

SABC Knuckles Under To ANC Pressure

Written by Rudi Prinsloo
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The SABC had "knuckled under" to ANC pressure in cancelling a show on political satire, Cope said on Wednesday.

"Much like the old apartheid days when the public broadcaster was merely a mouthpiece of the ruling [National Party], the ANC has again brought pressure to bear on any programme that shows up the many flaws of its ruling clique," Cope said in a statement.

Announcing the cancellation on Tuesday, the SABC said it was acting "under legal advice".

"The SABC has been advised by its legal representatives that they still required more time to study the subject matter of the show and advise on it."

The Special Assignment episode was to have looked at "the use of satire and cartoon strips as an editorial tool within the South African media landscape", said spokesman Kaizer Kganyago.

The show was replaced with a rebroadcast of "Dik Getik" which focused on drug abuse in the Western Cape.

In response, Cope express its disappointment at the SABC's "repetitive failure to be an objective and even-handed purveyor of the news".

Ciope charged that, in cancelling the show on political satire, the SABC had again "knuckled under to political pressure from the ANC and Luthuli House and sycophantically betrayed the media principle of freedom of expression".

Cope said political satire and satirical cartoons like that of Zapiro were time-honoured ways of debating and communicating disapproval of political parties through humour and informing the people of the issues of the day.

"The old saying that 'the truth will out' is well served by satire and is again being undermined by the ANC, who want to stifle the truth, the tradition of protest and the freedom of expression in general.

"We condemn this action and call on our national broadcaster to deliver its mandate to the people of an objective programmer that gives all points of view to the people so they can make their own, informed political choice."

Cope said the action also cast doubt on the national broadcaster's mandated ability, duty and will to deliver objective news to South Africa, which was "especially vital" in the run up to national elections.

Cartoonist Jonathan Shapiro, known as Zapiro, told the Star he was "livid", but not surprised at the decision not to broadcast.

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The show was to have dealt with multi million rand lawsuits brought against him by ANC president Jacob Zuma over his cartoons.

"My conjecture is that it's a matter of spinelessness on the part of the top SABC execs, that they are worried about having similar lawsuits being brought against them," he told the newspaper.

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