

Boeing 787 jet nosedives, injuring 50 people on a flight from Australia to New Zealand

Kevin Reed
12 March 2024

On Monday, a Boeing 787-9 Dreamliner operated by Chile-based LATAM Airlines dropped suddenly midflight from Sydney, Australia to Auckland, New Zealand, injuring 50 people on board.

The flight, with 263 passengers and nine crew members, dipped dramatically into a nosedive for a couple of seconds and caused unbelted passengers to slam into the ceiling of the cabin. After stabilizing, the flight continued for another hour while the injured were tended to by doctors among the passengers on board.

After the Boeing jet touched down in Auckland, the passengers were met by paramedics and more than 10 emergency vehicles. Most of the injured were treated at the scene, while 13 people were taken to a hospital for treatment. One passenger was reported to be in serious condition.

Passenger Brian Jokat told the BBC, “The plane, unannounced, just dropped. I mean it dropped unlike anything I’ve ever experienced on any kind of minor turbulence, and people were thrown out of their seats, hit the top of the roof of the plane, throwing down the aisles.”

Jokat also told broadcaster RNZ that one passenger two seats away from him was not wearing a seatbelt when the plane dropped. Having dozed off, Jokat said, “I thought I was dreaming. I opened my eyes, and he was on the roof of the plane on his back, looking down on me. It was like *The Exorcist*.”

The LATAM Flight 800 was scheduled to continue on to Santiago, Chile, with a different plane. The airline released a statement saying, “LATAM regrets the inconvenience and injury this situation may have caused its passengers and reiterates its commitment to safety as a priority within the framework of its operational standards.” The airline company also referred to the incident as “a technical event during the flight which caused a strong movement.”

The midair nosedive and injury of passengers between Australia and New Zealand is the latest in a series of events on jets designed and manufactured by Boeing. There were four serious air safety incidents on United Airlines flights with Boeing planes last week.

These episodes took place two months after the midair door plug blowout on a Boeing 737-MAX plane operated by Alaska Airlines which is likely the result of unsafe maintenance procedures at the passenger jet manufacturer’s Renton, Washington, production facility.

On Monday, the *New York Times* reported that a six-week audit by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) of the Renton operation had found dozens of problems in Boeing’s manufacturing process, as well as that of a key supplier, Spirit AeroSystems.

While the FAA had itself reported last week that there were “multiple instances” in which Boeing and Spirit AeroSystems had failed to comply with quality control requirements, the agency did not provide any specifics.

The *Times* report said that a slide presentation it had obtained “offers a more detailed picture of what the audit turned up.” The FAA conducted 89 product audits that examined the production process, and it failed 33 of these. There were “a total of 97 instances of alleged noncompliance, according to the presentation,” the *Times* report said.

Among the product audits were 13 conducted at Spirit AeroSystems—the company assembles the fuselage of the Boeing 737 MAX planes at its plant in Wichita, Kansas—in which it failed seven of these examinations. The *Times* reported that in one instance, Spirit mechanics used “a hotel key card to check a door seal,” and another instance where mechanics applied Dawn soap to a door seal “as a lubricant in the fit up process.”

Most of the failures found by the auditors were instances where “approved manufacturing process, procedure or instruction” were not being followed. Other

issues dealt with maintenance of quality control documentation.

FAA administrator Mike Whitaker told the news media on Monday, “It wasn’t just paperwork issues, and sometimes it’s the order that work is done. Sometimes it’s tool management—it sounds kind of pedestrian, but it’s really important in a factory that you have a way of tracking tools effectively so that you have the right tool, and you know you didn’t leave it behind. So, it’s really plant floor hygiene, if you will, and a variety of issues of that nature.”

The comments from Whitaker, as well as the FAA findings at Boeing and Spirit, are plainly outrageous for their nonchalance and carelessness in the life-and-death matters related to aircraft manufacturing and safety of the traveling public, which depends on airplanes that are free from blowouts, sudden nose dives and crashes that kill everyone on board.

Two Boeing 737 MAX jets suddenly went into nose dives and crashed in Indonesia in 2018 and in Ethiopia in 2019 and killed all 346 passengers and crew members. These tragedies were caused by new automated navigation equipment on the planes that had not been adequately identified and pilots and staff inadequately trained for by Boeing.

The matter of safe manufacturing processes was very much on the mind of whistleblower John Barnett, 62, of Louisiana, who worked at Boeing for more than three decades. Beginning in 2017, Barnett began warning aviation authorities that Boeing was engaged in “catastrophic” safety failings.

On Monday, officials in Charleston, South Carolina, said that Barnett was found dead “from what appears to be a self-inflicted gunshot wound.” Members of Barnett’s family issued a statement saying that he had tried to highlight serious concerns but was met with “a culture of concealment” that valued “profits over safety.”

Barnett was in Charleston to give deposition testimony in his federal legal action against Boeing with the case scheduled to come before an administrative law judge in June. His lawyers Brian Knowles and Robert Turkiewitz issued a joint statement on Tuesday, saying, “He was in very good spirits and really looking forward to putting this phase of his life behind him and moving on. We didn’t see any indication he would take his own life. No one can believe it.”

The lawyers called for a thorough investigation into Barnett’s death, stating, “We need more information about what happened to John. The Charleston police need

to investigate this fully and accurately and tell the public what they find out. No detail can be left unturned.” So far, the Charleston police officials are maintaining that there are no indications of “foul play” in the case.

Interviewed by the *New York Times* in 2017, Barnett said, “I haven’t seen a plane out of Charleston yet that I’d put my name on saying it’s safe and airworthy.” He filed a whistleblower complaint with federal regulators about his experiences at Boeing’s Charleston factory and accused the company of denigrating his character and hampering his career.

As we have analyzed previously on the WSWs, the growing crisis at Boeing is the byproduct of the drive for profitability and financial performance on Wall Street over quality of design, manufacturing precision and use of technology to eliminate safety issues in the air. Boeing, in cooperation with government agencies and airline manufacturing workers unions, has sped new planes to market, cut corners to reduce costs and imposed increased exploitation on production workers.

The catastrophic failure of Boeing’s 737-MAX planes that have killed hundreds of people can only be characterized as crimes because these events were entirely preventable. While no one has been held accountable for the crashes in Indonesia and Ethiopia, Boeing, with a market capitalization value of \$117.4 billion as of March 12, has maintained sweetheart arrangements with the investigatory, regulatory and criminal justice systems in the US that have encouraged a continuation of the practices that produce these catastrophes.

More fundamentally, the protection of the decision-makers behind the Boeing crashes is itself an expression of the collapse of the supremacy of American industry, which it had possessed in an earlier historical period when it emerged as the most powerful capitalist country in the world. The US ruling class is increasingly embracing criminality in all of its affairs, whether it be on Wall Street, on the factory floor or in the White House.



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact