J., Lord EVERSHED, M.R., *dissenting*), that plaintiffs made a representation which they knew to be false and which they intended should be relied upon by persons who received the bill of lading; that, accordingly, all the elements of the tort of deceit were present; and that, therefore, a promise to indemnify plaintiffs against any loss resulting to them from making the representation was unenforceable.

—Appeal by defendants allowed.

Per MORRIS, L.J. (at p. 9): There may perhaps be some circumstances in which indemnities can properly be given. . . . Each case must depend upon its circumstances. But even if it could be shown that there existed to any extent a practice of knowingly issuing clean bills when clausured bills should have been issued, no validating effect for any particular transaction could in consequence result.

Per PEARCE, L.J. (at p. 13): In the last 20 years it has become customary, in the short-sea trade in particular, for

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[C.A.]

shipowners to give a clean bill of lading against an indemnity from the shippers in certain cases where there is a *bona fide* dispute as to the condition or packing of the goods. . . .

This practice is convenient where it is used with conscience and circumspection, but it has perils if it is used with laxity and recklessness. It is not enough that the banks or the purchasers who have been misled by clean bills of lading may have recourse at law against the shipowner. They are intending to buy goods, not law suits. . . .

The evidence seemed to show that in general the practice is kept within reasonable limits. In trivial matters and in cases of *bona fide* dispute where the difficulty of ascertaining the correct state of affairs is out of proportion to its importance, no doubt the practice is useful.

Per Lord EVERSHED, M.R. (*dissenting*) (at p. 18): I am not satisfied that we in this Court should hold that the contract of indemnity made between plaintiffs and defendants was a bargain involving, as the plaintiffs knew and intended or should be taken to have known and intended, a fraudulent misrepresentation on the defendants' part and therefore is a contract unenforceable by the plaintiffs. Thoughtless, misguided and irresponsible the plaintiffs may have been; but I am not satisfied on my part, on the evidence and what I take to have been the views of the learned Judge, that it would be just for this Court to condemn them as fraudulent and dishonest.

But even if we should conclude that the representation was made with such recklessness as to amount, in law, to the same thing as a representation made with the deliberate intention of deceiving, still I am not satisfied that it would be right to hold, or that any authority compels us to hold, that the proved circumstances were such that it would be contrary to public policy, *contra bonos mores*, to allow the plaintiffs to recover upon the contract of indemnity from the defendants.

The following cases were referred to:

- Alexander v. Rayson, [1936] 1 K.B. 169;
 Berg v. Sadler and Moore, [1937] 2 K.B. 158;
 Boissevain v. Weil, (C.A.) [1949] 1 All E.R. 146; (H.L.) [1950] 1 All E.R. 728;
 Brandt and Another v. Liverpool, Brazil and River Plate Steam Navigation Company, Ltd., [1924] 1 K.B. 575; (1923) 17 Ll.L.Rep. 142;
 Compania Naviera Vasconzada v. Churchill & Sim, [1906] 1 K.B. 237;

Crofter Hand Woven Harris Tweed Company, Ltd., and Others v. Veitch and Another, [1942] A.C. 435;

Dent and Others v. Glen Line, Ltd., (1940) 67 Ll.L.Rep. 72;

Holman v. Johnson, (1775) 1 Cowp. 341;

Pearce and Another v. Brooks, (1866) L.R. 1 Ex. 213;

Scott v. Brown, Doering, McNab & Co., [1892] 2 Q.B. 724;

Shackell v. Rosier, (1836) 2 Bing. (N.C.) 634;

Silver v. Ocean Steamship Company, Ltd., [1930] 1 K.B. 416; (1929) 35 Ll.L.Rep. 49;

United Baltic Corporation, Ltd. v. Dundee, Perth & London Shipping Company, Ltd., (1928) 32 Ll.L.Rep. 272.

