

One year since the first Boeing 737 Max 8 crash

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On Friday, the National Transportation Safety Committee of Indonesia released its final report on the crash of Lion Air Flight 610, a Boeing 737 Max 8 aircraft that plunged into the Java Sea 13 minutes after takeoff from Jakarta, killing all 189 passengers and crew. The 322-page document, released almost exactly a year after the October 29, 2018 disaster, is an exhaustive and damning indictment of the design of the jet by Boeing and its certification by the US Federal Aviation Administration (FAA).

The report also comes seven months after the second crash of a Boeing 737 Max 8, Ethiopian Airlines Flight 302, which dove into the ground about six minutes after taking off from Addis Ababa, killing the 157 men, women and children on board. In total, the two crashes killed 346 people on a plane Boeing supposedly made to be “one of the safest airplanes ever to fly.” To date, no Boeing executives have been arrested, much less prosecuted, for pushing the deadly jet into service.

It is now officially confirmed that the immediate cause of the Lion Air crash was a previously little-known piece of software called the Maneuvering Characteristics Augmentation System (MCAS). It was installed by Boeing to compensate for the Max 8’s tendency to stall, a byproduct of attaching a newer, larger engine onto the half-century-old Boeing 737 chassis. The report explicitly notes that the aerospace giant used an old airframe in order to save time and money developing an airplane that did not have “significant areas of change at the product level,” and used MCAS to ensure that there would not be “a simulator training requirement for pilots.”

These decisions were driven entirely by considerations of profit, stock value and market share, rather than safety. Boeing was in a competitive race against its European-based rival Airbus to maintain and

strengthen its dominance of the market for short- and mid-range aircraft, particularly in the rapidly expanding Asian market. Airbus had a one-year jump over Boeing in the development and production of its new plane, the A320neo aircraft.

Boeing promoted its Max 8 version of the 737 to potential airline customers largely on the basis of the claim that it was cheaper to purchase and put into operation because it required virtually no additional training for pilots with previous 737 flight experience.

The giant defense contractor and commercial aircraft maker rushed the new model into service as part of a cost-cutting drive under CEO Dennis Muilenburg that had already entailed nearly 16,000 job cuts. Wall Street rewarded Boeing with a near-quadrupling of its stock price and record profits.

That regulations even exist allowing a company to introduce a new airplane while requiring only minimal pilot training speaks to the complicity of the FAA and the trade unions with the corporations. Both were aware of and made no significant protest against Boeing’s one-hour online training course for the Max 8, when it normally takes weeks of training on a flight simulator to bring pilots up to speed to fly new aircraft.

They were also aware that this could prove fatal. In a recent *New York Times* article, The Professional Aviation Safety Specialists union, which represents workers at the FAA, reportedly told Congress in 2016 that as a result of the further deregulation of the airline industry, the government would be able to intercede in problems with an aircraft only “after an accident has happened and people are killed.”

Not only did Democratic and Republican lawmakers, including House Transportation Subcommittee Chairman Peter DeFazio (Democrat from Oregon), do nothing, they have since passed the FAA

Reauthorization Act, which came into force only a few weeks before the Indonesia crash. It gives Boeing and other airplane manufacturers even more freedom from oversight than at the time the Max 8 was approved.

The Boeing 737 Max was particularly attractive to companies like Lion Air, which are relatively new in the international airline industry and have from the beginning based themselves on keeping aircraft, training and maintenance costs as low as possible. As was noted in the crash report, the airline cut corners wherever it could, including by installing a misaligned sensor onto the Max 8 that crashed.

This was aided and abetted by Boeing, which sold the airline a Max 8 variant that did not include a safety warning that would have informed pilots about the incorrect sensor and, by all indications, given them the information they needed to regain control over the aircraft after MCAS started forcing it to dive.

The predatory attitude Boeing has toward regional airlines is a symptom not merely of corporate greed, but the end result of the capitalist system itself, which subordinates all social needs to private profit. It points to the basic antagonism between the interests of society, including safe, efficient and inexpensive air travel, and the private ownership of basic industries, as well as the division of the world economy among rival nation states. The same basic contradictions of capitalism are fueling the geopolitical and economic conflicts that threaten nuclear war and ecological disasters.

The criminally negligent handling of the Max 8 is the outcome of decades of deregulation at the hands of both big-business parties. The process was launched at the end of the 1970s by Democrat Jimmy Carter with his 1978 Airline Deregulation Act, and championed by Alfred Kahn, the chairman of the since disbanded Civil Aeronautics Board (CAB), and Senator Edward Kennedy. They gutted the CAB, which had until that time treated commercial flight as a regulated public utility, setting routes, schedules and fares.

They also plotted to smash the PATCO air traffic controllers union, plans that were executed in 1981 by Carter's successor, Ronald Reagan, with the help of the Democratic-controlled Congress, ushering in the social counterrevolution that has continued ever since.

The only way to prevent further disasters is to take the profit motive out of commercial flight, end the

dominance of Wall Street and replace the anarchy of the capitalist market with a rationally planned and internationally organized system of air transport. This requires the nationalization of the airline and aerospace companies and their transformation into publicly owned and democratically controlled utilities.



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