

Crossing swords with Zille isn't the best career move

SOUTH AFRICA

KUBEN CHETTY

THERE is a long-running joke among some senior members of the DA that reveals that the leadership of the party may have changed, but Helen Zille remains the puppet master.

Indeed, history has reflected that those who have crossed swords with Zille have found themselves either being sidelined or pushed out of the party.

Zille has remained the de facto leader of the party after stepping down and even after relinquishing her position as premier of the Western Cape. It is claimed those who back the party financially pull the strings, and party members claim Zille controls the policy direction of the party even though the faces of leadership keep changing.

Here is a look at those black members of the DA who have clashed with Zille and the consequences.

JOE SEREMANE

Seremane was the only senior DA leader with struggle credentials. He was imprisoned as a political prisoner on Robben Island for six years and was detained without trial from 1976 to 1978, and several times between 1982 and 1984.

He joined the Democratic Party in 1994, the predecessor to the DA and in 1998, was elected an MP. He became the federal chairperson of the DP, and when then DA leader Tony Leon, in May 2007, announced he would retire, Seremane was a leading candidate to succeed Leon but was defeated by Helen Zille.

Seremane was the DA's candidate for president in the parliamentary vote in 2008 to elect a successor to Thabo Mbeki, but with the DA standing no realistic chance of gaining a majority vote, he was seen as a cosmetic appointment by the party, with members at the time preferring that Zille stand as potential president.

Ultimately, Seremane was viewed as a threat by Zille, and he retired in 2010.

MAMPHELA RAMPHELE

It took just five days for Agang SA leader Mamphele Ramphele to find that merging her party with the DA and standing as its presidential candidate was a disaster she would not live down.

In 2014, then DA leader Zille and Ramphele sealed the merging of the two parties with a kiss, a move that would later become known as the "kiss of death". A few days later, Zille claimed Ramphele "renege" on the agreement.

Zille backed out of the agreement and accused Ramphele of playing games. Ramphele had technically been a DA member for five days.

Ramphele apologised for the reversal of her decision, saying the timing was not right. However, the reaction to it had shown people were unable to overcome race-based party politics, and she never recovered. On July 8, 2014, she announced her withdrawal from politics.

LINDIWE MAZIBUKO

She was the parliamentary leader of the DA and was earmarked to take over from Zille as the leader of the party. Yet, Mazibuko said she was constrained by Zille in expressing her ideas and left abruptly to study at Harvard University in the US.

Mazibuko quickly found herself ostracised, and eventually, left the party and politics altogether.

It was in 2018 that Mazibuko broke her silence, telling the Marie Claire Power Summit in Johannesburg that Zille had failed to nurture new leadership in the party — and was doing the same thing to the current DA leader Mmusi Maimane. In her address, she said: "I want you to remember that women pulling each other down, women undermining each other in public is not something that happens in the corporate world. It happens in different organisations and it happens in politics."

Zille responded by denying that she had ever undermined anyone.

MBALI NTULI

Mbali Ntuli was the party's youth leader when she clashed with Zille. Prior to that, Ntuli, who is currently a member of the provincial legislature in



HELEN Zille and Mmusi Maimane

KwaZulu-Natal, benefited from Zille's attention but was left out in the cold for thinking independently and falling out with Zille. Ntuli clashed with Zille again when she liked a Facebook post calling Zille, then the Western Cape premier, a racist. She was charged by the party for contravening the DA's social media policy, but the charges were withdrawn.

PATRICIA DE LILLE

While it was okay for Zille to openly challenge her party, the same could not be said for Patricia de Lille. Last year, De Lille faced a slew of charges under the DA's federal constitution, related to, among other matters, her allegedly deliberately acting in a manner which impacted negatively on the image or performance of the DA.

De Lille left the DA and formed the GOOD party, but still had to deal with the National Prosecuting Authority (NPA) after corruption charges were laid against her by her former party. The NPA, ultimately, decided to prosecute De Lille, who is currently minister of public works and infrastructure. De Lille has described the party as a "shell of its former self" and that "its members have abandoned their principles".

"The DA has abandoned its principles, and the battle for the soul of the party has been lost. Watching this battle play out in the past few years has been like witnessing the slow death of a child – unbelievably hard, tough to recognise and difficult to accept,"



ZILLE and Mamphele Ramphele

she said.

PHUMZILE VAN DAMME

In June, Phumzile van Damme, the party's communications spokesperson and Zille became involved in a war of words on Twitter.

Van Damme had taken to social media to report an alleged racist incident at the V&A Waterfront, where she said she punched a man who had been racist towards her. Zille tweeted: "I wish the family would come forward and give us their perspective. But I suppose they are scared of potential consequences. It is hard, in these circumstances, to work out where the truth lies."

Van Damme responded directly to Zille, saying she would not "kowtow to anyone who seeks to invalidate my experience".

"What potential consequences would that be, Helen? Confirming their racism? I told them in the video they recorded that they must please make it public to show their racism. You've clearly made your mind up, so? I will not kowtow to anyone who seeks to invalidate my experience."

MMUSI MAIMANE

The DA's dismal performance at the national general elections was the first sign that internal support for Mmusi Maimane was on the wane.

A bruising battle with De Lille and the emergence of a black caucus not supportive of Maimane revealed the cracks in his armour had become fissures.



ZILLE and Patricia de Lille

The DA was punished by voters in the May elections. Many split their votes and voted for Cyril Ramaphosa nationally or the FF+ provincially. When Jacob Zuma was in the presidential hot seat, Maimane questioned the former president's integrity, using the parliamentary platform.

So when the spotlight turned to Maimane's lifestyle, and questions over his integrity emerged, the public perception was that Maimane was no longer a bastion of integrity. He was accused of driving a vehicle gifted by disgraced businessman, Markus Jooste. The rental vehicle was paid for by Steinhoff.

There were also claims Maimane wasn't paying a market-related lease for the house he currently stays in.

The party's finance committee chairperson Dion George said there was a delay in returning the car to Steinhoff because Maimane was overseas.

The latest revelation is that a report compiled by Leon at the party's request, looking at Maimane's leadership, as well as the DA's poor performance at the polls in May, recommended Maimane step down.

Zille then emerged as a contender for chair of the all-powerful Federal Council, and it is not difficult to join the dots to see that Maimane's position is under threat.

Maimane has the backing of the party's provincial leaders, but history has shown there is only one winner when someone takes on Zille.