TAB 8

2009 CanLII 39771 (ON SC)

COURT FILE NO.: CV-08-7672-00CL
DATE: 20090727

SUPERIOR COURT OF JUSTICE – ONTARIO
(COMMERCIAL LIST)

RE: IN THE MATTER OF THE *COMPANIES' CREDITORS ARRANGEMENT ACT*, R.S.C., c. C-36, AS AMENDED

AND IN THE MATTER OF A PLAN OF COMPROMISE OR ARRANGEMENT OF WINDSOR MACHINE & STAMPING LIMITED, LIPEL INVESTMENTS LTD., WMSL HOLDINGS LTD., 442260 ONTARIO LTD., WINMACH CANADA LTD., PRODUCTION MACHINE SERVICES LTD., 538185 ONTARIO LTD., SOUTHERN WIRE PRODUCTS LIMITED, PELLUS MANUFACTURING LTD., TILBURY ASSEMBLY LTD., ST. CLAIR FORMS INC., CENTROY ASSEMBLY LTD., PIONEER POLYMERS INC., G&R COLD FORGING INC., WINDSOR MACHINE DE MEXICO, WINMACH INC., WINDSOR MACHINE PRODUCTS, INC. WAYNE MANUFACTURING INC. AND 383301 ONTARIO LIMITED

Applicants

BEFORE: MORAWETZ J.

COUNSEL: Andrew Hatnay & Andrea McKinnon, for United Auto Workers Local 251

Daniel Dowdall & Jane Dietrich, for Bank of Montreal

Joseph Marin, for the Applicants

Tony Reyes, for RSM Richter Inc., Monitor

Raong Phalavong, for Saginaw Pattern

HEARD: MARCH 6 and 10, 2009

ENDORSEMENT

2009 CanLII 39771 (ON SC)

INTRODUCTION

[1] International Union, United Automobile Aerospace & Agricultural Implement Workers of America ("United Auto Workers, Local 251" or the "Union") bring this motion for an order requiring the Applicants to pay termination and severance pay that is due and owing to the unionized employees of Tilbury Assembly Ltd. ("Tilbury") and Pellus Manufacturing Limited ("Pellus") under the *Employment Standards Act*, 2000 ("ESA") as result of terminations that occurred subsequent to the filing of proceedings by the Applicants under the *Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act* ("CCAA").

[2] The motion was opposed by Bank of Montreal (the "Bank"), the secured creditor of the Applicants and by the Applicants.

[3] The amount owing to the Tilbury employees for termination pay is approximately $23,000 and the amount owing for severance pay is approximately $216,000. These amounts are not in dispute.

[4] The amount claimed to be owing to the Pellus employees (assuming that the employees were terminated on February 20, 2009) is approximately $132,000 and the amount claimed to be owing for severance pay as of that date is approximately $326,000. This amount is disputed by Pellus.

[5] The Union submits that the Applicants should be required to pay the termination pay and severance pay owing to the Tilbury and Pellus employees for the following reasons:

(a) The ESA sets out a comprehensive code that requires an employer who terminates an employee to give the employee prior notice of termination, or if such notice is not given, pay in lieu of notice (commonly referred to as "termination pay"). The ESA also requires that an additional amount (referred to as "severance pay") be paid to certain long service employees if criteria in the ESA are met.

(b) The Amended and Restated Initial CCAA Order and the consent orders issued by this Court dated October 29, 2008, do not authorize the company to avoid paying termination pay and severance pay. The October 29, 2008 consent orders state that "the *Employment Standards Act, 2000* continues to apply".

(c) Section 5 of the ESA expressly states that no employer can contract out or waive an employment standard in the ESA and that any such contracting out or waiver is void.

(d) The Supreme Court of Canada has held that federally regulated bankruptcy and insolvency proceedings cannot be used to subvert provincially regulated property and civil rights, as long as the doctrine of paramountcy is not triggered. In the

absence of paramountcy, a provincial law such as the ESA continues to apply in insolvency proceedings.

(e) For the Tilbury and Pellus employees who continued to work for the Company after it went into CCAA protection and who were subsequently terminated, the payment of termination pay and severance pay is an ordinary course payment by the Company. It is to be paid the same way wages, benefits and other aspects of employee compensation are paid.

