

NO. 69247-0-1

IN THE COURT OF APPEALS  
OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON  
DIVISION I

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STATE OF WASHINGTON,

Respondent,

v.

JUSTIN E. CRITCHELL,

Appellant.

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BRIEF OF RESPONDENT

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COURT OF APPEALS  
STATE OF WASHINGTON

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## **I. ISSUES**

Did the trial court correctly instruct the jurors that they had a “duty to return a verdict of guilty” if they found the elements of the crime proved beyond a reasonable doubt?

## **II. STATEMENT OF THE CASE**

The defendant, Justin Critchell, was found guilty by a jury of third and fourth degree assault. CP 38-39. According to the State’s evidence, the defendant and his cousin Steven Burke came into a Seven-Eleven. They got into an argument with the clerk, Dibash KC. Mr. KC called to his co-worker, Uttam Lal. Mr. Burke grabbed a beer out of the cooler and left without paying. Mr. Lal came out of the back room and told the defendant to leave. The defendant came behind the counter and shoved Mr. Lal twice. Mr. Lal picked up a knife that was used to cut pizza. The defendant then left the store. 7/24 RP 28-34 57-60.

Police apprehended Mr. Burke and the defendant nearby. When told that he was under arrest for robbery, the defendant began resisting. Because the defendant was kicking, the officers placed a hobble around his ankles. The defendant refused to walk to the patrol car, so officers carried him into the car. As Officer Jeff

Klages was backing out, the defendant kicked him in the face. 7/23 RP 75-84; 7/24 RP 84-93, 126-28, 176-82.

The defendant testified that he had been in the Seven-Eleven waiting to pay. Mr. Lal came out of the back and told him, "Get the hell out of my store, you Native piece of shit." The defendant went over to confront Mr. Lal about this slur. Mr. Lal picked up a knife, so the defendant shoved him in self-defense. 7/25 RP 48-50.

The defendant denied intentionally kicking Officer Klages. Rather, he had kicked out to get his feet underneath him, so he could get his weight off of his handcuffed hands. 7/25 RP 54-55

At trial, the jury gave jury instructions that included the standard language:

If you find from the evidence that each of these elements has been proved beyond a reasonable doubt, then it will be your duty to return a verdict of guilty.

On the other hand, if, after weighing all the evidence, you have a reasonable doubt as to any one of these elements, then it will be your duty to return a verdict of not guilty.

CP 49, inst no. 6; CP 55, inst. no. 12. No objection was raised to these instructions. 7/25 RP 34-35.

### III. ARGUMENT

#### **ALL THREE DIVISIONS OF THIS COURT HAVE APPROVED THE “DUTY TO CONVICT” LANGUAGE IN THE STANDARD JURY INSTRUCTIONS.**

For the first time on appeal, the defendant argues that the “duty to convict” language in the jury instructions violates his constitutional right to a jury trial. Identical arguments have been rejected by all three divisions of this court. State v. Meggyesy, 90 Wn. App. 693, 958 P.2d 319, review denied, 136 Wn.2d 1098 (1998) (Division One); State v. Brown, 130 Wn. App. 767, 124 P.3d 663 (2005) (Division Two); State v. Wilson, 2013 WL 4176077 (8/15/13) (Division Three). The Meggyesy opinion includes a detailed analysis of the factors set out in State v. Gunwall, 106 Wn.2d 54, 720 P.2d 808 (1986). Meggyesy, 90 Wn. App. at 701-04.

The result of these cases is consistent with Article 4, §16 of the Washington Constitution Under that section, judges have the duty to “declare the law” to juries. By statute, a person who commits certain acts “is guilty of assault.” RCW 9A.36.031(1) (third degree assault), RCW 9A.36.041(1) (fourth degree assault). The statute does not say that such a person “may be guilty.” If a judge were to instruct a jury that it “may” convict on proof of the

necessary facts, it would not be carrying out its duty to “declare the law.”

The defendant argues for precisely this result. He claims that the jurors had a right to acquit him if they thought that assaulting someone is an “appropriate” response to police actions or a storekeeper’s use of a racial slur. Brief of Appellant at 14. In other words, he would rewrite the statutes to say that a person who commits the specified acts “*may* be guilty of assault, if a jury considers such conviction justified, in light of whatever factors the jury sees fit to consider.” Such a legal doctrine would end any hope of treating similar offenders in a uniform fashion.

The defendant relies on the *power* of a jury to disregard its instructions in return a verdict of acquittal. This power exists equally for other kinds of verdicts. In both civil and criminal cases, the court is precluded from probing the jurors’ thought processes State v. Crowell, 92 Wn.2d 143, 146, 594 P.2d 905 (1979); Gardner v. Malone, 60 Wn.2d 840, 841, 376 P.2d 651 (1962). This means, among other things, that the court will not consider whether the jury actually made the findings required by the instructions.

In one criminal case, for example, the defendant was charged with conspiracy to deliver marijuana. The jurors were

instructed that to convict, they had to find that the defendant intended to deliver marijuana. The jury found the defendant guilty. After trial, the defendant presented affidavits from several jurors. They said that they had never found that the defendant intended to deliver marijuana. The trial court refused to consider these affidavits and denied a new trial. This court affirmed. The affidavits could not be considered because they involved matters that inhered in the verdict. State v. Hughes, 14 Wn. App. 186, 189-90, 540 P.3d 439 (1975).

A similar result occurred in a civil case. The plaintiff was injured when a cable attached to a tree pulled the tree down onto him. The jury was instructed that the only question of negligence was whether the tree was of a sufficient size and strength to withstand the pull of the cable. The jury returned a verdict for the plaintiff. After trial, the defendant presented affidavits from five jurors. They said that the jury had not considered the size of the tree. Instead, the verdict was based on failure to warn. Under the instructions, this was not a proper basis for finding the defendant negligent. Nonetheless, the trial court denied a new trial, and the Supreme Court affirmed. Again, the affidavits could not be

considered because they inhered in the verdict. Ralton v. Sherwood Logging Co., 54 Wash. 254, 103 P 28 (1909).

These cases demonstrate that in *any* case that is properly submitted to a jury, the jurors have the *power* to ignore their instructions. So long as the evidence would *support* the necessary findings, courts will not inquire whether the jurors actually *made* those findings. The duty to convict ultimately rests within the jurors' conscience. But the same is true of the duty to acquit, or the duty to render a verdict for plaintiff or defendant in a civil case. In all such cases, the jurors can ignore their instructions and reach a verdict contrary to their findings, with no fear of adverse consequences.

In short, the State constitution imposes on judges the duty to "declare the law." Judges fulfill that duty by informing jurors of what facts must be proved to justify a particular verdict. The judges then tell jurors that they have a duty to reach an appropriate verdict in light of their determinations concerning those facts. These instructions properly reflect both the judge's duty to declare the law and the jury's duty to determine the facts. As all three Divisions of this court have recognized, such instructions are proper.

**IV. CONCLUSION**

The judgment and sentence should be affirmed.

Respectfully submitted on August 27, 2013.

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