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346 dead — and no charges: How the system protects Boeing

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Family members of 737 MAX crash victims hold photos of their loved ones while demanding justice and accountability.

A system built to shield corporate power

It's official: Mass-casualty airplane manufacturer Boeing will face no criminal charges for the two 737 MAX jetliner crashes that killed 346 people. With this latest development, the U.S. "justice" system has provided yet another example of how, at the heart of U.S. capitalism, profit is prioritized over human life.

On Nov. 7, a Texas federal judge announced he would grant the Department of

Justice's request to drop all criminal charges against Boeing. The decision caps a three-year saga dating back to the DOJ's 2021 deferred prosecution agreement (DPA) with the company. In exchange for fines and promises to strengthen its safety and ethics programs, Boeing effectively gets to walk away from the deaths of 346 people with minimal consequences.

Families denied justice

The victims' families have rightly argued that the DPA was unjust from the start, allowing a mega-corporation to buy its way out of prosecution. Their outrage only grew as Boeing's safety failures continued to mount, including the January 2024 Alaska Airlines door-plug blowout — an event so serious that the DOJ later concluded Boeing had breached the 2021 agreement. Yet even after that breach, Boeing is once again being allowed to pay its way out of accountability.

Just three months after the Alaska Airlines blowout, prominent whistleblower and aviation-safety advocate John Barnett was found dead under suspicious circumstances. Barnett had been testifying to federal authorities that Boeing was cutting corners and creating significant risks for pilots and passengers.

Bipartisan impunity for big capital

After all this death, danger, and deception, the justice system's priority remains the same: Protect the corporate executives whose decisions led to catastrophe. Boeing gets to mislead regulators, rush unsafe aircraft into service, smear pilots when disaster strikes, and walk away with a slap on the wrist.

It's worth noting that the government's gentle treatment of Boeing spans both the Biden and Trump administrations. While the Biden administration sought to enforce the DPA after the Alaska Airlines incident, it still signed the agreement in the first place — opening the door for Boeing to escape criminal charges. On matters of

corporate power and the hoarding of wealth by the few, Democrats and Republicans are united.

The capitalist state at work

Under capitalism, elected officials do not represent the people; they represent big capital. Their role is not to restrain corporate greed but to enforce the rule of banks and mega-corporations like Boeing.

In “State and Revolution,” Lenin described the capitalist state plainly:

“The state is an organ of class rule, an organ for the oppression of one class by another; it is the creation of ‘order’ which legalizes and perpetuates this oppression by moderating the conflict between classes.”

This “moderation” — which shields the wealthy while sacrificing the working class — is on full display in the government’s refusal to prosecute Boeing in exchange for what amounts to blood money. Boeing will pay its fines. Politicians will claim justice has been served. But what happens when Boeing’s negligence and fraud take more lives?

The DPA is a disgrace. The dismissal of criminal charges is a disgrace. And Boeing’s impunity is a disgrace. Working people are tired of back-room deals and token penalties. Corporations like Boeing — and the banks and investors behind them — must be dismantled and replaced with institutions that truly serve the people.

