

SUPREME COURT OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK — NEW YORK COUNTY

PRESENT: Hon. Beatrice Shambout Justice PART 10

In Re IJB Scroder Bank Trust

INDEX NO. 101530/98

MOTION DATE _____

MOTION SEQ. NO. 001

MOTION CAL. NO. _____

- v -

The following papers, numbered 1 to _____ were read on this motion to/for _____

Notice of Motion/ Order to Show Cause — Affidavits — Exhibits ...

Answering Affidavits — Exhibits _____

Replying Affidavits _____

PAPERS NUMBERED

Cross-Motion: Yes No

Upon the foregoing papers, it is ordered that this motion

on remand, pursuant to the order of the appellate division, first department dated April 20, 2000.

J.S.C.

MOTION IS DECIDED IN ACCORDANCE WITH ACCOMPANYING MEMORANDUM DECISION

FILED

OCT 03 2000

COUNTY CLERK'S OFFICE NEW YORK

MOTION/CASE IS RESPECTFULLY REFERRED TO JUSTICE

DATED:

Dated: 8/16/00

MS

Check one: FINAL DISPOSITION

NON-FINAL DISPOSITION

J.S.C.

CDISPS

SUPREME COURT OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK
NEW YORK COUNTY : IAS PART 10

----- X

In the Matter of the Application of

Index No. 101530/98

IBJ SCHRODER BANK & TRUST COMPANY (not
in its individual capacity but in its capacity as Trustee
under a Trust Agreement dated as of December 21, 1985
among Resources Satellite Corp., J. Henry Schroder
Bank & Trust Company and the Beneficiaries thereunder),
Petitioner,

for an order, pursuant to CPLR § 7701, for a Construction
of an Indenture and Approval of a Settlement.

----- X

SHAINSWIT, J.:

In this special proceeding, brought pursuant to CPLR Article 77,
petitioner-trustee seeks a declaratory judgment concerning the construction of an
Investor Trust Agreement, together with approval of the trustee's proposed settlement
of another action presently pending in this Court, involving assets of the Trust, entitled
IBJ Schroder Bank & Trust Co. v GE Capital Spacenet Services, Inc., Index No.
601299/96 (the "Spacenet" action).

The Trust was established in 1985 to facilitate investments by more than
400 beneficiaries in a project involving the launching and operation of a
communications satellite during the years 1985 through 1994. The Trust involved a
complex series of financial transactions involving the development and placement in
space of the communications satellite.

The Spacenet action involves a certain master lease relating to the lease
of 24 satellite transponders carried on a satellite which was launched into orbit in 1985.

The satellite earned money for the Trust through receipt of sums from television and radio broadcasters for the use of electronic signals transmitted for television and radio broadcasting by the satellite's "transponders." A transponder automatically transmits a broadcasting signal upon reception of such a signal from another transmitter.

Because adequate supply of fuel was crucial to the operation of the satellite, the trustee and the satellite owner executed the Agreement Regarding Fuel ("Fuel Agreement"), whereby the satellite owner agreed to make certain stipulated fuel shortfall payments, entitled "Stipulated Loss Value" payments, in the event of a fuel shortage. It is alleged that such a fuel shortage occurred, thereby triggering the trustee's rights to demand payment from the satellite owner under the terms of the Fuel Agreement. Accordingly, in the Spacenet action, the trustee seeks to recover from the satellite owner the sum of \$40,785,455, representing a "Stipulated Loss Value" payment set forth for in the Fuel Agreement.

The satellite owner served its answer in the Spacenet action, denying all liability and pleading defenses and counterclaims, including, among other things, that: (a) the provision in the Fuel Agreement as to Stipulated Loss Value was an unenforceable penalty under New York law; (b) the satellite's failure resulted from a catastrophic event or mechanical failure and not from a lack of fuel; and (c) the satellite in fact had sufficient fuel on the applicable date.

In September 1997, the trustee and the defendants in the Spacenet litigation conditionally agreed to a proposed settlement which provides for the satellite owner to pay \$8.5 million, of which \$6.97 million would be paid to the Trust.

The trustee thereupon commenced this action by "Verified Petition For Construction of Trust and Approval of Proposed Settlement," seeking, among other things: (a) a declaration that it had the authority to commence the Spacenet action; (b) a declaration that it had the authority to settle the Spacenet action; and (c) judicial approval of the proposed settlement of the Spacenet action. 186 trust beneficiaries, jointly represented by one law firm, have submitted opposition to the trustee's application for a declaratory judgment and approval of the proposed settlement.

