

Cathay in \$7.6m payout to pilots

Eighteen former Cathay Pacific pilots have been awarded \$7.6m for unfair dismissal by a Hong Kong court.

They were fired during a labour dispute eight years ago, when they started a work-to-rule campaign.

The plaintiffs said pilots were often made to fly longer than agreed hours, with not enough breaks between flights.

A Cathay spokesman said the airline was disappointed with some aspects of the judgement and had not yet decided whether to appeal.

'Strong signal'

The airline said it was dismissing them for frequent sick days and a negative attitude towards management. Judge Ansemolo Reyes said that "the predominant reason for the plaintiffs' termination by Cathay was their perceived participation in union activities".

The 18 pilots were among a group of 49, known as the 49ers, who were fired. The other 31 pilots also sued, but settled with the company.

The judge added: "By dismissing them, Cathay hoped to send a strong signal to other union members to comply with management's line or else face a similar fate as the 49ers."

He also ruled that the pilots were defamed by the company's statements.

Seventeen of the 18 plaintiffs were each awarded HK\$150,000 (\$19,350) for unfair dismissal, a month's pay for wrongful termination and HK\$3.3m (\$425,800) in defamation damages.

The 18th pilot died in 2002.

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