

US late-night comics fall into (anti-Russian) line

David Walsh
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Predictably, America's late-night comics and television talk show hosts have joined the right-wing campaign to depict Donald Trump as an ally or even pawn of Russia's Vladimir Putin.

The various well-heeled comedians have responded instinctively—and eagerly—to the McCarthyite, anti-Russian initiative launched by the Democratic Party, the *New York Times* and other media outlets, along with important portions of the US military and intelligence apparatus. These elements of the ruling elite have been terrified by the mass popular opposition to Trump's right-wing policies and are making every effort to divert the outrage into reactionary channels.

Everything about the talk show hosts, their histories, outlooks and social positions, ensured they would take up this campaign. As we have noted before, the comic monologues on the late-night talk shows are an integral part of a painstaking process—the daily cycle by which “public opinion” and an official “national consensus” are formed in the US.

On his program Wednesday night, Stephen Colbert, the host of *The Late Show with Stephen Colbert* on CBS, staked out an especially persistent and repugnant position.

Colbert first took part in a “remake” of a scene from the 1995 film, *The Usual Suspects*. He played the part of an individual under police questioning. In response to his interrogator's comment (Chazz Palminteri as a detective in the original film), “You're not telling us everything, I know you know something,” Colbert replied, “Yes, I do know something, and I'm telling you everything. You're just not listening! I've been telling you for like a year! There's something weird going on between Trump and the Russians!” The sketch went on from there.

Colbert devoted much of his opening monologue Wednesday night to the “Russian question.” These are samples:

“We just learned from multiple intelligence sources

that Trump aides were in ‘constant touch’ with senior Russian officials during the campaign. ‘Constant touch,’ by the way, is also Trump's Secret Service code.”

“We do know that Trump's campaign was talking to the Russians a lot, and ‘the frequency of the communication and the proximity to Trump of those involved ‘raised a red flag’ with US intelligence.’ Yes, intelligence were worried that once he got in the White House, he might raise a red flag.”

“But he [Trump] did not take the opportunity of the press conference to address any of the rumors that he's being run by the Kremlin, and the two handpicked reporters he called on were polite enough not to ask whether our country is over.”

Brilliant, witty material.

Colbert also described Russia as “America's greatest foe since World War II” and referred to contact between former National Security Advisor Michael T. Flynn and the Russian ambassador as an “act of treason.” In response to the claims of former Trump campaign manager Paul Manafort that he had “never knowingly spoken” to Russian intelligence officers on the telephone, who, after all, did not wear badges that said, ‘I'm a Russian intelligence officer,’ Colbert joked, “Well, how do you know? You were on the phone! You can't hear a badge... the guy on the other end could have a hammer-and-sickle face tattoo for all you know.”

This is filthy stuff, which makes an effort, among other things, to revive the anticommunist propaganda of the Cold War era.

Colbert is hardly alone. Also on Wednesday night, Jimmy Fallon, the host of *The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon* on NBC, chimed in with this: “The big story is that last night, the *New York Times* published a bombshell report that President Trump's campaign was in contact with Russian intelligence since 2015. When asked if it was true, Trump said, ‘Nyet! I mean, no!’”

Seth Meyers too, host of NBC's *Late Night Meyers*, focused Wednesday on Trump and his "ties" and "regular contact" with Russia during his "Closer Look" segment. Meyers displayed the old Soviet flag as well, with its hammer and sickle, and suggested that "this one is about to make a comeback."

On his January 23 program, Meyers, formerly a head writer for NBC's *Saturday Night Live* (2001–2014), quipped, "During his inaugural address, President Trump said that the ideology for his administration will be 'America First.' Which also happens to be Putin's ideology: 'America first, then we go into Ukraine, then Eastern Europe...'"

On the February 11 edition of the long-running *Saturday Night Live* program, a mock Trump played by Alec Baldwin appeared in "People's Court" over his travel ban and called in a faux Vladimir Putin as a "character witness." Baldwin-Trump described Putin as "Someone who's known me for years, he's family, he's an incredible person with impeccable credentials." As Putin (Beck Bennett) swaggered into the courtroom, the narrator commented, "This is Russian President Vladimir Putin. He's an authoritarian leader who has invaded other countries and killed rivals. He's President Trump's long-time crush."

Referring to Trump, the shirtless Bennett-Putin explained to the court, "This man is a great friend. He's my little American Happy Meal. He'd do anything for you. Go against his own country just to make you happy." The skit was genuinely foul.

Bill Maher, of the HBO political talk show *Real Time with Bill Maher*, has been almost pathological about Trump's alleged Russian connections. On the night of the inauguration, in his opening monologue, Maher said, "We have a new leader... [long pause] Vladimir Putin." Later, he referred to Trump as "a president from Moscow."

One of his guests on the same program, Keith Olbermann, former host of a political commentary program on MSNBC, described Trump as "a Russian puppet" and the inauguration as a coup d'état. Olbermann declared, "We were invaded, is what it boils down to... We're now only debating at this point... how much the Russians decided our election."

Not to be outdone, Conan O'Brien, host of *Conan* on the cable channel TBS, commented January 11, "In a tweet today, Donald Trump compared the way he's been treated to Nazi Germany. Which is unfair, because everyone knows Hitler won his election without the help of the Russians."

In the "Confusing Question of the Day" segment on *Jimmy Kimmel Live!* on ABC recently, one of Kimmel's sidekicks asked people on the street, along with other things, how concerned should Americans be about Russian interference in US elections.

Of course, the various hosts and programs have also mocked other moves by the new president, including his travel ban, the presence in the White House of extreme right-wingers like Steve Bannon and the activities of such Trump aides as Kellyanne Conway and Stephen Miller. The theme they always return to, however, and whose presentation seems most deeply felt, is the anti-Russian one.

The comics are working off a script provided for them by the Democrats and the media and political establishment as a whole. Stupid, irresponsible and conformist, they take the line of least resistance. In fact, in pursuing the campaign against Russia, they are able to feel at one with powerful political and social forces. It is a warm, comforting sensation.

Their wealth is a significant element in their political and social conformism. These are not individuals who want to rock the boat. O'Brien's net worth is an estimated \$75 million, Colbert's is \$45 million, Kimmel's is \$35 million, Fallon's is \$25 million, Olbermann's is also \$25 million, Maher's is calculated to be between \$23 and \$30 million and Meyers' is \$10 million.

For eight years, these people shut their mouths about the crimes of the Obama administration against the populations of Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, Syria, Yemen, Pakistan and elsewhere. They kept quiet about the growing misery of the American working class. They proved themselves the worst sort of sycophants and toadies.

Now they've "come to life," opposing Trump on the most unprincipled and reactionary basis. They deserve only contempt.



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