(f) The payment of termination pay and severance pay in a CCAA proceeding is not a re-ordering of priorities among creditors nor is it giving a higher rank to unsecured employee creditors. Termination pay and severance pay that arises on the termination of employees post-CCAA filing is not pre-filing debt. It is an ordinary course payment.

(g) The payment of termination pay and severance pay in the case at bar is within the reasonable expectations of the parties because:

(i) Company management represented to the Union employees from the outset of the CCAA proceedings that it would continue to pay all contractual amounts due to employees who worked during the CCAA proceedings, which would include amounts for termination pay and severance pay; and

(ii) The Company, the Bank and the Monitor consented to the terms of court orders that expressly state that the "*Employment Standards Act 2000* continues to apply".

(h) The employees have no recourse to be compensated for the unpaid termination pay and severance pay. There will be no Plan of Compromise.

(i) The *Wage Earner Protection Plan* (WEPP) is not available to the employees because the Company is in CCAA proceedings and the WEPP is only available to terminated employees if their employer is a bankrupt or in receivership.

(j) The amount of termination pay and severance pay owing is relatively low.

(k) The Company has the cash to pay the termination pay and severance pay that is owing.

(l) The payment of termination pay and severance pay will not jeopardize the Company's restructuring which is to be a Proposed Transaction involving a purchase of the company by its controlling shareholders.

(m) The Company has not drawn on the DIP Facility throughout the CCAA proceedings.

2009 CanLII 39771 (ON SC)

(n) The Company should not be able to use the CCAA to avoid its employee termination pay and severance pay obligations under the ESA.

(Note: In the excerpt from the factum, counsel to the Union references "Applicants", and the "Company". Hereafter, the collective reference is to "Applicants".)

2009 CanLII 39771 (ON SC)

[6] The Bank submits that the Union's motion for the payment of termination and severance claims should be dismissed because:

(a) the termination and severance claims are unsecured obligations of Tilbury and Pellus which are not afforded any priority under the Amended and Restated Initial Order, or any other orders that have been made in the CCAA proceeding, and are therefore unsecured claims subordinate to the claims of the Bank as a secured creditor. Any amount paid in respect of the termination and severance claims is a direct deduction from recoveries for the secured creditors; and

(b) the provisions of the Amended and Restated Initial Order granted by this Court on September 2, 2009 (the "Amended and Restated Initial Order") do not permit the Applicants to pay termination and severance claims at this time.

[7] The Applicants submit that the Union's motion should be dismissed because:

(a) the provisions of the Amended and Restated Initial Order do not permit the Applicants to pay the termination and severance claims in the circumstances in which the Union is seeking such payment;

(b) the Union has not sought to amend the Amended and Restated Initial Order at any time during these proceedings to require the Applicants to pay the termination and severance claims; and

(c) the effect of granting the relief to the Union would be to accord termination and severance claims a special status over the claims of other unsecured creditors of the Applicants and would result in the payment of such claims in priority to the claims of the Applicants' secured creditors.

FACTS

[8] The Union represents employees at four facilities of the Applicants: Tilbury, Pellus, G&R Cold Forging Inc. and Pioneer Polymers Inc. The Union represents approximately 180 employees out of the total workforce of 300 employees.

[9] On August 1, 2008, Windsor Machine & Stamping Ltd. ("WMSL"), 538185 Ontario Ltd. (Pellus Tool), Pellus, Tilbury, G&R Cold Forging Inc. and 383301 Ontario Limited (the "BIA Proposal Proponents") each filed a notice of intention ("NOI") to make a proposal pursuant to s. 50.4(1) of the *Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act* ("BIA").

[10] On August 6, 2008, the Applicants (including the BIA Proposal Proponents) were granted protection under the CCAA.

[11] As of the date of the initial CCAA order on August 6, 2008, the Monitor reported that the Bank was owed approximately $16.25 million comprised of approximately $8.1 million under an operating line of credit and approximately $8.15 million under a term loan. The Bank agreed to make available up to an additional $2 million to fund the Applicants' operations during the CCAA proceedings under a DIP Loan Agreement.

[12] The amount owing to various vendors as of the date of the NOI Filing was approximately $6.5 million.

