

Five years' jail for Plutus conspirator

Tax fraud

David Marin-Guzman
Workplace correspondent

One of the key architects of one of the country's largest tax frauds has been sentenced to at least five years' prison after a judge declared it one of the most serious crimes ever to come before the courts.

The NSW Supreme Court ordered Plutus Payroll founder and CEO Simon Anquetil to spend seven years and six months in prison, five years without parole, for helping to mastermind the sophisticated three-year fraud that ripped off more than \$105 million.

Anquetil, 37, was at the foundational meeting that set up the tax fraud through the establishment of Plutus Payroll, which siphoned off at least \$105 million in pay-as-you-go tax and GST through a complicated network of companies from 2014 to 2017.

"The tax fraud conspiracy is objectively one of the most serious offences of its kind to come before a court in this country," Justice Anthony Payne said on Friday.

More than a dozen people were charged as part of the conspiracy and the judge found it involved a "very high level of sophistication, premeditation, planning and very significant degree of dishonesty".

Anquetil operated at the apex of it, he said, laundering \$28 million and receiving at least \$12 million.

Justice Payne said the scale of the fraud had both a financial and a "corrosive effect" on society and its effects had been exacerbated by a COVID-19-driven recession where calls on government services were as urgent as any time since the Great Depression.

"The injury suffered by this offending is a collective financial injury suffered by all Australians," he said.

"The loss to the Commonwealth of over \$100 million will need to be made up from additional taxes levied on other taxpayers or by cuts to government spending."

Anquetil's sentence is the highest so far in the conspiracy, following a three-year non-parole sentence for Plutus general manager Josh Kitson.



Simon Anquetil: motivated to "always have more". PHOTO: DOMINIC LORRIMER

However, he had faced a potentially much bigger prison sentence as a result of pleading guilty to both fraud and money laundering, which attract 10-year and 25-year maximum sentences respectively.

The judge reduced the sentence in part due to Anquetil's early guilty plea and because it would be "onerous" for him to be separated from his wife and child, particularly with the prison visitation restrictions due to COVID-19.

On Thursday, Anquetil had also written an apology letter to the judge for his role in the fraud.

"I was motivated by a desire to always have more: More success, more respect, more wealth," he said.

"I have lost the respect of so many and I have lost my wealth whilst irreversibly diminishing my ability to make wealth in the future."

According to the letter, the idea for Plutus was born while Anquetil was completing a teaching degree and after he had been battered by "a poor business partnership" that had forced him to move back home with his parents.

However, he said he now felt "deep regret that my actions have made it more difficult for the government to help the families who need it most".

Considering the letter and references going to his extensive contributions to charities and causes, Justice Payne was "cautiously optimistic" that Anquetil would not re-offend and he appeared to have adopted a different outlook in life.

The other alleged architects of the Plutus conspiracy have pleaded not guilty and are expected to face trial next year.

Naming and shaming can have career consequences for 'Karens'

Work Bad behaviour that goes viral can lead to the loss of your job.

Natasha Boddy

Karen Gately admits she found the initial memes involving her name quite hilarious, but she wonders if the joke has gone too far.

"I know a lot of Karens who are feeling quite challenged at the disrespect of using our names to describe behaviours that are really ordinary," said the HR specialist and founder of Corporate Dojo, whose name is pronounced "Car-in".

The moniker has dominated headlines this week after a video involving a woman later identified as Kerry Nash who refused to wear a mask at a Bunnings store in Melbourne's south-east went viral.

Before long, the woman was outed on social media as a former iSelect employee. After being tagged in several tweets, the company condemned her behaviour and said she had not worked for iSelect since December 2018.

At a time when campaigns such as Black Lives Matter and on LGBTIQ issues are driving public debate, the backlash from viral videos is often swift and far-reaching, especially for those in the eye of the "Karen" storm.

Earlier this year, New York-based Amy Cooper, who was dubbed Central Park Karen, was fired from her role at finance firm Franklin Templeton after she was filmed calling police on an African American man bird-watching, while Tennessee woman Sonya Holt also lost her job after she was filmed at a rally last month saying "white lives matter, white lives are better".

Experts say Australia's employment laws are very different from those of the US, where most sackings of this nature occur.

In an age where reputational risk is top of mind for many companies, viral videos and bad behaviour can nevertheless have incredibly damaging consequences on a person's career and job prospects, even decades on.

"The rise of social media has meant that any public bad behaviour can, and most likely will, go viral," said Sarah McCann-Bartlett, chief executive of the Australian HR Institute.

"Because of the accessibility of information online, a badly behaved employee is likely to be linked to their employer, which in turn can damage



Amy Cooper lost her job after calling the police on an African American man who asked her to restrain her dog in New York's Central Park. PHOTO: AP



Corporate Dojo founder Karen Gately, left, and Australian HR Institute CEO Sarah McCann-Bartlett say firms worry about brand damage from notorious employees.

the organisation's brand and reputation even if that behaviour was displayed outside of work."

Ms Gately and Greg Weiss, founder and director of Career365, agree.

"Management is going to look at somebody who behaves in a rogue manner [outside of work] and say 'does this person pose a reputational risk to us?'", Mr Weiss said.

Ms Gately said: "Everybody Googles nowadays, so that stuff definitely sticks. People do these things and then we crucify them, and their ability to recover their professional and personal reputation can obviously be seriously at risk."

Mr Weiss pointed to the case of a senior executive who was still paying the price a decade after they were dogged by bad publicity.

Professionals also need to aware of how social media posts can taint them in the eyes of potential employers.

"So if a 'Karen' is identified, it comes down to the values and the risk profile that potential employer has in deciding whether they're going to take on such an individual," Mr Weiss said.

The notoriety from a viral video can be a very high price to pay. "All of these people are being piled onto because they've behaved badly ... I really do fear for their mental health and safety," Ms Gately said.

Sign up for our Work & Careers newsletter at john.afr.com/workandcareers

▶ Weekend Fin p32

Get AFR Weekend delivered to your home.

From \$69 per month.

Enjoy AFR Weekend delivered to your home on Saturdays plus get unlimited afr.com access across your devices. Subscribe to the Premium Weekend package for only \$69 per month.

>> afr.com/delivery

FINANCIAL REVIEW
The Daily Habit Of Successful People