Court of Appeals Reaffirms Vitality of Donovan-Arthur Rule

St. John's Law Review

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarship.law.stjohns.edu/lawreview

This Recent Development in New York Law is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at St. John's Law Scholarship Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in St. John's Law Review by an authorized editor of St. John's Law Scholarship Repository. For more information, please contact selbyc@stjohns.edu.
jurisdiction is sought be one which could have been brought as a counterclaim in the original action had the original action been brought in the supreme court. Since only a defendant can counterclaim,\(^7\) it is logical to conclude that CPLR 303 should be available only to a defendant.\(^7\)

In *Green*, the party seeking to take advantage of CPLR 303 was the plaintiff in the primary action. Harlowe's counterclaim was asserted not against him, but rather against Bender; hence, the primary plaintiff should not be considered a defendant within the context of CPLR 303. Moreover, since a *Dole* claim has generally been considered a defense rather than the commencement of an action, it would seem that even Bender could not have utilized CPLR 303 to secure in personam jurisdiction over Harlowe.\(^7\)

Finally, it should also be noted that the counterclaim interposed by Harlowe was superfluous. Bender had already introduced the apportionment issue by impleading Harlowe, and the latter's counterclaim added nothing to the action. In all probability, Harlowe, who could not actually benefit by the interposition of a *Dole* counterclaim, did so in conformity with his insurer's pro forma practice.\(^7\)

In conclusion, while it is clear that Justice Gagliardi reached the correct result in *Green*, it is submitted that the court's inquiry into CPLR 303 should have revealed that, by its terms, this statute was intended to be utilized not by a plaintiff in the primary action, but instead, only by a defendant.

**Criminal Procedure Law**

*Court of Appeals reaffirms vitality of Donovan-Arthur rule.*

Stemming from a long line of New York decisions, the *Donovan-Arthur* rule requires suppression of any statements elicited from a criminal defendant in the absence of his retained or assigned counsel unless the defendant has first waived his rights in the presence of his attorney.\(^7\) Although it was originally held to be

\(^7\) See CPLR 3019(a).

\(^7\) See CPLR 303, commentary at 156-57 (McKinney 1972).

\(^7\) See notes 66-70 and accompanying text supra.

\(^7\) Indeed, had the court ruled in favor of *Green* and held that Harlowe waived his jurisdictional defenses by counterclaiming, it is quite possible that Harlowe would have had a claim against his insurer "for its counsel's zealousness in exposing the insured to personal liability." 175 N.Y.L.J. 116 at 12, col. 3 (footnote omitted).

\(^7\) The *Donovan-Arthur* rule was developed in a line of cases that predated the Supreme Court decisions in *Miranda v. Arizona*, 384 U.S. 436 (1966), and *Escobedo v. Illinois*, 378 U.S.
mandated by the New York State Constitution, later decisions created several exceptions to the rule, and in 1970 the Court of Appeals actually characterized it as "merely a theoretical statement of the law." With its constitutional basis in doubt, consider-

478 (1964). See generally Paulsen, The Winds of Change: Criminal Procedure in New York 1941-1965, 15 BUFFALO L. REV. 297 (1969). An early case recognizing the importance of effective representation of a criminal defendant was People v. Di Biasi, 7 N.Y.2d 544, 166 N.E.2d 825, 200 N.Y.S.2d 21 (1960), discussed in 35 ALB. L. REV. 798, 800 (1971); 51 CORNELL L.Q. 356, 360 (1966). In Di Biasi, the Court held that statements made in the absence of retained counsel by a defendant who had been indicted for a capital crime were inadmissible in evidence. Shortly after Di Biasi, the same rule was applied to a defendant in a noncapital case who was unrepresented by counsel. People v. Waterman, 9 N.Y.2d 561, 175 N.E.2d 445, 216 N.Y.S.2d 70 (1961). The Waterman Court additionally held that since an indictment represents the formal commencement of a criminal action, the defendant's right to counsel attaches at that point. Id. at 565, 175 N.E.2d at 447-48, 216 N.Y.S.2d at 74-75.

Extension of the right to counsel to the preindictment stage of the proceeding came in People v. Donovan, 13 N.Y.2d 148, 193 N.E.2d 628, 243 N.Y.S.2d 841 (1963). In Donovan, the Court suppressed the confession of a defendant whose lawyer was denied access to him at the preindictment stage of the proceedings, holding that such denial violated both the privilege against self-incrimination and the right to counsel. Id. at 151-52, 193 N.E.2d at 629, 243 N.Y.S.2d at 843. Following Donovan, uncertainty existed as to the exact limits of the rule, especially since it was unknown whether a defendant would have to request counsel before the right would attach. See Note, Escobedo in New York, 40 ST. JOHN'S L. REV. 297, 55-59 (1965). After the decisions in People v. Gunner, 15 N.Y.2d 226, 205 N.E.2d 852, 257 N.Y.S.2d 924 (1965), and People v. Friedlander, 16 N.Y.2d 248, 212 N.E.2d 533, 265 N.Y.S.2d 97 (1965), however, this uncertainty no longer existed. Gunner and Friedlander indicate that it is not necessary that the defendant actually be denied access to counsel, nor that he specifically request to see his attorney for the rule to apply.