[13] The DIP Facility was extended to the Applicants under the terms of a DIP Loan Agreement. The DIP Facility was approved under the terms of the Initial Order at the outset of the CCAA proceedings.

[14] The provisions of the DIP Loan Agreement provide that advances from the Bank to WMSL could be loaned to Pellus and Tilbury, (among other Applicants) to fund ordinary course operations of those affiliates. Counsel to the Applicants submits that as Tilbury and Pellus have no funds to pay any termination or severance pay to the employees at Tilbury and Pellus represented by the Union (the "Tilbury Union Employees" and "Pellus Union Employees"), respectively, and they would have to ask that WMSL lend them sufficient funds for that purpose.

[15] Under the terms of the Amended and Restated Initial Order, counsel to the Applicants submit that the right of the Applicants to negotiate the terms on which termination and severance payments may be made upon termination of the employment of the Applicants' employees was subject to the covenants which are contained in the DIP Loan Agreement and that the Applicants, with limited exceptions that do not include the making of termination and severance payments, are not permitted to do anything which adversely affects the ranking of the obligations of WMSL to the Bank under either the DIP Loan Agreement or under the Amended and Restated Credit Agreement that governs the terms of loans made by the Bank to the WMSL prior to the commencement of the CCAA proceedings.

[16] On October 8, 2008 a sales process was approved by court order. The deadline for submission of offers to the Monitor was November 18, 2008. On November 18, 2008 there were no offers received, however, certain parties continued to express an interest in the Applicants' operations.

[17] Orders were made in these proceedings on October 29, 2008 (the "October 29 Orders") at the time that access agreements with two major customers of the Applicants were approved by the court. The October 29 Orders included provisions stating that the notice of one week for termination of the employment of employees on the expiry of the access periods under the Access Agreements would not operate to neutralize or suspend the provisions of the ESA.

[18] In September or October, 2008, the Union was informed of the possibility of the closure of the Tilbury facility. The Union advised the Applicants at that time that should the

2009 CanLII 39771 (ON SC)

employment of any Tilbury Union Employees be terminated, those employees should be paid termination and severance pay as required under the ESA.

[19] The efforts of the Applicants in October and early November, 2008, were directed to securing sources of funding for the Applicants' restructuring initiatives from prospective purchasers, financial institutions and other providers of capital as strategic partners and investors. The Applicants submit that they considered filing a plan of arrangement during that period if their efforts to secure funding had been successful.

[20] When no offer was received to purchase the assets of the Applicants, the principals of WMSL (the "Shareholders") negotiated with the Bank and with Export Development Canada ("EDC") to obtain financing from the Bank and from EDC for two newly incorporated corporations ("New Cos") to be controlled by the Shareholders which would purchase the Applicants' assets, properties and undertakings on a going-concern basis (the "Proposed Sale").

[21] The Applicants were of the view that the Proposed Sale was the only alternative to a liquidation sale or auction of the Applicants' assets and properties.

[22] The Applicants acknowledge that they are not in a position to proceed with a plan of arrangement that would see value paid to their unsecured creditors.

[23] At the end of November 2008, the management of Tilbury determined that a transfer of the employment of any of the Tilbury Union Employees was no longer economically feasible because of the decline in current and projected volume for the Applicants. The Union was advised of this decision and effective December 5, 2008, the Applicants terminated 47 Tilbury Union Employees at the Tilbury plant. The Tilbury Union Employees did not receive termination pay and severance pay.

[24] On January 21, 2009, the Applicants informed the Pellus Union Employees that the operations of Pellus would be closed down and that their employment would be terminated. The closure date was subsequently extended to late February 2009. The number of Pellus Union Employees whose employment will be terminated as a result of the closure of the Pellus facility is 43, of whom 40 are Pellus Union Employees.

[25] Pellus advised the Union of its position that under the provisions of the ESA, the Pellus Union Employees are not entitled to be paid severance pay because each Pellus Union Employee is not one of 50 or more employees who will have had the employment relationship with Pellus severed within a six-month period and Pellus does not have a payroll of $2.5 million of more. The adjudication of this issue is not before me at this time.

