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Zondo commission – ANC MPs under Luthuli House control, says Khoza

Former ANC MP Makhosi Khoza did not hold back in her evidence before the commission of inquiry into state capture on Thursday, detailing how the leadership of the party controlled how its caucus took big decisions in Parliament.

Members of the ANC in Parliament were encouraged to vote along party lines in no confidence motions, and refrain from holding the executive accountable when they appeared before committees. For Khoza, the latter became evident when she challenged a plan by former SAA chairperson Dudu Myeni to rid the airline of white pilots, and replace them with younger, black ones in the name of transformation. When Khoza questioned the wisdom in that move, given that SAA was highly regarded internationally as a safe airline, she was lambasted by fellow ANC committee members. Former cabinet minister Des van Rooyen called it an anti-revolutionary move, said Khoza. Van Rooyen, however, denied this in his affidavit responding to Khoza's, according to evidence leader Adv Alec Freund.

Khoza left the ANC in 2017 after she faced sanctions from the party for voting in favour of a motion of no confidence against then president Jacob Zuma in August of that year. Leading the pack of punishers was cabinet minister Gwede Mantashe, who held the position of secretary-general at the time. Together with his deputy Jessie Duarte, Mantashe made the habit of attending caucus meetings every Thursday, in what Khoza described as an agenda to influence the collective majority in the National Assembly.

"The challenge that you had was people who were not members coming in to instruct us to violate the Constitution," she said of the conduct of the two top six members. In an address before the vote of 8 August, a more "measured" Mantashe addressed the caucus once again, after a Constitutional Court ruling that allowed for a secret ballot. The matter had been brought to the court by opposition parties advocating for the vote to be secret so as to allow those members of the ANC who did not favour Zuma to continue being president to do so without retribution.

Mantashe told the meeting of a danger of South Africa becoming a 'judiocracy', where the big decisions were made by the courts, rendering other structures invalid. "In other words there was no respect of the independence of the judiciary and the view was that it was now taking the powers of running the country," said Khoza.

Commission chairperson Deputy Chief Justice Raymond Zondo asked if she understood this to mean that MPs were being asked to ignore the Constitutional Court ruling, and Khoza confirmed this.

"It's bad enough when it is said by any party, but when it is said by the ruling party, it is even worse," said Zondo.

Khoza confirmed that she did indeed vote against Zuma on the day, and against party lines, and was severely punished for it. The ANC took a position to punish four MPs that were known to

have voted against Zuma, and instituted disciplinary action against them. She wrote to Mantashe seeking an engagement on what had transpired in Parliament, but there was no response. Similarly, Khoza could not secure a meeting with parliamentary speaker and ANC chairperson at the time, Baleka Mbete, about what was becoming a safety issue for her. These to her served as signs that she was not to receive any support from the party leadership.

Khoza took the decision to resign, she said, in defence of her stance against what she thought was wrong with the party. She told the commission that among the people she was disappointed in was incumbent president Cyril Ramaphosa, who she said failed to stand by his initial position of criticising Zuma. Ramaphosa, she said, would later backtrack on this, in the apparent interest of the party.

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