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VIEWERS and guests of the popular ZNS programme Press Pass criticised the Broadcasting Corporation of the Bahamas yesterday for pulling Monday night's regularly scheduled show and called on management at the corporation to account for its actions.

In an exclusive article yesterday, The Tribune reported how members of the media taped a 30-minute segment at ZNS' main office on Collins Avenue on June 3 for broadcast on Monday. However, the show was cancelled without explanation.

During the taping, ZNS reporters Clint Watson and Altovese Munnings with this reporter and radio DJ Kevin Harris discussed the proposed budget cuts to BCB and the disproportion in numbers and salary between managers and line staff at the cash-guzzling corporation.

Coming down hard on the fact that there were some 70 managers at ZNS who collectively earn more than \$5 million compared to the 142 line-staff making a little over \$3 million, the newsmen suggested that if the government was trying to cut the corporation's budget by \$4 million then BCB's line staff should have been the last to be affected.

Following this taping, however, the show was abruptly pulled and not broadcast as expected at 8.30 pm Monday, drawing criticism from all segments of society.

Speaking with The Tribune yesterday, Mr Harris (who was present during the taping last week) said that he saw no justification for the BCB to pull the show. In fact, during his morning broadcast yesterday Mr Harris criticised ZNS on the airwaves for directly going against what Prime Minister Hubert Ingraham had accomplished by opening the airwaves up in 1992 when he first came to office.

"I will not place this at the feet of the Prime Minister or the Minister of Broadcasting (Tommy Turnquest). This would be in total violation of everything Prime Minister Ingraham has stood for. When he came to office in 1992, one of the things Mr Ingraham took pride in was opening the airwaves for his people to be able to do exactly what Press Pass was set up to do - to give them a platform and a voice.

"I don't think this is consistent with the agenda, or the Manifesto of the FNM. This seems more to me to be a personal decision on behalf of the management of ZNS because of some strong opinions voiced about ZNS by persons who work at ZNS," he said.

When informed of what had actually been said during the taping of Press Pass last week, ZNS chairman Michael Moss said he would have fully supported the show being broadcast in its entirety as the corporation's board has been pointing out to the two unions at ZNS for some time that the ratio of the number of management personnel to line staff at ZNS is "outrageous."

"So we do understand and admit to the fact that there are far too many management personnel compared to line staff. In fact there are management personnel in the corporation who have no management responsibilities," he said.

In relation to the actual pulling of the show, Mr Moss said that the decision did not come from his level, the General Manager's level, or even the Ministerial level.

"The show was pulled below that level and I guess the responsible person would explain because the person did it on their own for reasons best known to them. In fact I only became aware that it had been pulled today. I spoke with the Minister and the General Manager and the minister was not aware that it had been pulled and the General Manager said he gave no such instructions, the instructions for the show to be pulled came from a level below him."

In fact when The Tribune spoke with ZNS general manager Edwin Lightbourne yesterday he claimed that he had only seen the show in question earlier that day - some 24 hours after the decision had been made to take it off the air.

When pressed for some clarification therefore as to who is responsible for what is actually broadcast on TV and radio and if in fact it was not the responsibility of the general manager, Mr. Lightbourne asked if he could call The Tribune back as he had just been made aware of what was happening.

Less than an hour later, the corporation issued a statement stating, "This week's show was pulled at the operational level and not at the Board or ministerial level."

The statement went on to say that "the Corporation has a right to ensure proper oversight of all content on radio and television for reasons of accuracy, fairness and objectivity the same as all other responsible media entities."

However, on Monday, Senior Deputy General Manager of Radio and Television Kaylessa Deveaux-Isaacs explained that the decision was reached when the news guests on the show veered off the list of "approved topics for discussion."

When asked if this would be the only explanation or apology that would be offered to the guests and viewership of the programme, Mr. Lightbourne avoided the question. Instead he said that he was happy to hear ZNS programmes have an "excellent draw" as there are "persons" who believe that their programmes do not attract the kind of viewers they would like.

"So I am very happy to hear we have that kind of draw in terms of public viewership and support," he said.

Published On: Monday, June 14, 2010