

UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS FOR THE FIFTH CIRCUIT

Ruiz v. United States

494 F.2d 1 (5th Cir. 1974) · Decided May 16, 1974

SUMMARY

The Fifth Circuit affirmed the denial of Ruiz’s motion under 28 U.S.C. § 2255 to vacate his sentence and withdraw his guilty plea to distributing narcotics. The court held that Rule 11 did not require prior disclosure of whether an enhanced-sentence information had been filed, so long as Ruiz was informed of the possible sentencing ranges, and concluded that the record established a sufficient factual basis for the plea.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit
JURISDICTION	Federal
DECIDED	May 16, 1974
DISPOSITION	affirmed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Ruiz appealed the denial of his motion under 28 U.S.C. § 2255 to vacate his sentence and set aside his guilty plea.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	The court reviewed the § 2255 claims and the plea and sentencing record for legal error and determined from the transcript that the record conclusively refuted Ruiz's contentions.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	published precedential decision of the United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit
PARTIES	Ruiz v. United States

TOPICS

- post-conviction relief
- criminal procedure
- sentencing
- statutory interpretation
- plea bargaining

PRACTICE AREAS

- criminal procedure
- post-conviction relief
- sentencing
- plea practice

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether Rule 11 and the applicable narcotics sentencing statute required Ruiz to be informed before entering his guilty plea that the Government had sufficient proof of a prior conviction triggering

enhanced punishment.

2. Whether the district court complied with Federal Rule of Criminal Procedure 11 by establishing a factual basis for Ruiz's guilty plea.

HOLDINGS

1. Rule 11 requires a defendant to understand the range of possible statutory sentences, including applicable enhanced-punishment possibilities, but does not require advance knowledge of the exact sentence the court will impose or whether the Government has sufficient proof of a prior conviction to trigger enhancement. Because Ruiz was informed of the statutory sentencing possibilities, his guilty plea was not invalid on this ground.
2. The district court satisfied Rule 11's factual-basis requirement by obtaining a synopsis of the evidence from the prosecutor and Ruiz's sworn admission that the alleged facts were true before entering judgment.

KEY QUOTATIONS

"It is only necessary, however, that the defendant know the range of possible sentences, not the exact penalty that the court will assess in the event of a guilty plea." (494 F.2d at 3)

"Rule 11 mandates only that the defendant be told of the possibility of sentencing under one of several provisions and the minimum and maximum penalties required by each." (494 F.2d at 3)

"This procedure satisfies both the letter and the spirit of Rule 11." (494 F.2d at 3)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

In May 1968, Ruiz pleaded guilty to distributing narcotics under 26 U.S.C. § 4704(a). Before sentencing, the Government provided information regarding a prior federal narcotics conviction, and Ruiz's counsel admitted that the prior conviction allegation was true; Ruiz personally stated that he had no further comments. Before entering his plea, Ruiz was advised of the statutory sentencing ranges, including the possibility of enhanced punishment for a prior federal narcotics violation, and he acknowledged understanding the possible punishments. At arraignment, the prosecutor summarized the evidence and Ruiz admitted under oath that the alleged facts were true.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Ruiz pleaded guilty to one count of distributing narcotics in violation of 26 U.S.C. § 4704(a) and was sentenced as a second offender under the narcotics laws. He later moved under 28 U.S.C. § 2255 to vacate the sentence and withdraw the plea, arguing that he had not been informed before pleading of the potential enhanced sentence and that the district court had failed to establish a factual basis for the plea under Federal Rule of Criminal Procedure 11. The district court denied relief, and the Fifth Circuit affirmed.

DISPOSITION

affirmed

CASES CITED

- United States v. Blair, 470 F.2d 331 (5th Cir. 1972)
- United States ex rel. Hill v. United States, 452 F.2d 664 (5th Cir. 1971)
- United States v. Woodall, 438 F.2d 1317 (5th Cir. 1970)
- Tucker v. United States, 409 F.2d 1291 (5th Cir. 1969)
- Mordecai v. United States, 421 F.2d 1133 (D.C. Cir. 1969), cert. denied, 397 U.S. 977 (1970)
- Robinson v. United States, 474 F.2d 1085 (10th Cir. 1973)
- Hall v. United States, 489 F.2d 427 (5th Cir. 1974)

OPINION

PER CURIAM.

