

Mmusi - Where are you? The country wants to hear from you!

 By [Marion Scher](#)

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One of the big stories that emerged over the weekend was the announcement on Friday evening that disgraced former DA shadow minister of police, Diane Kohler Barnard had been fired from the party. This as a result of her sharing a Twitter post supporting apartheid-era president PW Botha for which she had already faced a disciplinary hearing which had demoted her.



Mmusi Maimane

This announcement came following a Federal Executive caucus to decide on suitable punishment for Kohler Barnard. The result - expulsion.

I, like many other Jo'burgers eagerly awaited John Robbie's interview with Mmusi Maimane, who surely wanted to explain how they came to fire one of their most outspoken and senior members. But, instead of the ebullient Maimane, who in a [column \(12 May, 2015\)](#) I lauded as being always available and a brilliant interviewee, suddenly we got a seemingly unprepared DA spokesperson, Phumzile van Damme.

In answer to Robbie's question on why Maimane wouldn't speak to him, Van Damme informed him that as the national spokesperson she alternates with Mmusi on interviews. Her comment went: "He leads the party and I'm sure he's got other things in his diary, which is why I'm dealing with this..." In other words, John Robbie - you're not really important enough for him these days. Or at least that's how it appeared.

In fact for a spokesperson of a party that is out to glean as many supporters as they can, her tone was remarkably arrogant. One thing her boss does well is reaching people through his non-condescending and honest comments - a lesson she would do well to learn.

Then Robbie went on to ask her to comment on the issue. Her response: "I'm assuming you're referring to the reports in the Sunday papers?" No, he wants her to talk about the Rugby World Cup result.

She then informed him that actually she couldn't discuss what went on in closed party meetings. As a spokesperson she should know that no comment is the lifeblood of runaway journos...

When John pointed out the newspapers had suggested there were divisions in their party over the issue she replied in an amazed tone that "people are allowed to disagree which isn't an indication of wide divisions. It's really not the end of the world."

Robbie then asked if the Federal Executive meeting became very heated. And her answer was "Like I said, (sigh) it was a closed party meeting and I can't talk about it." That's fair enough and I also teach people to specifically deal with interviewers who badger you by saying I can't talk about it. But I do teach them to have an alternative answer to draw the interviewer away. Her cheeky answer was along the lines of "You know we have around 1,000 public representatives who are capable of forming authentic thoughts. And we disagree all the time..." Yes, that makes me want to vote for their party!



Phumzile van Damme

What was particularly irritating was her constant sneering laugh - yes, I use the word sneering as that about sums it up. Kind of "Oh, John, really." Speak to John Robbie that way at your peril, Ms van Damme.

She even spoke slowly when responding to certain questions in case John couldn't quite understand the gems coming from her mouth. This makes me sad when I had such high hopes for the DA under Maimane. My advice now is be careful who says what - where - when and why...

Tweets:

"This DA spokesperson doesn't sound convincing at all. Mmusi should have commented on this one."

"The national spokesperson of the DA sounds like a complete idiot! Not sure they deserve my vote anymore."

"Listening to the DA National Spokesperson - haai Ms Phumzile. Not eloquent. Not confident."

ABOUT MARION SCHER

Marion Scher (www.mediamentors.co.za) is an award-winning journalist, lecturer, media trainer and consultant with 25 years' experience in the industry. For more of her writing, go to her Bizcommunity profile or to Twitter @marionscher.

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