

Once again, on the rush to judgment in the crash of EgyptAir Flight 990

Jerry White
19 February 2000

In light of the events surrounding the Alaska Airlines crash it is worthwhile to reexamine the case of EgyptAir Flight 990, which plunged into the Atlantic Ocean last October 31, killing 217 people.

Based on the information released to the public so far, there does not appear to be the same type of overwhelming evidence of mechanical failure in the EgyptAir crash as exists in the case of Alaska Airlines Flight 261. Nevertheless, the revelations that have emerged in the wake of the Alaska Airlines disaster about the state of airline safety make all the more dubious the hasty efforts of US investigators and government officials, backed by the media, to rule out mechanical failure in the EgyptAir tragedy.

Less than three weeks after that crash, and prior to the recovery of the vast bulk of the Boeing 767 wreckage, including such critical sections as the cockpit, National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) investigators indicated they had concluded the disaster was the result of sabotage. NTSB Chairman Jim Hall broadly hinted that the investigation would be handed over to the FBI.

On the basis of flight data recordings, including a voice reciting an Islamic saying shortly before the automatic pilot was disengaged, investigators suggested the copilot had deliberately thrown the plane into a dive in an act of suicide and mass murder. Despite a scarcity of evidence to support this theory, the American media presented it virtually as fact.

The unstated assumption of the NTSB investigators was: in the absence of immediate, clear and overwhelming evidence of mechanical failure, the cause of such disasters must be human error or criminal intent. They were obviously disposed to take as a given the premise that commercial jets are safe, and there is little likelihood of mechanical failure.

In the wake of the Alaskan Airlines crash, it is

obvious that such a blanket assumption is not warranted. What has come to light—evidence of widespread mechanical problems, lack of proper maintenance by the airlines, government laxity in enforcing safety standards—all lends weight to the arguments of the *World Socialist Web Site* and others that investigators initially jumped to premature and questionable conclusions in the EgyptAir case.

The possibility that one of the crew members was responsible for the crash cannot be ruled out. But it is also too early, from the standpoint of what has been revealed to the public, to rule out mechanical failure.

It would be the height of naiveté, or something less innocent, to pretend that business interests do not impinge on the way crashes are investigated and reported to the public. In the case of EgyptAir, tremendous pressure was undoubtedly exerted on investigators to reach a conclusion that would exonerate Boeing, the American manufacturer of the plane, and place the entire blame on the airline, which happens to be foreign-owned.



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact