

The Crash of German Wings Flight 4U9525: What's behind the Media's Character Assassination Campaign?

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On 24 March, a German Wings Airbus crashed over the French Alps. Only 48 hours later, French prosecutor-in-charge Brice Robin gave a press conference in Marseille, releasing first results of the ongoing investigation. Facing news teams from around the world, Robin stated that it seemed "as if the co-pilot had brought the aircraft down deliberately and thus destroyed it."

It is well known that it takes months or even years after an aircraft accident until irrefutable evidence for its cause can be produced. Nevertheless, Robin's premature blame was immediately seized upon by the mainstream media in order to ignite one of the largest character assassination campaigns in the history of journalism.

Within hours, the full name of the co-pilot was revealed and private photos of him were published. His two places of residence were made known to the public, his parents' home was besieged by a host of journalists from all over the world who among others filmed his brother being led away by the police. Relatives, neighbors, classmates and friends were bombarded with questions, all of which proceeded from the basic assumption that the co-pilot had already been proved guilty.

Both the prosecutor's statement and the mainstream media's subsequent campaign blatantly violate the basic principles of journalism and the entire Western hemisphere's legal systems. Article 11, paragraph 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations in 1948 states: "Everyone charged with a penal offence has the right to be presumed innocent until proved guilty according to law in a public trial at which he has had all the guarantees necessary for his defense."

The fact that this presumption of innocence has been (and is still being) completely disregarded by the mainstream media (and also by a part of the supposedly critical media), casts a revealing light on the moral state of the news industry. However, the willful moral destruction of a deceased person and his family members should also prompt everyone with a critical mind to raise at least two questions: What interests lie behind this targeted smear campaign? Who benefits from it?

Even a cursory glance at the aviation industry shows that it has been in considerable distress for at least two decades. Mergers, bankruptcies, acquisitions, the founding of low-cost carrier fleets and a relentless international price war have been accompanied by country-wide strikes, wage cuts, layoffs of permanent staff and the hiring of temporary workers.

Beyond that, the international aviation industry management has found it increasingly difficult to explain the dubious circumstances surrounding several disasters in recent years. Those of flight 4U9525 – the refusal of several crews to board their flights after the accident, the desolate state of the voice recorder and the fact that it took so long to find the black box – certainly do not help to alleviate this crisis of confidence.

To understand the mechanisms behind this development, it is helpful to take a brief look at the history of the Lufthansa airline (the parent company of Germanwings): Lufthansa was founded in 1926 and was exclusively state-owned for forty years. It went public in 1966. During the wave of privatizations in the early nineties, the German government cut its share of company stocks from over 50% to 34%. In 1997, Lufthansa was completely privatized, leaving the financing of the airline to investors interested in raking in profits.

As almost simultaneously the financial sector almost exploded after having been increasingly deregulated since the late seventies, investors in the real economy (which the aviation industry is part of) found themselves in a fierce and ruinous struggle with competitors acting in the much more profitable derivative markets. In order to survive in this battle, the aviation industry expanded the low cost carrier business considerably with the major airlines taking over a large part of them in the second half of the nineties. While in 1994 only 3 million passengers used low cost carriers, their number shot up to 17.5 million in 1999. In 2002 Lufthansa founded its subsidiary Germanwings whose staff of little more than 2000 employees handled a passenger volume of over 13 million in 2013.

Employees of low cost carrier airlines are either not or only partially unionized, often employed through hiring agencies, have longer working hours and are paid lower wages than their colleagues working for conventional airlines. Also, their sheer existence is regularly being used as a form of blackmail against their colleagues in collective bargaining.

Apart from the significant expansion of low cost carrier fleets, two additional factors have crucially influenced the development of the international aviation industry in recent years: Instead of leading to a restriction of activities in the financial markets, the crisis of 2007 / 2008 has led to a massive extension of speculation in the derivative sector. The trillions to the banks at almost zero interest rates provided by the governments of the United States, Japan and the Euro Zone countries have almost exclusively been used for speculation and have further increased the pressure on investors in the real economy.

The second factor is the unequal battle between the conventional aviation industry and its new competitors from the Middle East, which benefit from significantly lower labor and fuel costs due to the oil-richness of their countries.

These increasingly difficult conditions would have normally prompted low cost carrier airlines to raise their fares. However, their target group being most affected by the drop in real wages and the expansion of the low wage sector, the airlines could only meet their investors' demands by continually reducing their costs. This in turn created a dangerous race to the bottom, leading to the progressive deterioration of the security situation for passengers.

It is in order to cover up this highly dangerous situation and to divert attention from the real causes of the industry's plight that after each disaster the aviation industry hastens to focus public attention on factors such as "human error". The disappearance of flight 370 of Air

Malaysia already provoked a variety of speculations about a possible suicide of its pilot. This time it is the alleged and not yet proven psychological problems of a co-pilot, that are being presented to the public as the cause of the disaster.

The mainstream media's unrestricted support for Lufthansa and Germanwings after the crash is due to the fact that the news industry as part of the real economy is in a struggle similar to that of the aviation industry. Here too, investors demand that absolutely every opportunity of generating profits is seized upon, even if it leads to the moral destruction of a deceased person and his family.

Both the silent acquiescence to lower safety standards in order to boost profits in the aviation industry and the smear campaign of the mainstream media bear witness to the devastating effects that the now all-encompassing domination of the world economy by the financial sector has on our life, pervading all areas of our society.

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