Federal agency to investigate talk show host Stephen Colbert over anti-Trump joke

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The chairman of the US Federal Communication Commission (FCC), Ajit Pai, indicated in an interview Thursday that the agency was looking into a vulgar joke that late-night television talk show host Stephen Colbert made last week at the expense of Donald Trump.

In the middle of a would-be comic rant addressed to Trump on May 1, Colbert said, "the only thing your mouth is good for is being Vladimir Putin's c---holster." Because CBS' "The Late Show with Stephen Colbert" is taped, the immediately offending word was bleeped out.

Pai told his Philadelphia radio station interviewer, "I have had a chance to see the clip now and so, as we get complaints—and we've gotten a number of them—we are going to take the facts that we find, and we are going to apply the law as it's been set out by the Supreme Court and other courts, and we'll take the appropriate action."

Colbert's program airs at 11:35 p.m. in certain parts of the country, and 10:35 p.m. in others, outside the so-called "safe harbor" hours (6 am to 10 pm) when it is considered most likely that children will be watching television. The FCC has the authority to act on allegations of indecent or obscene material during that time period.

Thus, although Colbert could be fined, if he is found to be in violation of FCC standards, according to NBC News, "he may get a reprieve from any sort of penalty."

The threat by the FCC's Pai against Colbert is anti-democratic and ultimately aimed more broadly at freedom of speech and the right to criticize or mock government officials. The commission chairman, appointed to the agency by Barack Obama, but elevated to its leading position by Trump, has already proven himself, on "net neutrality" and other issues, to be a shill for powerful corporate interests.

The complaints about Colbert's crudity from right-wing Trump supporters, who launched a #FireColbert hashtag, are pretty rich, and thoroughly hypocritical, given the current president's own track record.

Colbert offered a semi-apology on Wednesday: "I would change a few words that were cruder than they needed to be … I'm not going to repeat that phrase." But he went on, "I believe he [Trump] can take care of himself. I have jokes; he has the launch codes. So, it's a fair fight."

All that being said, Colbert's monologue on May 1 was intellectually bankrupt and did not offer a trace of insight, comic or otherwise, into the predicament the American population faces under a Trump administration.

Colbert took as his point of departure an interview with Trump conducted by John Dickerson of CBS News' "Face the Nation." Trump abruptly ended that conversation, held in the White House' Oval Office, when Dickerson pressed him about his previous claims he had been wiretapped by Obama. During the course of the abbreviated interview, Trump referred to Dickerson's program as part of the "fake news" operation and dubbed it "Deface the Nation."

On Monday, Colbert chose to take offense at Trump's slighting of Dickerson, a conventional bourgeois journalist-hack, and launched into an abusive tirade against the president. The attack, however, avoided every substantive political and social issue.

In the face of an administration that has sharply accelerated the social counter-revolution, that has set about removing any impediments to the accumulation of private wealth by the financial oligarchy, Colbert confined himself to puerile, essentially harmless jibes.

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The comic came across as a smug, upper middle class school-boy, obsessed with entirely secondary "lifestyle" issues, and perhaps embarrassed by some of Trump's more idiotic gaffes. At one point, to satirize Trump's briefing himself on this or that issue, Colbert pretended to read from a roll of toilet paper—this was the level of it.

Then, of course, there is the anti-Russian campaign, a thoroughly reactionary operation, with distinct McCarthyite and anti-communist undertones, with which Colbert has identified himself for months, along with leading sections of the media and the Democratic Party.

In one especially unamusing moment last Monday, the camera peered over Trump's shoulder at the document he was supposedly reading at his desk in the Oval Office. The piece of paper bore a heart symbol pierced with an arrow and the words "Donald + Vlad [i.e., Russian president Vladimir Putin]."

Colbert's oral sex joke came in the middle of this barrage of pointless insults: "Mr. Trump, your presidency? I love your presidency. I call it *Disgrace the Nation.* You're not the POTUS [President of the United States]. You're the BLOATUS. You're the glutton with the button. You're a regular Gorge Washington. You're the presi-dunce, but you're turning into a real prick-tator. Sir, you attract more skinheads than free Rogaine. You have more people marching against you than cancer. You talk like a sign language gorilla who got hit in the head," etc., etc.

As we have previously noted, that the various late-night comics and talk show hosts would fall into line with the effort to demonize Putin and legitimize US aggression against Russia and its allies was entirely predictable. The former are wealthy, complacent figures who fully identify with the establishment and American "national interests."

In the first two months of Trump's administration, Colbert, Bill Maher, Jimmy Fallon, Jimmy Kimmel, the personnel and writers of Saturday Night Live, Keith Olbermann, Michael Moore and others repeatedly returned to the theme that Trump was a Russian "agent," that he was Putin's "puppet," and so forth. In this way, they attempted to divert the genuine popular anger at Trump, initially expressed in the mass protests on January 21, into foul political channels.

The illegal April 7 cruise missile attack on a Syrian air base, which indicated that either Trump had received the political message or that US military officials were taking matters into their own hands, or both, somewhat dampened the anti-Russian frenzy on late-night television. In any event, the propaganda campaign had not resonated deeply with the American people, largely concerned with other, pressing matters.

Now Colbert has returned to the anti-Russian attack. There is absolutely nothing creditable about his miserable attempt at humor on May 1.

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