

The campaign against comedian Samantha Bee over her comments on Ivanka Trump

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Canadian-American comedian Samantha Bee has come under fire from Trump administration figures and right-wing pundits after making a vulgar reference Wednesday to Ivanka Trump, the president's daughter, on her late-night TBS program, "Full Frontal with Samantha Bee."

Donald Trump and various Fox News commentators immediately demanded that Bee be fired. The attack on Bee comes in the immediate wake of the cancellation of Roseanne Barr's "Roseanne" television series after the actress-comedian posted a racist tweet. Trump and company claimed a "liberal double standard" was allowing Bee to keep her show.

The comic was responding Wednesday to Trump's policies, including the administration's decision to prosecute all undocumented immigrant adults, which means in many cases separating them from their children, and to reports that the government had "lost track" of 1,475 unaccompanied immigrant children placed in foster care.

On her May 23 program, a week earlier, Bee had denounced Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). The comedian told her listeners, "I'm serious, it's awful, and we don't need it... By putting the anti-terrorism people in charge of immigration, the government signaled that immigrants are a threat, but ICE's own figures show that most of the immigrants in detention pose no threat to the public."

She went on, "The US government should not be in the business of tearing happy families apart, it's disgusting... So no, let's not just reform ICE or fix it, or hope it gets better under a different president, let's shut it the fuck down."

In the midst of various reports emerging about the horrific conditions facing immigrants and their children, on May 27 Ivanka Trump tweeted an idyllic

photograph of herself and her 2-year-old son Theodore. The photo provoked an angry response from Twitter users.

These were a few of the comments directed at Trump's daughter:

"How lucky that you get to do that with your children. Meanwhile, there are 1,500 children that are missing their parents as a result of Daddy's orders. The fact that you and other so-called leaders have stood idly by and done nothing speaks volumes."

"An actual mother would have compassion for the children harmed by your father's policies."

"The main purpose of this policy is to inflict as much horror, torment & suffering as possible on these people."

"How would your Sunday be if the federal government ripped this child from your arms and put him in a detention facility?"

On her offending program May 30, Bee made reference to the Roseanne Barr incident, along with the tweet-photo posted by the president's daughter: "Ivanka Trump, who works at the White House, chose to post the second most oblivious tweet we've seen this week. You know, Ivanka, that's a beautiful photo of you and your child, but let me just say, one mother to another: Do something about your dad's immigration practices, you feckless cunt. He listens to you. Put on something tight and low-cut and tell your father to fucking stop it."

The comment provoked a storm of pious outrage from Trump and company. On Thursday, White House Press Secretary Sarah Sanders described the "language used by Samantha Bee last night" as "vile and vicious." She continued: "The collective silence by the left and its media allies is appalling. Her disgusting comments and show are not fit for broadcast, and executives at

Time Warner and TBS must demonstrate that such explicit profanity about female members of this administration will not be condoned on its network.”

On Friday, Trump himself weighed in with a typically moronic tweet: “Why aren’t they firing no talent Samantha Bee for the horrible language used on her low ratings show? A total double standard but that’s OK, we are Winning, and will be doing so for a long time to come!”

Bee offered an apologetic statement on Thursday: “I would like to sincerely apologize to Ivanka Trump and to my viewers for using an expletive on my show to describe her last night. It was inappropriate and inexcusable. I crossed a line, and I deeply regret it.” TBS also issued an apology, observing, in part, “Those words should not have been aired. It was our mistake too, and we regret it.”

Born in Toronto in 1969, Bee made her name on “The Daily Show with Jon Stewart,” on which she appeared from 2003 to 2015. She launched her own program, “Full Frontal,” in February 2016. The use of obscenities is part of Bee’s regular comic routine as a “Furious Woman.”

Coincidentally, on Thursday evening, Bee and her program received a Television Academy Honors award. In her speech, the comedian noted, “Stories about 1,500 missing unaccompanied migrant children flooded the news cycle over the weekend. So last night we aired a segment on the atrocious treatment of migrant children by this administration and past administrations. ... Our piece attracted controversy of the worst kind.

“We spent the day wrestling with the repercussions of one bad word, when we all should have spent the day incensed that as a nation we are wrenching children from their parents and treating people legally seeking asylum as criminals. If we are OK with that then really, who are we?”

Indeed, with a few exceptions, the American media ignored the content of the controversy in its treatment of the Bee-Ivanka Trump controversy. The comedian was chastised for her incivility and rudeness toward the “first daughter.”

Both the sharpness of the Trump administration’s response and the media’s concerted attempt to bury the issues involved reflect genuine nervousness in the establishment about popular reaction to the wide-scale violence being practiced against impoverished and

defenseless people.

Bee was on hand at the Television Academy event to be honored for her program’s coverage of the #MeToo and Time’s Up movements. For months, “Full Frontal” has been especially enthusiastic in its denunciation of every individual accused of sexual impropriety and utterly indifferent to questions of due process.

Elementary democratic rights—and free speech in particular—are also at stake in the current campaign against Bee, although she and her program’s writers are unlikely to make the connection.

One is reminded of the famous exchange in Robert Bolt’s film *A Man for All Seasons* between Thomas More and his prospective son-in-law, William Roper. Roper has just advocated the preemptive arrest of a man who has not yet committed any crime. More explains to Roper that he would give the Devil himself the benefit of the presumption of innocence and other legal protections. Because, he remarks with considerable feeling and eloquence, if you were to destroy those protections, what protection would you have when the “Devil turned round on you”? More concludes, “I’d give the Devil benefit of law for my own safety’s sake.”

In any event, the attack on Bee by Trump, Rush Limbaugh, Fox News and the rest of the ultra-right media trash is reactionary and dangerous. It substantiates the point we made in our comment about the cancellation of Barr’s series by ABC and the Walt Disney Company, the network’s owner, posted on May 31:

“There is nothing admirable or remotely progressive about Disney’s actions... Disney’s decision reaffirms the ability of giant corporations to terminate television programs and other forms of entertainment or news when the CEO and other executives disapprove of an individual’s political views. This may be used against right-wing opinions in this case, but the far greater likelihood is that the precedent will be turned against opponents of big business and war.”

It didn’t take long.



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