PER CURIAM: Petitioner Ruiz appeals from the denial of a motion to vacate his sentence and set aside his plea of guilty to one count of distributing narcotics in violation of 26 U.S.C. § 4704(a). He contends that relief pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 2255 is required because: (1) he was not informed that he would be sentenced as a second offender against the federal narcotics laws prior to entering his plea of guilty, and (2) the trial court did not ascertain the factual basis for the plea as required by Rule 11 of the Federal Rules of Criminal Procedure.

We find no merit in these arguments and affirm. Petitioner rests his contention that he was entitled to know that he would be sentenced as a second offender before entering his plea on the terms of 21 U.S.C. § 851(a)(1) and Rule 11, Fed.R.Crim.Proc. Ruiz correctly notes that § 851(a)(1), the statute now governing enhanced sentences in narcotics cases, permits the harsher punishments for multiple offenders only when the Government has filed an information on any previous convictions in advance of trial or entry of a guilty plea.

He has neglected to observe, however, that this statute did not become effective until some three years after his trial. In May, 1968, the time of petitioner's plea and sentencing, enhanced terms were fixed under the provisions of 26 U.S.C. § 7237. That section specifically directed that the court and the defendant be provided with the Government's information on prior drug offenses "after conviction (but before pronouncement of sentence)".¹ The Government followed that procedure in this case; and the transcript of the sentencing hearing reveals no deviation from the requirements of § 7237.² *3In order to be accepted under Rule 11 a guilty plea must have been given "with understanding of the. consequences of the plea." Petitioner contends that since one of those consequences is the sentence to be imposed by the court, he ought to have been informed before entering his plea whether the Government had sufficient evidence of a prior conviction to trigger enhanced punishment.

Though ingenious, this argument lacks merit. Before entering his plea Ruiz received a full and accurate explanation of the sentences that could be imposed for a violation of 26 U.S.C. § 4704(a),

including the higher level of punishment required in the event of a prior federal narcotics violation.

The record of the May arraignment discloses that petitioner not only stated that he understood the possible punishments awaiting him, but also admitted to a federal narcotics violation in 1960. While he still lacked definite knowledge that the Government had proof of the prior conviction, that doubt as to final disposition is not significant in assessing the validity of the plea.

Rule 11 does require disclosure of information on the punishment authorized by statute. It is only necessary, however, that the defendant know the range of possible sentences, not the exact penalty that the court will assess in the event of a guilty plea. See *United States v. Blair*, 5 Cir. 1972, 470 F.2d 331; *United States ex rel. Hill v. United States*, 5 Cir.

1971, 452 F.2d 664; *United States v. Woodall*, 5 Cir. 1970, 438 F.2d 1317; *Tucker v. United States*, 5 Cir. 1969, 409 F.2d 1291. Nor is a defendant who is subject to punishment under more than one sentencing statute entitled to know prior to his pleading which statute the court will utilize. Rule 11 mandates only that the defendant be told of the possibility of sentencing under one of several provisions and the minimum and maximum penalties required by each.

See *Mordecai v. United States*, 1969, 137 U.S.App.D.C. 198, 421 F.2d 1133, cert. denied 397 U.S. 977, 90 S.Ct. 1098, 25 L.Ed.2d 272; *Robinson v. United States*, 10 Cir. 1973, 474 F.2d 1085. In line with these decisions, petitioner was given ample information on the statutory possibilities. Rule 11 demands no more. Petitioner's second contention—that the district court did not take steps to satisfy itself that there was a factual basis for the plea as required by Rule 11—cannot withstand a reading of the transcript of the arraignment.

The record conclusively shows that prior to entering judgment the trial court requested a synopsis of the evidence against petitioner from the prosecutor and that petitioner admitted under oath that the facts alleged were true. This procedure satisfies both the letter and the spirit of Rule 11. Cf. *Hall v. United States*, 5 Cir. 1974, 489 F.2d 427. Affirmed..

26 U.S.C. § 7237(c)(2).. Petitioner alleges at one point in Ms brief that the trial court did not afford him the opportunity, required under the old and new statutes, to affirm or deny the Government's allegation of a prior conviction.

The transcript of the sentencing proceeding, however, entirely refutes this contention. After the Government had presented to the court an information charging petitioner with a prior narcotics conviction in the Western District of Texas on May 20, 1960, his counsel responded that the allegation was indeed true. *3Ruiz was then asked by the court if he had any comments to make and petitioner stated that he did not.

The record discloses, therefore, both counsel's admission and petitioner's acquiescence.

