

Amid new revelations of criminality, US Senate seeks to rehabilitate Boeing

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Amid new whistleblower revelations of Boeing's systematic sacrifice of passenger safety to boost profits, the Democratic-controlled Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations held a hearing Tuesday aimed at rehabilitating the mega-corporation and military contractor.

It has been more than five years since a total of 346 men, women and children died in two separate crashes, just months apart, of Boeing 737 MAX 8 aircraft caused by a defective automated "anti-stall" system that the company knew to be potentially deadly. There have been no criminal prosecutions of the company or its executives.

Instead, in keeping with the modus operandi of capitalism and the rule of the corporate-financial oligarchy, Boeing has been allowed to continue violating federal safety regulations and cutting production corners in order to boost its bottom line and shore up its stock price.

In January, an Alaska Airlines Boeing 737 MAX 9 flight narrowly escaped disaster when a door plug on the fuselage blew out shortly after takeoff. It turned out that the supplier company had failed to bolt the door plug.

That debacle has since been followed by a string of safety failures and near crashes, ranging from landing gears and wing panels falling off during takeoff or in flight, to an onboard fire that aborted a takeoff, to unexplained rocking motions in flight that panicked passengers and caused injuries.

A series of whistleblowers have come forward to denounce the company for ignoring production standards in order to increase output and for threatening or exacting retaliation for their efforts to uphold legal requirements.

In advance of Tuesday's hearing, the Senate subcommittee issued a statement citing new complaints from a quality assurance investigator at Boeing's plant in Renton, Washington. It said:

New whistleblower and current Boeing employee Sam Mohawk alleges that Boeing is improperly documenting, tracking, and storing parts that are damaged or otherwise out of specification, and that those parts are likely being installed on airplanes. ... Mohawk has also alleged that he has been told by his supervisors to conceal evidence from the FAA, and that he is being retaliated against as a result.

Since January, two Boeing whistleblowers have died under mysterious circumstances, with very little attention paid by the media. In March, John Barnett, who had been fired from his job as a quality manager at Boeing's South Carolina plant for exposing safety violations on the company's 787 Dreamliner project, was found dead in his rented car before the final day of a three-day deposition in his civil suit against the company.

The Charleston County Coroner's Office immediately ruled that his death was the result of a "self-inflicted gunshot wound," without making public any evidence. Shortly thereafter, a family friend quoted Barnett as telling her, "If anything happens to me, it's not suicide."

Two months later, whistleblower Joshua Dean suddenly died after going public with charges of "serious and gross misconduct by senior quality management of the 737 production line."

Tuesday's Senate hearing was stage-managed to give the appearance of what the subcommittee chairman, Richard Blumenthal (Democrat-Connecticut), called a "reckoning" for Boeing and the featured witness, CEO David Calhoun.

Relatives of passengers killed in the 737 MAX 8 crashes were in the audience, holding posters with photos of their dead loved ones, as were family members of John Barnett. In opening the hearing, Blumenthal addressed both groups.

Significantly, Blumenthal categorically called Barnett's death a suicide.

Calhoun began his remarks by turning to the family members in the chamber and apologizing for their loss. Asked to comment by Blumenthal, he also expressed his "horror" at the death of Barnett.

Anti-Gaza genocide protesters present in the chamber were simply ignored by committee members on both sides of the aisle.

There were criticisms directed at Calhoun from politicians of both parties, but the entire procedure was a charade. Blumenthal called for a new management team to restore the company's credibility. "We're here because we want Boeing to succeed," he said, adding, in reference to Boeing's McDonnell Douglas division, "for the sake of our military."

Nothing was said, of course, about the irrational and anti-social essence of a key component of public transportation being in the hands of private bosses, themselves beholden to multitrillion-dollar banks and hedge funds.

Dennis Muilenberg, who was CEO when the 737 MAX 8 was launched, made \$80 million during his tenure, or more than \$231,000 for each person who died in the two MAX crashes. His successor, Calhoun, has made more than \$76 million since 2021.

The *Seattle Times* reported that from 2014 to 2018, "Boeing diverted 92 percent of operating cash flow for dividends and share buybacks to benefit investors."

Such levels of financial parasitism go hand in hand with criminality and militarism and are incompatible with democracy. It is the working class that pays for the bankruptcy of a system based on the private monopolization of the means of production, nationalism and war, and the subordination of all social needs to corporate profit-making and the personal enrichment of an oligarchic elite.

Socialist Equality Party presidential candidate Joseph Kishore issued a statement on X Tuesday evening on the hearings. "The basic issue," he wrote, "which of course none of the assembled senators would speak of, is the subordination of such a basic social need as travel to private profit.

He continued:

Calhoun and other executives are paid tens of millions, hundreds of millions, or, in the case of Elon Musk, \$45 billion, to ensure the endless flow of profits to top investors. As with almost all major companies, among Boeing's investors are top private equity funds like BlackRock and Vanguard, that control trillions of dollars.

Kishore added:

The entire transportation system, along with other critical social infrastructure—healthcare, education, housing, energy, etc.—must be operated on the basis of social need, not private profit. Only in this way can workers be guaranteed the basic rights essential to modern society, including the right to safe travel.

The mass killers who control Boeing must be held accountable and brought to justice. But this is inseparable from a united and international offensive of the working class against the capitalist system itself.

The starting point is the expropriation of the capitalist owners of Boeing and the entire transportation industry and the transformation of aircraft production into a public utility under the democratic control of the working class.



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