The final step in the evolution of the right to counsel in the precommencement stage of a New York criminal action was taken in People v. Arthur, 22 N.Y.2d 325, 239 N.E.2d 537, 292 N.Y.S.2d 663 (1968). The Court in Arthur held that once the defendant's attorney enters the proceeding, the police may no longer question the defendant irrespective of whether he requested the attorney or even knows of his presence. Such questioning is permitted only if the defendant first waives his rights in the presence of the attorney. Id. at 329, 239 N.E.2d at 539, 292 N.Y.S.2d at 666. Thus, it is clear that the Donovan-Arthur rule applies to assigned as well as retained counsel, and is applicable even when counsel fails to request the police to refrain from questioning the defendant. Finally, the rule has been held to be entitled to retroactive recognition. People v. Miles, 23 N.Y.2d 527, 542, 245 N.E.2d 688, 696, 297 N.Y.S.2d 913, 924 (1969). It should be noted, however, that the rule is not without exceptions. See note 94 infra. See generally W. Richardson, EVIDENCE § 545 (10th ed. J. Prince 1973) [hereinafter cited as Richardson].


able uncertainty developed as to the continued viability of the rule.\textsuperscript{85} Recently, however, the Court of Appeals, in \textit{People v. Hobson},\textsuperscript{81} reaffirmed the continued existence of the \textit{Donovan-Arthur} rule, declaring that "[a]ny statements elicited [from a defendant] . . . , after a purported 'waiver' obtained without the presence or assistance of counsel, are inadmissible."\textsuperscript{82}

\textit{Hobson} presented the Court with an opportunity to reconsider the rule in a classical \textit{Donovan-Arthur} setting. Defendant Hobson had been photograph-identified as the perpetrator of a robbery in Suffolk County. Several months later, while being held on unrelated charges, he was placed in a lineup for identification as the robbery suspect. Defendant's assigned counsel\textsuperscript{83} was present at the lineup, but left shortly after Hobson was identified. Following his attorney's departure, defendant signed a waiver form and agreed to speak to the police. Although the detective involved knew that Hobson was represented by counsel, he made no effort to contact the attorney before commencing an interrogation that elicited inculpatory statements from Hobson.\textsuperscript{84} Before trial, Hobson unsuccessfully moved to suppress these statements. He was subsequently convicted, upon a plea of guilty, of robbery in the third degree.\textsuperscript{85} The Court of Appeals held that Hobson's confession should have been suppressed,\textsuperscript{86} thus reaffirming the continued viability of the \textit{Donovan-Arthur} rule. In reaching this result, the Court overruled two cases often viewed as departures from the \textit{Donovan-Arthur} rule—\textit{People v. Robles}\textsuperscript{87} and \textit{People v. Lopez}.\textsuperscript{88}

\textsuperscript{85} See \textit{People v. Pellicano}, 40 App. Div. 2d 169, 338 N.Y.S.2d 831 (4th Dep't 1972) (divided appellate division refused to apply the \textit{Donovan-Arthur} rule). A noted commentator also expressed uncertainty as to the status of the rule following the \textit{Robles} decision. See \textit{Richardson}, supra note 76, § 545, at 547-48.


\textsuperscript{82} \textit{Id.} at 481, 348 N.E.2d at 896, 336 N.Y.S.2d at 420.

\textsuperscript{83} Significantly, counsel had been assigned to defendant for the robbery charge. Had the attorney been assigned solely to represent defendant on the unrelated charges, the \textit{Donovan-Arthur} rule would not have barred admission of the statements concerning the robbery. \textit{See}, e.g., \textit{People v. Taylor}, 27 N.Y.2d 327, 266 N.E.2d 630, 318 N.Y.S.2d 1 (1971).\textit{ But see People v. Ramos}, No. 461 (N.Y. Ct. App. Oct. 26, 1976).

\textsuperscript{84} 39 N.Y.2d at 482-83, 348 N.E.2d at 896-97, 336 N.Y.S.2d at 420-21.

\textsuperscript{85} \textit{Id.} at 481, 348 N.E.2d at 896, 336 N.Y.S.2d at 420. The conviction was affirmed by the appellate division. 47 App. Div. 2d at 716, 336 N.Y.S.2d at 1003.

