

EDITOR, The Tribune.

Recent fears about "the return of old ZNS censorship" relating to the current affairs television show, Press Pass, are entirely unfounded.

First of all, this type of free-wheeling discussion programme would have been inconceivable during earlier incarnations of ZNS, when only politically supervised discussion was tolerated. Press Pass is now in the middle of its second season.

The show features local print and broadcast journalists reviewing topical issues in a moderated discussion format. Neither the general manager nor the board are involved in selecting the guests or the topics for this show.

The claim that the most recent episode was pulled because it was critical of the ratio of management to line staff - and the implication that might have regarding ZNS' payroll costs - could not be further from the truth.

The disproportionate number of managers to line staff has repeatedly been remarked upon by the responsible minister, the board, and top management at ZNS. It would therefore make no sense for the show to be pulled for this reason.

Further details regarding the manpower issue and its cost implication to the Broadcasting Corporation will be the focus of later public statements. The purpose of this communication is simply to respond to the glib charges of censorship that were raised recently.

ZNS, in common with all print and broadcast media houses, has in place editorial policies and appropriate personnel to ensure that policy guidelines are adhered to.

Press Pass was scheduled to air only a few days after ZNS had found it necessary to retract and apologize for a salacious and unsupported story that had been broadcast without appropriate editorial oversight.

In the case of Press Pass, editorial oversight was heightened as individuals who had been involved in that story (for which ZNS had found it necessary to issue a retraction and apology), were also involved in the Press Pass discussion.

The individual at ZNS authorised to exercise journalistic oversight concluded that many of the facts discussed during the Press Pass taping were inaccurate and that the discussion itself was unbalanced.

Neither the board nor the general manager were involved in that editorial decision - and had no advance knowledge of it. However, we are satisfied that appropriate judgment was exercised in this instance.

It is important to note that the frequent claims of censorship that were once leveled against ZNS are a thing of the past. In fact, I believe the record shows that, although ZNS continues to be a state broadcaster (at least for the time being), more news stories are aired expressing the views of the opposition rather than the government.

That is a clear indicator of journalistic independence rather than censorship.

Broadcasting Corporation of The Bahamas
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