[26] In January 2009, the Applicants paid $2.8 million toward the Bank operating line as a repayment of pre-filing debt. In addition, as a result of asset sales and collections a further $1.2 million was also paid to the Bank toward its term loan facilities.

[27] The Monitor's Sixth Report is dated February 23, 2009 and at that date, the Applicants had approximately $3.4 million in cash and at the end of April 2009, the Applicants were

2009 CanLII 39771 (ON SC)

expected to have $3 million. The Applicants has not drawn the DIP Facility throughout the CCAA proceedings.

[28] Periodically during the CCAA proceedings, the Applicants returned to court and obtained orders extending the CCAA proceedings. Extensions were granted, under s. 11(4) of the CCAA based upon the court making required findings that the Applicants were operating in good faith and with due diligence such as to justify an extension of the stay.

2009 CanLII 39771 (ON SC)

ISSUES AND ANALYSIS

[29] The issue to be determined on this motion is: Should the Applicants, in these CCAA proceedings, be required to pay termination pay and severance pay to the Tilbury Union Employees and the Pellus Union Employees.

[30] This issue was recently considered in *Nortel Networks Corp., Re,* 2009 CanLII 31600 (On. S.C.) in the context of proceedings commenced by Nortel Networks Corp., et al (the "Nortel Applicants") under the CCAA (the "Nortel CCAA Proceedings").

[31] In the Nortel CCAA Proceedings, both unionized and non-unionized employees brought motions seeking an order to vary the Initial Order to require the Nortel Applicants to pay, among other things, termination pay and severance pay, in accordance with the applicable collective agreement and/or the *Employment Standards Act*. The motions were dismissed.

[32] The initial order in the Nortel CCAA Proceedings (the "Nortel Initial Order") was similar to the Amended and Restated Initial Order. Both were based on the Model Order.

[33] The applicable order in each case, (a) entitles but did not require the Applicants to pay outstanding and future wages, salaries, vacation pay,..., in each case incurred in the ordinary course of business; (b) provides that the Applicants were entitled to terminate the employment or lay off any of its employees and to deal with the consequences in the Plan.

[34] Many of the submissions raised by the Union at [5], were considered in the Nortel decision.

[35] Included in the conclusions in Nortel were statements to the effect that:

(i) claims for termination pay and severance pay are unsecured claims. These claims do not have any statutory priority;

(ii) Section 11.3 of the CCAA is an exception to the general stay provisions authorized by Section 11 and as such should be narrowly construed;

(iii) Section 11.3 applies to services provided after the date of the Initial Order;

(iv) the triggering of the payment obligations for termination and severance pay may have arisen after the Initial Order but it does not follow that a service was

provided after the Initial Order. The claims for termination and severance pay are based, for the most part, on services that were provided pre-filing.

(v) a key factor is whether the employee provided services after the date of the Initial Order. If so, he or she, is entitled to compensation benefits for such services.

(vi) the court has the jurisdiction to order a stay of outstanding termination pay and severance pay obligations under Section 11 of the CCAA.

(vii) the failure to pay outstanding termination pay and severance pay obligations does not amount to a case of contracting out of the ESA. Rather, it is a case of whether immediate payout resulting from a breach of the ESA is required to be made. The ESA applies, but during the stay period, there is a stay of the enforcement of the payment obligation.

2009 CanLII 39771 (ON SC)

[36] In my view, these conclusions are equally applicable to this motion.

[37] The submissions of the Union which are addressed in the Nortel decision are as follows:

(i) Payment of termination pay and severance pay are subject to the stay provisions.

(ii) The failure to pay outstanding termination pay and severance pay obligations does not amount to a contracting out of the ESA. Rather, it is a case of whether immediate payout resulting from a breach of the ESA is required to be made. The ESA applies, but during the stay period, there is a stay of the enforcement of the payment obligations.

(iii) The ESA continues to apply but there is a stay of the enforcement of the payment obligations.

(iv) The triggering of the payment obligations for termination and severance pay may have arisen after the Initial Order but it does not follow that a service was provided after the Initial Order. The claims for termination and severance pay are based, for the most part, on services that were provided pre-filing.

(v) A key factor is whether the employee provided services after the date of the Initial Order. If so, he or see, is entitled to compensation benefits for such services.

