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Hard-won victories for Cathay's pilots, flight attendants

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Two former employees at Cathay Pacific could not be happier after scoring victories in court against the airline that ended long-running labour disputes.

Retired in-flight services manager Becky Kwan Siu-wa and ex-pilot John Warham, a former president of the Hong Kong Aircrew Officers Association, were among those awarded damages for unfair policies by Cathay, in two separate judgments.

In Kwan's case, the Court of Final Appeal ruled that certain allowances should be considered in calculating the holiday pay of cabin crew. Kwan estimated she would be entitled to about HK\$100,000 in compensation.

She won her appeal along with flight attendants Jenny Ho Kit-man and Vera Wu Yee-mej, who lodged a labour complaint four years ago.

Meanwhile, Cathay will have to pay HK\$850,000 in damages to each of the 18 pilots, including Warham, that it sacked in 2001 over their industrial action.

Collectively known as the Cathay Pacific "49ers", the pilots were fired during an industrial dispute in 2001 concerning pay and working hours.

"It was great that we both [flight attendants and pilots] received such favourable verdicts at the same time, as everyone supported each other in the two cases," Kwan said. "We had a lot of solidarity and it was a perfect ending after what was a long battle for everyone involved."

Following years of bitter wrangling, Cathay now stands to pay out hundreds of millions of dollars in compensation.

Warham, who now works as a flight simulator instructor, said justice had finally been served.

"I feel vindicated. What we've shown is that people can take on these huge corporate entities and beat them," he said. "We've shown them up for what they are - unethical and immoral."