The trustee predicates his commencement of the Spacenet action, vis-a-vis the beneficiaries of the Trust, upon section 5.02 of the Investor Trust Agreement. That section provides that, in the event of an event of a default under the master lease:

the Trustee shall give prompt written notice of such event of default to the Lessee, the Grantor and the Beneficiaries by certified mail, postage prepaid. In the event that such event of default has not been cured within 30 days after mailing of such notice, the Trustee shall take such action or shall refrain from taking such action, not inconsistent with the provisions of the Agreements, with respect to such event of default as the Trustee shall be directed in writing by all of the Beneficiaries, or, if no such direction has been received from all of the Beneficiaries within 30 days after the mailing of such notice to the Beneficiaries, the Trustee shall, in its sole discretion ... take such action as shall be necessary to terminate the Master Lease, to obtain the benefits of the Master Collateral Assignment Agreement and to cause the Lessee thereunder to perform all of its obligations upon such termination.

(emphasis supplied).

Prior to commencing the Spacenet action, the trustee sent the requisite notice under Section 5.02 of the Investor Trust Agreement to the proper parties, including the beneficiaries, and did not, in return, receive any "directions" from the beneficiaries.

By decision and judgment dated October 21, 1998, this Court held that the Trust Agreement did not confer upon the trustee authority to settle the action in question.¹ Having decided that such authority to settle the Spacenet action was lacking, the Court never reached the trustee's further request for judicial approval of the proposed settlement. The trustee appealed from the October 21, 1998 decision and judgment.

The Appellate Division reversed (___ AD2d ___, 706 NYS2d 114 [First Dept 2000]). The Appellate Division held that the trustee was, in fact, vested with the authority to settle the Spacenet action, stating that:

It is settled that the duties and powers of a trustee are defined by the terms of the trust agreement and are tempered only by the fiduciary obligation of loyalty to the beneficiaries (see, United States Trust Co. of N. Y. v First Nat. City Bank, 57 AD2d 285, 295-296 affd 45 NY2d 869; Restatement [Second] of Trusts § 186, comments a, d). In this matter, the same provision of the trust agreement which, the parties do not dispute, gave the trustee the power to commence the underlying action, also vests the trustee with the power to "take such action as shall be necessary" with respect to the subject matter of the underlying action. We now find that this provision includes the power to settle that action. We take no position on whether the settlement agreement, in its present form, should be approved and remand the matter to the IAS court to consider all relevant factors in determining whether such approval is warranted.

(Id.).

Thus, this matter is now before this Court on remand to determine

¹ On a motion seeking, inter alia, reargument and clarification of the October 21, 1998 decision and judgment, this Court held that the trustee had the authority, pursuant to section 5.02 of the Investor Trust Agreement, to "take such action" as might be necessary under the circumstances, including commencing the Spacenet action (Decision and Order dated April 12, 1999).

whether or not approval of the proposed settlement is warranted.

As set forth in the Petition, the trustee maintains that the proposed settlement of the Spacenet action is reasonable and prudent, and the best way to conserve and protect the Trust's assets. In support, the trustee argues that: (a) there is a serious risk that the Spacenet defendants may prevail on one or more of the defenses asserted by them in the Spacenet action, thereby precluding any recovery by the trustee in the Spacenet action; and (b) prosecution of the Spacenet action would be very costly and time consuming, because such cases are extremely expert-intensive and technically complex.

The opposition offered by the 186 trust beneficiaries goes primarily to their belief that the settlement amount is too low. They claim that the proposed settlement is unreasonable and contrary to their best interests, arguing that: (a) the plain terms of the Fuel Agreement require payment of the "Stipulated Loss Value" of approximately \$40 million (now over \$60 million with interest); (b) the proposed settlement would substantially compromise that amount to \$8.5 million; and (c) the trustee has not in any way tested any of the defenses raised in the Spacenet litigation, but rather agreed to that substantial compromise despite having failed to take any discovery or to file any dispositive motions in the Spacenet litigation.

Since the objecting beneficiaries have not submitted any evidence to show that the trustee's actions may have been based on some ulterior motive or that the trustee is somehow itself interested in the transaction other than in its fiduciary capacity, the trustee submits that the dispute comes down to whose view as to the

wisdom of the proposed settlement should prevail -- that of the trustee or that of the objecting beneficiaries.

Here, the trustee is the entity to whom the Investor Trust Agreement gives sole power to "take such action as shall be necessary" with respect to the subject matter of the underlying action. While there is some question as to whether the applicable standard of review here is the business judgment rule or the prudent man standard, the conclusion is the same under either standard -- the trustee's decision to compromise the Spacenet action is within the scope of the trustee's powers, is reasonable and prudent, and is entitled to judicial deference. Thus, in view of the trustee's showing of the reasonableness of the proposed settlement herein, and in the absence of any evidence tending to show a breach by the trustee of its fiduciary duties, the trustee's view must prevail. The Court will not invalidate the proposed settlement merely because certain beneficiaries believe a greater recovery might be obtained if the Spacenet action is submitted to an expensive and unpredictable litigation.

CONCLUSION

Accordingly, on remand, the Court holds that approval of the proposed settlement of the Spacenet action is warranted, and grants the trustee's motion to that extent. *Settle order/Judgment.*

Dated: August 16, 2000

ENTER:



J.S.C.