[38] Two additional points that are not directly addressed in the Nortel decision are as follows:

(i) Counsel to the Union submitted that the recent case of *Re West Bay SonShip Yachts Ltd.* (2009) B.C.C.A. 31 stands for the proposition that claims for termination and severance pay becomes owing to the employees at the point where their employment was terminated during the post-filing period and

therefore such claims are post-filing claims. In my view, this case can be distinguished. The claim in *West Bay* involved a common law claim for damages for wrongful dismissal. This type of claim is distinct from a claim for severance pay or termination pay under employment standards legislation, as noted by Levine J.A. at paragraph [14].

(ii) Tilbury Union Employees and Pellus Union Employees did provide services after the date of the CCAA application. Any incremental increase in termination pay and severance pay attributable to the period of time after the Applicants went into CCAA protection may justify treatment as a post-filing claim.

2009 CanLII 39771 (ON SC)

[39] This motion raises an interesting question. Should the Applicants be faulted for commencing proceedings under the CCAA, even though it turns out that no plan can be proposed which provides value to the unsecured creditors. In this case, the alternative to filing under the CCAA would have been to continue with the NOI under the BIA. In light of the acknowledgment that no CCAA plan can be presented which would be of benefit for the unsecured creditors, it follows that no viable proposal could have been made under the BIA. The failure to file a proposal under the BIA would have resulted in a bankruptcy and likely a receivership. In a receivership/bankruptcy, the termination pay and severance pay claims of the Tilbury Union Employees and the Pellus Union Employees would rank as unsecured claims and subordinate to the secured creditors.

[40] In turn, this raises a further question. Should the priority status of the Tilbury Union Employees and Pellus Union Employees be different in the context of CCAA proceedings as opposed to a receivership or bankruptcy.

[41] In this case, the Monitor reports that certain secured creditors will suffer a loss. Any amount paid in respect of termination and severance pay claims would be as a result of a direct deduction from recoveries for the secured creditors. In my view, the effect of granting the requested relief would be to accord the termination and severance pay claims special status over the claims of other unsecured creditors of the Applicants and would also result in the payment of such claims in priority to the claims of the Applicants' secured creditors.

[42] In addition to my conclusions as set out in *Nortel*, I have not been persuaded that the requested relief can be justified in this case on the following grounds.

[43] First, the priority of secured creditors must, in my view, be recognized. Counsel to the Union made the submission that the Applicants and the Bank are advancing a priority argument that may be relevant in a bankruptcy or receivership proceeding but not in a CCAA proceeding, as there is no priority distribution scheme in the CCAA. In my view this submission is misguided. Although there is no specific priority distribution scheme in the CCAA, that does not mean that priority issues should not be considered. An initial order under the CCAA usually results in a stay of proceedings as against secured creditors as well as unsecured creditors. The stay prevents secured creditors from taking enforcement proceedings which would confirm their

priority position. The inability of a secured creditor to take such enforcement proceedings should not result in an enhanced position for unsecured creditors. There is no basis, in my view, for the argument that somehow the absence of a statutory distribution scheme entitles unsecured creditors to obtain enhanced priority over secured creditors for pre-filing obligations. To give effect to this argument would result in a situation where secured creditors would be prejudiced by participating in CCAA proceedings as opposed to receivership/bankruptcy proceedings. This could very well result in a situation where secured creditors would prefer the receivership/bankruptcy option as opposed to the CCAA option as it would recognize their priority position. Such an outcome would undermine certain key objectives of the CCAA, namely, (i) maintain the *status quo* during the proceedings; and (ii) to facilitate the ability of a debtor to restructure its affairs. In my view, it is essential, in a court supervised process, to give due consideration to the priority rights of secured creditors. In this case, the secured creditors have priority over the termination pay and severance pay claims of the Tilbury Union Employees and the Pellus Union Employees.