\textsuperscript{86} 39 N.Y.2d at 491, 348 N.E.2d at 903, 334 N.Y.S.2d at 427.


Court, in an opinion written by Chief Judge Breitel, declared that both Robles and Lopez represented a sudden, unexplained retreat from an established and well-reasoned line of authority.\(^9\) Noting that the purpose of the rule is to provide an “effective safeguard against an involuntary waiver of counsel?”\(^10\) by a person in the grips of the state's coercive police power, the Hobson Court declared that neither Robles nor Lopez provided a convincing rationale for vitiating the rule.\(^9\) These considerations led the Court to conclude that the doctrine of stare decisis did not require adherence to the two decisions.\(^9\)

Undoubtedly, Robles was a bar to application of the Donovan-Arthur rule. In Robles, defendant's attorney asked the police to “watch” the defendant while he left the room. In answer to a question posed to him during his lawyer's absence by an acquaintance on the police force, defendant admitted to murdering two people. At no time during the subsequent interrogation did the police secure a waiver of defendant's rights in the presence of his lawyer or even inform defendant's attorney of the questioning.\(^3\) Allowing Robles' statement to be admitted in evidence, the Court of Appeals held, without elaboration, that the Donovan-Arthur rule was a mere theoretical statement and not a basic rule of law.\(^4\) The rule, said the Robles Court, “is not applicable unless there is evidence of conduct . . . which would indicate an intention to victimize a defendant or

\(^{9}\) 39 N.Y.2d at 488-88, 348 N.E.2d at 899-901, 384 N.Y.S.2d at 423-25.

\(^{10}\) Id. at 484, 348 N.E.2d at 888, 384 N.Y.S.2d at 422.

\(^{3}\) Id. at 485-87, 348 N.E.2d at 898-900, 384 N.Y.S.2d at 423-24.

\(^{2}\) Commenting on its abandonment of the Robles and Lopez decisions, the Hobson Court noted that adherence to precedent is particularly important when property and contract rights are involved since the public continually relies on the stability of the law in those areas. The absence of day-to-day reliance on the stability of constitutional law, combined with the necessity of correcting errors in constitutional interpretation, requires less reliance upon stare decisis in reassessing constitutional precedents, especially those involving individual rights. Id. at 488-89, 348 N.E.2d at 901-02, 348 N.Y.S.2d at 425-26.

\(^{3}\) See 27 N.Y.2d at 157-58, 263 N.E.2d at 304-05, 314 N.Y.S.2d at 794-95.

\(^{4}\) Id. at 158, 263 N.E.2d at 305, 314 N.Y.S.2d at 795. In so describing the Donovan-Arthur rule, the Robles Court relied on People v. Kaye, 25 N.Y.2d 139, 250 N.E.2d 399, 303 N.Y.S.2d 41 (1969), and People v. McKie, 25 N.Y.2d 19, 250 N.E.2d 36, 302 N.Y.S.2d 534 (1969). Examination of these two cases reveals that the Court's reliance on them in Robles is questionable. Both Kaye and McKie merely represent exceptions to the Donovan-Arthur rule, see Richardson, supra note 76, § 545, at 547, and are not at all inconsistent with the rule itself. The Kaye exception provides that a spontaneous statement made by the defendant, not elicited by questioning, is admissible in evidence notwithstanding failure to comply with Donovan-Arthur requirements. 25 N.Y.2d at 143-44, 250 N.E.2d at 331-32, 303 N.Y.S.2d at 44-46. In McKie, the Court declared that the Donovan-Arthur rule does not apply to statements made while not in custody. 25 N.Y.2d at 26-28, 250 N.E.2d at 39-41, 302 N.Y.S.2d at 539-40.
outwit his attorney in order to carry on an inquiry.” Clearly, the Robles Court drastically limited, if indeed it did not completely abrogate the rule.

It is submitted, however, that Lopez was not a barrier to reaffirmation of the Donovan-Arthur rule by the Hobson Court. The Court in Lopez held that a postindictment waiver of counsel by a defendant not represented by an attorney may be effectuated without having any lawyer present. In contrast, the Donovan-Arthur rule is applicable only when the defendant is represented by counsel. Thus, since Lopez actually did not involve a Donovan-Arthur situation, it was unnecessary for the Hobson Court to have overruled that decision. Quite possibly, by overruling Lopez the Court is indicating that any statements elicited from a defendant during the “critical stages” of the proceeding must be taken either in the presence of counsel or pursuant to a waiver entered into with the advice of counsel. If so, this rule presumably would be applicable regardless of whether the defendant is in fact represented by counsel during the critical stages.

