With

‘People from whom control is removed will do stupid things’, ‘Fortitude’, Bruce Daisley (2022)

This uncomfortable truth was vividly demonstrated by one of the social-media sensations of 2017: video footage of a middle-aged Vietnamese American passenger being dragged from a plane sitting on the tarmac at Chicago’s O’Hare Airport.

United Express flight 4211 had been scheduled to leave for Louisville at 5:40pm. Problems arose shortly after boarding, however, when the crew were instructed to find seats for four additional cabin staff who needed to be taken to Louisville to work another scheduled service the following morning. The crew asked the passengers whether any of them would be prepared to help out by giving up their seats. Three volunteered, and were given £800 travel vouchers and free overnight hotel accommodation by way of compensation. No one else, however, was prepared to put up their hand. The united employees therefore made their own selection, lighting upon one Dr David Dao Duy Anh. He, as later stated, had commitments in Kentucky the following day, so he refused to disembark. An argument ensued.

The airline then instructed three reluctant security officers from the Chicago Department of Aviation to physically remove the sixty-nine year old. They proceeded to haul him from his seat, drag him along the gangway (in the course of which his had banged against an armrest) and remove him from the plane. He emerged with glasses knocked askew on his bloodied face, having lost two teeth, and suffered concussion that landed him in hospital. Filmed by several passengers on board, the incident made for grim viewing on social media and was immediately picked up by news outlets.

United Airlines paid a heavy price for the conduct of its staff, both in terms of compensation they had to offer and the hit to their reputation that they suffered. The Washington Post reported that Dao settled for a sum in the region of **$140 million.**

United subsequently commissioned a detailed internal report. Its findings make for fascinating reading. The agents, the report stated, **‘did not have the authority to act independently** and authorise higher levels of compensation or provide other modes of transportation’. They had to stick rigidly to the rules set out for them by the company – rules that did not empower them to resolve disputes. **They had no control.** The consequences spoke for themselves. (p128)