2009 CanLII 39771 (ON SC)

[44] Second, counsel to the Union also submits that based on the rationale in the decision of the Court of Appeal in *Re 1231640 Ontario Inc. (State Group)* (2007), 37 C.B.R. (5th) 185 (Ont. C.A.), priority rules do not crystallize in a CCAA proceeding. I do not accept this argument. *State Group* addressed a priority issue as between competing PPSA secured creditors in the context of a interim receivership under s. 47 of the BIA. The issue in *State Group* was whether a s. 47 BIA receiver was a person who represents creditors of the debtor under s. 20(1)(b) of the PPSA. The Court of Appeal held that an interim receiver was not such a person. The issue in *State Group* governs the relationship as between competing interests under the PPSA. In my view, it does not stand for the proposition that the priority position of a secured creditor vis-à-vis unsecured creditors should not be recognized in the context of a CCAA proceeding.

[45] Third, the Union put forth submissions to the effect that, in this particular situation, the amount of termination pay and severance pay is relatively low and the Applicants have the cash to pay the amounts owing and, further, that such payments would not jeopardize the Proposed Sale.

[46] In my view, the fact that the Applicants may have available cash does not mean that the Applicants can use the cash as they see fit. The asset is to be used in accordance with credit agreements and court authorized purposes, including those set out in the Amended and Restated Initial Order. I am in agreement with these submissions of counsel to the Applicants as set out at [15]. This Order placed restrictions on the use of cash, which restrictions are consistent with legal priorities. In my view, the fact that the Applicants have cash does not justify an alteration of legal priorities. The legal priority position is that the claims for termination pay and severance pay are unsecured claims which rank pari passu with other unsecured creditors and subordinate to the interests of the secured creditors. (See also Indalex Limited CV-09-8122-00CL – July 24, 2009 on this point.)

[47] I acknowledge that the situation facing the employees is unfortunate and that in Nortel, a hardship exception was made. However, this exception was predicated, in part, on the

reasonable expectation that there will be a meaningful distribution to unsecured creditors, including the former employees. Such is not the case in this matter.

[48] Counsel to the Union also submitted that paragraph 11(d) of the Amended and Restated Initial Order only allows the company to terminate employees on terms agreed to by the employees or "to deal with the consequences thereof in the plan". Counsel to the Union submits that there is no agreement in this case and there is no plan and consequently paragraph 11(d) does not authorize the company not to pay termination pay and severance pay.

[49] In my view, the Applicants provide a complete response to this argument in their submission summarized at [15] which I accept and at paragraph 32 of their factum by noting that the Applicants could have proposed a Plan that would not have seen value paid to the unsecured creditors and that could have effected the Proposed Sale through a Plan, and to require that the Applicants propose a Plan in order to effect the sale would be an overly technical requirement inconsistent with the CCAA's remedial objective. I also accept these submissions. In my view, this is not a case where the Applicants have used the CCAA to avoid termination and severance pay obligations under the ESA. The fact that these claims will not be paid is a result of legal priorities as opposed to any specific action of the Applicants.

[50] I also note the CCAA proceedings are ongoing and the Applicants have brought forth a motion to propose a plan directed only at the secured creditors, but such a plan has been accepted in other cases. (See *Anvil Range Mining Corp.* (2001), 25 C.B.R. (4th) page 1 (Ont. S.C.J.), aff'd 2002, 34 C.B.R. (4th) 157 (Ont. C.A.)) This motion has yet to be heard.

DISPOSITION

[51] In the result, I have not been persuaded that the facts of this case are such that would justify an outcome different from that of *Nortel*. The claims for termination pay and severance pay are unsecured claims and enforcement proceedings are stayed, save and except for any incremental amount of termination pay and severance pay attributable to the period of time after the Applicants went into CCAA protection.

[52] Counsel to the Bank also raised the issue that Tilbury and Pellus do not have the funds to pay the termination and severance claims as all cash is held by WMSL. Counsel to the Bank submits that if an order were to be made that WMSL were required to pay or to loan money to Tilbury or Pellus so that they could then pay the termination and severance pay claims, such would be equivalent to a common employer finding without a proper trial of such issue. I accept this position and to the extent that I have erred in my conclusions and this issue becomes relevant, it would be necessary, in my view, to have a hearing to determine whether WMSL, Tilbury and Pellus are a common employer. This possibility is recognized at paragraph 38 of the Reply Factum served by counsel to the Union.

[53] For the foregoing reasons, subject to the caveat in [51], the motion is dismissed.

2009 CanLII 39771 (ON SC)

MORAWETZ J.

DATE: July 27, 2009

2009 CanLII 39771 (ON SC)