

Blood & Treasure

Anyone looking to understand the turbulent state of today's airline industry can find similarities in a business strategy developed centuries ago.

Throughout the sixteenth century, bloodthirsty buccaneers sunk ships, sacked towns and terrorized entire populations. They enriched themselves in the name of country and under the cover of law.

Men like Sir Francis Drake and Captain Henry Morgan were honored by the King of England even as they left thousands floating in their wakes. Rape, torture, murder and enslavement became a day at the office on the high seas.

A similar brand of state-sponsored terrorism – air piracy – survives to this day. Its victims – the men and women who work in the airline industry – suffer grievously from raids on their pension funds and the destruction of their jobs.

Men like Glenn Tilton of United Airlines and Doug Steenland of Northwest Airlines gain stature on Wall Street by shaking down their workers until every last wage and benefit concession is extracted.

After stripping off all loose assets and ravaging stockholders, they reward themselves with lucrative post-bankruptcy life boats worth hundreds of millions of dollars.

Under the latest plan proposed by UAL, Glenn Tilton and his crew stand to divvy up as much as \$480 million in equity upon the company's emergence from bankruptcy.

Tilton, already the nation's highest compensated airline CEO, could collect a lottery-like windfall valued at more than \$40 million just for waking up on the day after the carrier emerges from bankruptcy.

It's high time we recognize what's happening to the airline industry in America: It is being hijacked, stripped of its most valuable assets and left to the mercy of foreign investors who will finish the job. If this is not piracy, what is?

Have you heard?

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