

Montreal lawyer found guilty of gangsterism

Paul Cherry

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Even lawyers are not above the law.

That is the message prosecutor Madeleine Giauque said she hoped has been sent after a Montreal lawyer was found guilty Friday of gangsterism, or committing a crime for the benefit of a criminal organization, in a verdict believed to be a first in Canada.

Louis Pasquin, 49, was also found guilty of conspiring to traffick cocaine, which carries a maximum life sentence, and two counts of drug trafficking.

The diminutive lawyer appeared to sink into his chair at the Montreal courthouse as he awaited a date for sentencing arguments. With his arms crossed, Pasquin seemed tense when Giauque asked that he and two other men convicted of similar charges Friday be taken into custody immediately. But Quebec Court Judge Carol St. Cyr said bail should apply until they are sentenced.



Defence Lawyer Louis Pasquin arrives at the Montreal Courthouse Friday, prior to being convicted of gangsterism, probably the first for such conviction for a lawyer in Canada. Pasquin, 49, was caught on wiretaps and in police surveillance allowing major drug dealers to use his house for meetings.

Photograph by: Marcos Townsend, The Gazette

Pasquin, a member of the Quebec Bar Association since 1987, is facing the real possibility of a lengthy prison term.

However, Giauque appeared satisfied with the broader victory when she spoke to reporters outside the courtroom.

"I think lawyers are not above the law," she said. "They are citizens like everyone else. But we can't take from this decision that all lawyers take part in dishonest practices. It is not the majority. Very much to the contrary."

St. Cyr had been deliberating since June after hearing a complicated trial featuring hundreds of wiretapped conversations collected during Project Piranha, a Sûreté du Québec investigation.

The police targeted Louis Alain Dauphin, 56, a well-connected drug trafficker with a penchant for fancy cars, and his vast network of dealers and customers around Montreal. He is serving the equivalent of a nine-year prison term after pleading guilty in 2007 to the same charges Pasquin was convicted of.

Before his arrest, Dauphin was considered one of the biggest drug dealers in the lower Laurentians. He was friendly with some members of the Hells Angels and supplied kilos of cocaine to them, but was independent of the biker gang.

Pasquin was careful when he spoke on the phone to Dauphin and a few of the other people arrested in Piranha in March 2006. When considered on their own, his conversations were not incriminating, but the investigation revealed Pasquin was acting as a middleman for Dauphin and Michael Russell, 63, a Toronto pilot who is alleged to have flown kilos of cocaine from British Columbia to Montreal on a regular basis in 2005.

(To make sure attorney-client privilege wasn't violated during the wiretapping of Pasquin's phones, SQ investigators had to obtain a special warrant. They were not allowed to listen to the recordings until a judge vetted them.)

Russell, who has yet to be tried, stayed at Pasquin's former home in Lachanaie whenever he flew in.

On wiretaps, he often referred to Pasquin's house as "the office."

Pasquin's position during the trial was that he had a professional relationship with Dauphin and his wife and they eventually became friends.

His lawyer, Pierre Panaccio, offered this as an explanation of their frequent telephone conversations. Pasquin also claimed Russell was dating his sister in 2005 when he let the pilot stay at his house.

St. Cyr simply didn't believe Pasquin's version of events.

"Seen in the light of the entirety of the proof presented, it doesn't stand up to analysis, is unbelievable and not credible," St. Cyr wrote.

For several weeks at the end of the summer of 2005, Dauphin's cocaine deals went smoothly. But things fell apart on Oct. 13, 2005, when the SQ seized more than 50 kilograms of cocaine from two of his couriers.

Dauphin found himself in financial trouble and sought new ways to finance future drug purchases.

During the trial, the Crown argued Pasquin's role evolved as he became part of negotiations while Dauphin tried to operate without cash.

Sentencing arguments are to begin on April 23.