

Revealed: the pilots on Cathay hit list

195 jobs at risk in 2001 dispute

Simon Parry

Updated on Oct 08, 2008

A secret "hit list" of nearly 200 pilots whom Cathay Pacific considered sacking during its bitter 2001 dispute with cockpit crew has been leaked and circulated among staff.

The list - which came from a member of the panel of Cathay executives and management pilots who decided which pilots to sack - includes the 49 pilots dismissed during the dispute, along with about 100 pilots still with the airline.

Cathay Pacific, which said yesterday it believed the list was genuine, had never acknowledged that it had a shortlist of out-of-favour pilots ahead of the sackings in July 2001.

The list has now been lodged as additional evidence in the High Court for a forthcoming action for unfair dismissal by 16 of the sacked pilots known as the 49ers, which is expected to be heard early next year.

A Cathay spokeswoman confirmed the list was believed to be genuine but said: "We will continue to robustly defend ourselves in any forthcoming proceedings as we have done in the past. We stand by all the evidence we have given in past proceedings."

On the list - originally distributed among the 20-plus members of the "Star Chamber" who picked the final 49 to be sacked - each pilot is given a score ranging from two to seven.

The score is based on criteria such as whether they called in sick at short notice and whether or not they attended a management lunch meeting after their union advised them not to.

The list was e-mailed yesterday to all 195 pilots on the list by the breakaway Cathay Pilots Union, which is backing continuing legal action against the airline by those 49ers who have not settled their cases.

In a circular to members, the union claims that the list proves that Cathay deliberately targeted Aircrew Officers Association members in the 2001 sackings.

Cathay executives have claimed in tribunal hearings and interviews that the 49ers were selected after the employment records of all 1,500 serving pilots were scrutinised during the two-day sitting of the "Star Chamber".

According to union sources, "Star Chamber" members were under strict instructions not to take any copies of the "hit list" out of the room at Cathay City where they held the talks in 2001.

The list contains 184 pilots, with 11 more names added in handwriting at the bottom under the heading "Crew Control List". All 11 were sacked.

The "Star Chamber" went through the rest of the list one by one, with members asked to speak out in favour of any pilot whose job should be saved. If no one did, the pilot's fate was sealed, a union source said.

The list sent out to pilots yesterday includes pencil marks made by the person who leaked it of "OK" or "X" next to each name.

A letter sent out with copies of the "hit list" appeals to the pilots to give financial support to the fight of the 49ers, no longer supported by the Aircrew Officers Association. The Cathay Pilots Union was formed in response to the association's decision to halt funding for their legal cases.

"Look at the list. You're on it. It could have been you," says the letter, which carries the name of the plaintiffs in the action, expected to proceed next year. "You escaped termination but you could have been one of those selected to have your career destroyed."

Asked how the release of the list might affect morale, the Cathay spokeswoman said: "All Cathay employees including pilots are evaluated on their performance based on merits. If any employee has concerns about their careers, there are many communication channels."

A Cathay management source, speaking on condition of anonymity, said: "All of this happened in 2001. It's now 2008. We have been working with the pilots, including some of the 49ers who have been hired back, over the years. As far as we're concerned, this is a red herring."

Star Chamber Hit List

Dear X

We are writing to you personally to seek your financial support for The 49ers' legal cases. Why are we doing that? Please read on.

Recently, a document has come to light that previously had been deliberately kept hidden and, moreover, its very existence denied. The document is the "hit list" that was used by management at the meetings held in July 2001 to decide which pilots were to be sacked.