

## **PRESS STATEMENT**

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**LEADER, PROGRESSIVE LIBERAL PARTY**

**PLP CONDEMNS GOVERNMENT'S HANDLING OF ZNS WORKERS**

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### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

The Progressive Liberal Party condemns the callous and heartless manner in which the government has treated the long serving staff of the Broadcasting Corporation of the Bahamas (BCB). This government continues to demonstrate an uncanny lack of respect for ordinary working Bahamians, a commitment for putting things before the welfare of people, and placing the desires and ambitions of special interests above the needs of the many.

The government stands further condemned for its nasty and intolerable habit of vilifying ordinary hard working Bahamians just before initiating mass displacements, needlessly destroying their careers and disrupting their lives and the lives of their families. These unforgivable and redundant attacks on Bahamians who have given much of themselves in the development of this country form a pattern of behavior by the FNM that is unbecoming of a government and must stop.

It is important to note that it was this same Prime Minister who publicly threatened to dismantle The Broadcasting Corporation of The Bahamas during the run up to the 1992 and 2007 General Elections; he is now making good on his threat. I, as I am sure many Bahamians did, watched in horror as a large majority of those terminated who had given so much of their lives to the nation through the corporation were treated like common thugs and criminals. Even though they acted professionally and non-violently, they were being escorted to their desks to collect their belongings and then escorted by the police out of the gate, creating the specter of criminality. This undermines the essence of human existence - **DIGNITY**

These people gave the most productive years of their lives to the corporation, working day and night, rain or shine to literally link this chain of islands together into one family through effective

communication. This exercise is not broadcasting reform; this is a callous and heartless gutting of a public corporation with no readily available transition plan in place.

The PLP is different from the FNM. When faced with similar prospects, the PLP reallocated the manpower and made provisions for temporary staff to upgrade themselves so that they become permanent and pensionable. These policy decisions were made and executed with no adverse effects to the public service or public corporations. Care was always taken to protect the dignity of these public servants and enhance the human capital. **THE PLP NEVER DID AND WILL NEVER** become engaged in a campaign of slander against the reputation of our valuable workers to achieve a political end.

The vague explanation given by the government that the downsizing of ZNS is designed to create a Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) can only be perceived as a red herring as the Government has failed to articulate a model and a comprehensive business plan outlining the new structure and function for this so called PBS. Further, the FNM has failed to make the case that shows a clear distinction between what ZNS now does and the so called PBS that they plan to implement. The fact is that notwithstanding that it sells commercials it is a public broadcasting service.

As for the Northern Service, all indications are that there will be substantial reductions in the role and function of ZNS 3 in the north. Another distinction between the PLP and the FNM is we recognize that there is a need for a ZNS to help hold the country together. ZNS Northern Service is not a commercial venture, it is meant to be part of the cultural fabric of the country, linking one part to the next. It is crucial in an island chain that we find and strengthen the ties that bind, not only in an economic sense, but using the media to help build our country as one unit in the minds and activities of our people.

Notwithstanding what the Prime Minister says, the PLP points out that the severance packages offered to the severed and disengaged workers of ZNS were not comparable to the packages offered to other civil servants who were fired or separated. As suggested by the Bishop of the Anglican Church of the Bahamas and the Turks and Caicos Islands in his charge at the opening of the Anglican Synod last night, the government must always be seen to be fair and even-handed in all of its dealings. To add insult to injury, the Prime Minister had the unmitigated gall to suggest that the workers of ZNS were ungrateful as they stood up for their rights and demanded parity.

Further, the politically convenient excuse given by the Government that it is fiscally challenged is wearing thin and is duplicitous at best. The Government can find moneys to support special interests in the form of generous subsidies for a container port (some \$26 million), the purchase of private buildings and docks, and \$10 million per mile for a highway to accommodate foreign special interests, an amount that is excessive by international standards.

The PLP publicly questions whether this downsizing exercise is part and parcel of some secret agreement the government has entered into with the International Monetary Fund to reduce the size of both the public service and public corporations. If this is so, the government is duty bound to come clean and advise the Bahamian people.

The PLP again reminds the FNM that the only role of good government is the care, protection, and happiness of the citizenry, and not their destruction. Certainly there is a better, more palatable and humane way to reform the Broadcasting Corporation of the Bahamas.

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