

Beer girls triumph as payment promised

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and Vincent McIsaac

ANGKOR Beer promoters, who had been striking against Cambrew for unpaid overtime and respect, have won their battle. Each will receive retroactive overtime pay totalling as much as US\$320, following intervention by city officials, the president of the union representing them said yesterday.

Phnom Penh deputy governor Pa Socheatvong reached an agreement with the women about half way through a two-hour meeting yesterday afternoon, said Mora Sar, president of the Cambodia Food Workers' Federation.

The deputy governor will now urge the company to honour a July ruling by the Arbitration Council that called on Cambrew to adhere to labour laws and pay its beer promoters US\$2 overtime on Sundays, Mora Sar said. The

council's ruling was retroactive for three years.

The city will pay the beer promoters for the overtime they are owed if Cambrew is slow to pay, Mora Sar added. He said city officials said they intervened in the strike because it was affecting public order and also said that the deputy governor told the women yesterday that "the company needs to follow the law".

Beer promoter Oum Thavy said she was happy with the city's offer, but added that the payment was not the issue.

"The money is not important for the company and it is not important to me. I want the company to respect the law and the women who promote its brands. Even though we work for the company we have rights," she said.

Mora Sar said yesterday's agreement opened the door for the estimated 1,000 beer promoters who work for Cambrew to file complaints for unpaid overtime. "In fact, the



Angkor Beer promoters protest outside the Cambrew headquarters in Phnom Penh last month. PHALINA

company owes them money back to 1997 when the labour law required double pay for overtime," he said.

The strike began on July

25 when 34 beer promoters began protesting in front of Cambrew's headquarters on Norodom Boulevard.

The women suspended their strike for one week last Thursday after Pa Socheatvong agreed to mediate. Their strike drew support from Cambodian unions who

threatened to boycott Angkor Beer. They were followed by Danish and international unions, who pressured Carlsberg, which owns half of Cambrew, to settle the strike over \$2 of daily overtime.

The boycott of Cambrew products saw some bars in Phnom Penh stop serving its products. Garage bar, which is located along the river-side, stopped serving Cambrew products to support the strike. "Beer girls are among the most exploited workers in Cambodia," its owner explained. "My staff and I wanted to show our support."

Mora Sar said yesterday's victory would boost the confidence of the Kingdom's estimated 4,000 beer promoters.

"It's only the second time they won," he said, referring to a strike last year when they protested to have fired colleagues reinstated. Cambrew and Carlsberg declined to comment. ADDITIONAL REPORTING

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