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PRESS RELEASE

Polish man settles race discrimination case

An electrical goods firm in Newry has settled a case brought by a Polish man alleging racial discrimination with a payment of £17,500, without admission of liability.

Zbigniew Teliga (aged 57), took his case with the help of the Equality Commission. He claimed that, although he had worked for Peter and Evelyn Murphy, trading as Murphy's DAC TV and Hi-fi, since September 2006, he was dismissed in August 2011 after injuring his hand at work. His employers claimed that he was a casual worker who worked on an ad-hoc basis and was paid accordingly, though the firm had provided Mr Teliga with a letter in 2008 stating that he had then been employed by them for two years and he was registered under the Accession State Worker Registration Scheme as a result.

Mr Teliga said, "The fact that I was dismissed so suddenly was a shock for me and my wife. We had no time to safeguard ourselves financially, and we were left with no resources. I had worked hard for them for five years and I believe they were satisfied with my work. I think I was treated in a way that their Northern Irish workers would not have been treated."

Eileen Lavery, Head of Legal, Policy and Research with the Equality Commission, said, "People who come to Northern Ireland to work are entitled to be treated fairly and with respect. They have rights against unfair dismissal, as all workers have, and the Race Relations Order protects them against discriminatory treatment on grounds of their race or nationality. The law on equality in employment is not something that employers can simply disregard. Unfair treatment can blight the lives of those who experience it and it can also be expensive and damaging for employers."

Jerome Mullen, Honorary Consul of the Republic of Poland in Northern Ireland, said, “I am very pleased with the outcome of this case taken by Mr Teliga, and I feel he was unfairly treated when dismissed by Murphy’s DAC TV & Hi-fi after five years of loyal service. It’s very important that employers who act in such a manner without applying proper procedures and due care towards their employees should be challenged and I thank the Equality Commission for supporting this man in vindicating his rights in this case. This company left Mr Teliga, a Polish national, with no job and no income. He had no entitlement to benefits and he was left destitute in effect. I am extremely disappointed that the company did not see fit to respond satisfactorily to my own personal contact with them at the outset; had they done so, matters could have been very different. It should be borne in mind that migrant workers from the European Union are entitled to the same treatment and protection under the law as local workers, nothing more and nothing less. This case shows that employers will not and should not get away such treatment of EU employees.”

In settling the case, Peter Murphy, on behalf of Murphy’s DAC, has expressed regret for any distress caused to Mr Teliga as a result of having to bring the proceedings and affirmed his commitment to the principle of equality of opportunity. He has given an undertaking to meet the Equality Commission and review company policies and procedures to ensure they comply with the law and the codes of practice, in particular those issued under the Race Relations (NI) Order 1997. He has agreed to consider all reasonable recommendations made by the Commission including amendment of policies and procedures and the training of staff.