

Fallout continues from beating of United Airlines passenger David Dao

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Public anger around the world has continued to grow following the wide circulation on social media of videos showing police brutalizing a 69-year-old doctor, David Dao, and dragging him from a United Airlines flight last Sunday.

Highlighting the viciousness of Dao's beating and removal from the plane, his representatives revealed at a press conference Thursday that the doctor had sustained significant injuries, including a concussion, a broken nose, the loss of two front teeth and a sinus injury.

"I would defy anyone to suggest that there was not unreasonable force and violence used to help Dr. Dao disembark that plane," said his lawyer, Thomas Demetrio. Dao's attorneys indicated that he might file suit against both United and the city of Chicago. They filed court papers at a Cook County court Wednesday requesting the city and airline preserve all surveillance footage, cockpit recordings, passenger lists and police reports.

The incident was touched off last Sunday when the airline ordered Dao and three other passengers to leave the plane, scheduled to depart from Chicago's O'Hare International Airport, first claiming the flight was overbooked and later stating that room was needed to transport four crew members. Dao had a paid ticket, and said he needed to see patients the next day along with his wife, who is also a doctor and with whom he was travelling. When Dao refused to leave, United called police on board the plane, who proceeded to violently remove Dao.

Several smartphone videos captured the brutal treatment of Dao and the horrified response of other passengers, many of whom loudly protested the actions of the airline and the police.

Dr. Dao's daughter, Crystal Pepper Dao, said at the

news conference, "What happened to my dad should never happen to any human being regardless of the circumstances."

The initial response to the incident by company spokesmen and United's CEO, Oscar Munoz, sought to downplay its significance and contrasted starkly with the events depicted in the video, only fueling more outrage among millions fed up with the degrading and humiliating treatment by the major airlines and airport security. In Orwellian language, Munoz himself initially apologized for having to "reaccommodate" passengers. In a letter to United employees, however, he attacked Dao as "disruptive and belligerent," and defended the decision to have police remove him from the plane.

Belatedly realizing the scale of anger internationally (nearly half a billion people have viewed the video in China alone) and hemorrhaging of hundreds of millions of dollars in stock value, the company has scrambled in subsequent days to carry out damage control.

On Tuesday, Munoz released a thoroughly unconvincing statement feigning contrition for Dao's abuse, saying, "The truly horrific event that occurred on this flight has elicited many responses from all of us: outrage, anger, disappointment. I share all of those sentiments, and one above all: my deepest apologies for what happened... I want you to know that we take full responsibility and we will work to make it right."

Desperately seeking to stem the PR fallout, United reportedly offered compensation to other passengers on the flight. Munoz also claimed that United would no longer use police to remove passengers from their flights—unless it is a matter of "safety and security," rendering the commitment meaningless.

Accounts from passengers have pointed to a pattern by United of forcing ticketholders from flights

involuntarily, whether because a flight was overbooked or to make room for flight crew or VIPs. According to a 2016 PBS *Newshour* report, the airline had the highest rate of “involuntarily” bumped flyers, at 11 per 100,000.

A *Los Angeles Times* columnist reported multiple instances of passengers being asked to leave a flight: one in which a family that had been flying standby was asked to get off to make room for CEO Munoz and his family, and another in which a man was threatened with handcuffs unless he gave up his first-class ticket to another who was deemed “higher priority” by the airline.

Politicians from both big-business parties have also attempted to head off popular discontent touched off by the Dao beating, posturing as morally outraged at the incident.

Sean Spicer, President Trump’s press secretary, called the event “troubling” in semi-incoherent remarks, saying, “I think clearly watching another human being dragged down an aisle, watching, you know, blood come from their face after hitting an armrest or whatever, I don’t think there’s a circumstance that you can sit back and say this probably could have been handled a little bit better [sic].”

The heads of the US Senate Commerce Committee released a letter to the airline and Chicago’s Department of Aviation Wednesday, saying that United’s explanation “has been unsatisfactory, and appears to underestimate the public anger about this incident.”

In Chicago, Democratic Mayor Rahm Emanuel, infamous for his role in the cover-up of the police murder of black teenager Laquan McDonald, fretted over this latest viral video of state violence, declaring for what seemed like the hundredth time that there would be a “thorough investigation” to “ensure nothing like this ever happens again.”

The City Council, concerned about the potential loss of tourism revenue, held a hearing with the Commissioner of Aviation Thursday. Alderman Michael Zalewski, chairman of the council’s aviation committee, said the event had given O’Hare Airport a “black eye.”

Zalewski revealed that the Aviation Department police may not have even been legally allowed on the

plane, saying, “They are allowed in the terminal and baggage area, but my understanding is they may not be allowed on a plane.” He added that he wasn’t sure the airport cops were even allowed to make arrests, or only issue tickets. The Aviation Department announced Wednesday that it had placed two additional officers involved in the incident on administrative leave.

Despite the mutual handwringing of the major political parties, they have both been complicit in the decades-long processes of industry deregulation, attacks on airline workers and the annulment of constitutional rights at US airports, which converged in Dao’s assault.

An examination of Federal Election Committee data published by the Center for Responsive Politics shows both parties have received lucrative handouts from United Airlines, which, like many other corporate behemoths, makes sure to purchase bipartisan favor.

In 2001, the Bush administration and Congress handed the airline industry \$15 billion after the 9-11 attacks. Eighty percent of the bailout went to the nine largest commercial carriers with United Airlines receiving the biggest slice of \$644 million.

While United has sought to pad its bottom line by implementing overbooking, baggage fees, smaller seats and other cost-cutting measures, which make flying a dreaded experience for many—if they can afford it at all—it has also manipulated the tax system to great advantage, with the full complicity of the political establishment. In 2015, the company reported a \$4.7 billion tax write-off due to losses in previous years, wiping out its tax bill of \$1.5 billion and boosting its net income from \$4.5 billion to \$7.3 billion.



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