---

85 27 N.Y.2d at 159, 263 N.E.2d at 305, 314 N.Y.S.2d at 795.
87 See note 76 and accompanying text supra.
88 Judge Gabrielli, concurring in the Hobson result, opined that the overruling of Lopez was unnecessary and improper. 39 N.Y.2d at 491-92, 348 N.E.2d at 903, 384 N.Y.S.2d at 427 (Gabrielli, J., concurring).
90 Although the Hobson majority did not discuss the effect of overruling Lopez, Judge Gabrielli, in his concurring opinion, recognized that with Lopez overruled an unrepresented postcritical stage defendant may not waive his rights unless an attorney is present. See 39 N.Y.2d at 491-92, 348 N.E.2d at 903-04, 384 N.Y.S.2d at 427-28 (Gabrielli, J., concurring). Butressing this interpretation of Hobson is the recent decision of the supreme court in People v. Reyes, 176 N.Y.L.J. 96, Nov. 18, 1976, at 11, col. 5 (Sup. Ct. N.Y. County). There, Justice Coon, citing Hobson, held that once judicial proceedings have begun, even an unrepresented defendant may only waive his right to counsel in the presence of a lawyer. Id., col. 6. Moreover, this result would seem to be indicated by careful comparison of then Judge Breitel’s dissent in Lopez with his opinion in Hobson. The Lopez dissent indicated that a postindictment, unrepresented defendant “is entitled to the advice of a lawyer and that the right may not be waived except in the presence and with the acquiescence of counsel.” 28 N.Y.2d at 26, 268 N.E.2d at 629, 319 N.Y.S.2d at 827 (Breitel, J., dissenting). The Lopez dissent further maintained that to permit a waiver of counsel by an unrepresented defendant during the postindictment stage of the proceeding might be less “egregious [than] where counsel is
Notwithstanding the questions created by the overruling of Lopez, it is submitted that the Hobson Court reached the correct result in reaffirming the Donovan-Arthur rule. The Court's analysis revealed that the doctrine of stare decisis does not compel a court to mechanically follow the latest relevant decision, but dictates instead that a court should be guided by "precedents which reflect principle and doctrine rationally evolved."\textsuperscript{110} Moreover, the overruling of Robles and concomitant reaffirmation of the Donovan-Arthur rule ensures, at the very least, that any waiver of protected constitutional rights by a represented criminal defendant will be knowingly, intelligently, and voluntarily made.\textsuperscript{102} Without such a safeguard, a defendant may unwittingly be deprived of his constitutional right to counsel.\textsuperscript{103} In the final analysis, Hobson is a reaffirmation of the
Court of Appeals' liberal interpretation of the right to counsel and privilege against self-incrimination provisions of the New York State constitution. It is hoped that this laudable policy of safeguarding these rights will continue to be vigorously applied by the judiciary of this state.

**GENERAL MUNICIPAL LAW**


Section 50-e of the General Municipal Law requires that in any tort action against a public corporation in which a notice of claim must be served upon the corporation as a condition precedent to commencement of the action, such notice must be served within 90 days after the claim arises. In apparent response to repeated judicial criticism, the legislature recently amended section 50-e, mitigating the harshness of some of its more stringent provisions. Prior to the amendment, a claimant's slight departure from the strict prescriptions mandated by this section often enabled a munic-

---

39 N.Y.2d at 485, 348 N.E.2d at 899, 384 N.Y.S.2d at 423.


105 As long ago as 1952, the Court of Appeals, in *Teresta v. City of New York*, 304 N.Y. 440, 108 N.E.2d 397 (1952), acknowledged the inequities which can result from a literal enforcement of § 50-e. In *Teresta*, the Court deemed the City to have waived the notice of claim requirement when it had examined the plaintiff for his alleged injuries and yet failed to object to lack of notice until the eve of trial. Construing the section liberally, the Court noted that the statute should not be applied as "a trap to catch the unwary or the ignorant." *Id.* at 443, 108 N.E.2d at 398, quoting *Sweeney v. City of New York*, 225 N.Y. 271, 273, 122 N.E. 243, 244 (1919). More recently, in *Murray v. City of New York*, 30 N.Y.2d 113, 282 N.E.2d 103, 331 N.Y.S.2d 9 (1972), Judge Breitel, in articulating his concern with the harsh effects of § 50-e, stated:

Except to the practitioner who is skilled in tort cases or claims against municipalities, it is a mousetrap. Such a statute should provide a greater discretion to give relief from its requirements and, of course, to avoid obvious abuses, set forth the standards for the exercise of that greater discretion. . . .

There should be prompt legislative correction of the statute.


107 For an in-depth analysis of § 50-e, see Graziano, *Recommendations Relating to Section 50-e of the General Municipal Law and Related Statutes*, to be published in *Judicial Conference, Twenty-First Annual Report* (1976). Professor Graziano's report was submitted to the legislature by the Judicial Conference and provided the basis for the amendments to § 50-e.