

Donations rise for sacked pilots after Cathay 'hit list' circulated

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A legal fighting fund for sacked Cathay Pacific pilots has seen a surge in donations following the circulation of a "hit list" of other cockpit crew considered for dismissal during a bitter dispute in 2001.

Tens of thousands of dollars have been donated to the unofficial Cathay Pilots Union in the two months since it circulated the full list of 195 names, from which the 49 sacked pilots were selected by a management committee nicknamed the "Star Chamber".

Among the 100 named pilots who are still serving are a deputy chief Boeing pilot and a number of senior training captains, none of whom knew they had been singled out for possible dismissal.

The list was leaked to the union by former management pilot Ian Wilkinson, a "Star Chamber" member, after he was forced to resign following a low-flying stunt he performed while taking delivery of a Boeing 777 in January. The Cathay Pilots Union, which was formed to continue the legal battle of the so-called "49ers" after their cases were dropped by the official Aircrew Officers' Association, e-mailed out the list with an appeal for donations.

The e-mail read: "Look at the list. You're on it.

"It could have been you. You escaped termination but you could have been one of those selected to have your career destroyed. You could so very easily have been a 49er."

A senior source within the Cathay Pilots Union, who did not want to be named, said: "The response has been extremely good. We've had several tens of thousands of dollars already donated and more money pledged to the cause.

"The pilot community within Cathay was surprised and agitated by the hit list's circulation.

"It was a disturbing reminder of how bad industrial relations were at that time and the unfairness of what happened to the 49ers." Most of the donations had come from pilots who were still with Cathay Pacific.

"One of them wrote and said, 'I always suspected I was on the hit list but it makes a difference when you see your name in black and white'," the source

said. The donations will support an unfair-dismissal hearing due to go before the High Court next year on behalf of 16 of the 49ers.

The action seeks reinstatement or sizeable compensation for the sacked pilots.

A Cathay spokeswoman declined to comment on the donations. However, she reiterated that the airline did not believe the circulation of the list had affected staff morale.

A management source said: "All of this happened a long time ago and everyone involved has moved on since then. This list is a historical document now. If you look closely at the list, you will see that there are some very senior serving pilots on it, and being there hasn't held them back in their careers in any way."