This was an appeal by defendants, Percy Dalton (London), Ltd., importers and exporters, of London, E., from a judgment of his Honour Judge L. K. A. Block ([1957] 1 Lloyd's Rep. 31), in the Mayor's and City of London Court, awarding £147 to plaintiffs, Brown, Jenkinson & Co., Ltd., shipbrokers, of London, E.C., upon their claim to enforce a letter of indemnity given by defendants concerning a cargo of 100 barrels of concentrated orange juice shipped at London on Apr. 4, 1956, on board the German motor vessel *Titania* for carriage to Hamburg. The consignment was shipped for a firm known as VIPA Internationale Handelsonderneming, of Rotterdam, and the *Titania*, which was owned by the Hamburg-London Linie, for whom plaintiffs were agents, was nominated to take the consignment. When the cargo was being shipped, it was noticed that the barrels were old and that some were leaking, and Brown, Jenkinson & Co. indicated that they would have to clause the bill of lading accordingly, but they agreed not to do so in exchange for a letter of indemnity. The receivers of the cargo were a Hamburg firm to whom it had been sold by VIPA. When delivery was effected, leakage was found to have occurred and a claim was made against the underwriters, and eventually the shipowners paid an equivalent of 1542 Dutch guilders.

Plaintiffs pleaded that the barrels were in an old and/or frail and/or leaky condition, but in consideration for the issue notwithstanding of a clean bill of lading defendants agreed (*inter alia*) to indemnify the shipowners against the consequences of a clean bill of lading

having been so issued. The condition of the barrels resulted in short delivery. In consequence of the clean bill of lading having been issued, the shipowners had to pay compensation to the receivers of the orange juice, and/or to the underwriters subrogated to their rights in respect thereof, amounting to £147.

Plaintiffs said that the shipowners had deemed it advisable in all the circumstances to pay such compensation as they were expressly authorized by the defendants under their letter of indemnity so to do; and the shipowners had by agreement assigned the benefit of the indemnity and the right to enforce it to the plaintiffs.

The defendants' case was that the letter of indemnity was given by them in pursuance of a conspiracy between themselves and the shipowners (by their agents the plaintiffs) or by the master of the ship to misrepresent the condition of the barrels to any subsequent holder of the bills of lading. They further said that their promise to indemnify the shipowners was given in consideration of the shipowners fraudulently misrepresenting the condition of the goods and that in the circumstances the indemnity was part of a contract which was illegal and/or contrary to public policy. The defendants also said that the purpose of the indemnity, as the shipowners well knew, was that the shipowners should fraudulently misrepresent the condition of the barrels and that the contract of indemnity thereby became tainted with illegality and/or was contrary to public policy. Further, defendants said that the purchasers of the orange juice, viz., VIPA Internationale Handelsgesellschaft, at all material times well knew of the true conditions of the barrels and had expressly requested the defendants to ensure that the goods should be delivered under a clean bill of lading, as otherwise VIPA were unable to obtain the necessary finance for the purchase. As these facts were known by the shipowners and/or by their agents, the plaintiffs, before the payment of compensation, the underwriters were not entitled to receive compensation, being in no better position than VIPA.

By their reply, plaintiffs pointed out that the receivers who took delivery under the bills of lading were Julius Mertens, of Hamburg. They also contended that such letters of indemnity were valid and/or so recognized by persons engaged in the trade or business of shipping cargoes.

His Honour held that the indemnity was enforceable against defendants, who now appealed, it being contended that as the consideration for the giving of the indemnity was illegal the indemnity could not be enforced, and that the issuing of bills of lading known to be false was contrary to public policy.

Mr. T. G. Roche, Q.C., and Mr. Michael Eastham (instructed by Messrs. Carters) appeared for appellants; Mr. Eustace Roskill, Q.C., and Mr. B. J. Brooke-Smith (instructed by Messrs. William A. Crump & Son) represented respondents.

After arguments which are sufficiently set out in their Lordships' judgments below, judgment was reserved.

Wednesday, July 3, 1957.

JUDGMENT.

Lord EVERSHED, M.R.: I will ask Lord Justice Morris to deliver the first judgment.

Lord Justice MORRIS: The question which is raised in this appeal is whether on the facts of this particular case an agreement to indemnify against the consequences of issuing a clean bill of lading is enforceable. The case is one in which the issuing of a clean bill of lading was not justified having regard to the condition of the goods which were shipped.

The plaintiffs act as loading brokers and chartering agents for certain shipping lines, including the Hamburg-London Line. The defendants had some barrels of concentrated orange juice which they wished to ship to Hamburg on the motor vessel *Titania*, one of the ships of that line. They communicated with the plaintiffs, and, following a telephone conversation, they wrote to plaintiffs on Mar. 28, 1956. The material parts of that letter are as follows:

We would confirm our telephone conversation of to-day and detail hereunder specification and our requirements:—

1. Consignment: 100 barrels concentrated orange juice—marked "V."