

The suspicious “suicide” of Boeing whistleblower John Barnett

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The death of Boeing whistleblower John “Mitch” Barnett, the 62-year-old former employee of the aerospace corporation, was declared a suicide two days after he was found dead in a truck parked in a hotel parking lot. There are ample reasons to question this narrative.

At the time, Barnett was in the middle of a deposition in Charleston, South Carolina, in which he was providing testimony for a civil case he was pursuing against Boeing. Barnett worked for Boeing as a quality manager for most of his 32-year career, during which he raised many serious questions about the safety of Boeing’s 787 Dreamliner commercial aircraft. The suit charges Boeing with harassing him on the job, stalling any promotions and ultimately forcing him to leave the company 10 years before he planned to retire.

Barnett completed two days of his deposition on March 7 and March 8, and, according to his lawyers Rob Turkewitz and Brian Knowles, he was tired but committed to giving his third and final day of testimony. When he did not arrive in court on March 9 and did not answer their phone calls, Barnett’s lawyers called the hotel where he was staying to check on him. Hotel employees found Barnett dead with a gunshot wound to his head.

The Charleston County coroner ruled that the cause of death was “a self-inflicted wound,” and a police report stated that officers had found “a white piece of paper resembling a note” near Barnett’s body. However, Barnett’s lawyers immediately challenged the claim that their client’s death was a suicide. They released a statement saying:

We didn’t see any indication that he would take his own life. No one can believe it. The

Charleston police need to investigate this fully and accurately and tell the public. No detail can be left unturned.

A more revealing comment came from one of Barnett’s family friends, Jennifer, who told an ABC affiliate on March 15 that Barnett had warned her, “If anything happens to me, it’s not suicide.”

Jennifer’s stunning revelation would, in a world based on reason, justice and the protection of the public, be the starting point for investigations into other causes of Barnett’s death. Instead, the corporate media has for the most part failed to report her statement, even as it continues to report on various near-disasters involving Boeing planes over the past several months.

It is worth contrasting Barnett’s death and its aftermath to that of Russian opposition politician Alexei Navalny, who was found dead in his jail cell in February. The news outlets, along with President Joe Biden, wasted no time declaring, with no evidence, that Navalny’s death was the work of Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Yet when there is more than enough evidence to suggest foul play in regard to a whistleblower against Boeing, the evidence is ignored.

Barnett had a history of speaking out about Boeing’s dangerous and negligent practices after he left the company in 2017. In a variety of interviews, he described how Boeing compromised quality control in a manner that was “catastrophic” for passengers on Boeing planes. The overriding goal, according to Barnett, was to “make the cash register ring.”

In an interview with the *Corporate Crime Reporter*, Barnett exposed the role of Boeing’s military connections, inherited from its merger with McDonnell

Douglas in 1997. “The entire team came down... from the military side,” he said. “Their motto was, we’re in Charleston and we can do anything we want. They started pressuring us not to document defects, to work outside procedures, to allow defective material to be installed without being corrected.”

The most infamous disasters of Boeing aircraft remain the deadly crashes of 737 Max 8 planes in October 2018 and March 2019 which killed all 346 passengers and crew aboard the two planes. Both crashes were caused by a relatively unknown piece of software, the Maneuvering Characteristics Augmentation System (MCAS).

Leaked documents and congressional hearings revealed that Boeing’s leadership knew that MCAS could cause crashes by forcing a plane into a nosedive, overriding pilot control. The corporate giant nevertheless went ahead with the installation of the software on all of its new planes. Top management also went out of its way to conceal the existence of the system from pilots, airlines and regulators until it was forced to after the first crash. But even then, Boeing insisted that the Max 8 planes were safe—until the second crash, which triggered the global grounding of the aircraft.

No executives were ever tried for the crime of developing and deploying a defective, deadly aircraft. Federal investigations let then-CEO Dennis Muilenburg and current CEO David Calhoun off the hook. Muilenburg made more than \$80 million during his time as CEO, and Calhoun made \$22.5 million in 2022 alone.

Boeing plays a massive role in the American economy and the US military-industrial complex. It is one of the country’s largest manufacturers and exporters, and is a key supplier of the vast sums of war materiel purchased by the US government. Nobody should doubt that it is capable of defending its profits and the interests of American imperialism by any means necessary, including the silencing of a troublemaker.

Barnett is not the first to come to a suspicious end just before providing potentially damning evidence against a critical force in American capitalism.

Journalist Michael Hastings was found dead after crashing into a tree at 100 miles per hour while investigating then-CIA Director John Brennan. His last

story, “Why Democrats Love to Spy On Americans,” was published by *BuzzFeed* on June 7, 2013, 11 days before he died.

Democratic Party staffer Seth Rich, thought to be behind the leak of 20,000 emails from the Democratic National Committee showing extraordinary corruption in favor of Hillary Clinton’s campaign, was shot in an apparent mugging in June 2016.

Financier and sex-trafficker Jeffrey Epstein was found dead in his jail cell in August 2019 after investigations into his business threatened to reveal sordid connections to high level executives and politicians in the US and around the world.

In every case, a story is worked out by the corporate media that is politically palatable for the bourgeoisie: car crash, robbery gone wrong, suicide by hanging. There is no serious investigation or follow-up, whether by the police or those purporting to call themselves “journalists.”

There can be no doubt that Barnett had more to say that would have further exposed the criminality of Boeing’s leadership and of American capitalism as a whole. The commercial and military aircraft giant remains in business only because it is protected at every level by federal regulators, whose penalties for deadly practices amount to less than a wrist-slap, and politicians who design laws allowing the production of machines as complex as aircraft with essentially no oversight.

These forces themselves serve Wall Street bankers and corporate executives who comprise the oligarchy in the US and internationally. For them, the waging of war and extraction of profit towers above questions of safety and the protection of human life.



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