Why I miss 'white Messiah' Cronin

I MISS Jeremy Cronin. The eulogy of his peers has waxed. He used to speak truth to power.

In this day and age, put him in the good books of the powers that were during President Thabo Mbeki's time. But Cronin was not deterred. He was shamed after presidential bunkerman the late Dumisani Makhayi categorised him for positioning himself as a "white Messiah" for black people.

The runinability of the ANC did not defend Cronin against the racial onslaught. He was left standing alone in the middle of a storm. His sin, remember, was to correctly point out in an interview in 2000 that the ANC was tecturing on the brink of "Zionisation".

By this he meant the party did not tolerate views divergent to those of the leader.

It was at the height of Mbeki's presidency when a number of people like Makhayi subordinated their brains to Mbeki's.

With intolerance of alternative views apparently the hallmark of the era, there was no doubt that Zuma PF tendencies had nested in ANC politics.

Those who questioned the lack of debate, like Archbishop Desmond Tutu, were asked to show the ANC church to which they belonged and to prove that they were not linked to the R23 membership fee or shut up.

Typical Tutu, he refused to pray in the same way he was used to pray for the apartheid government. He has now turned his prayers to President Jacob Zuma so that he may be blessed with God's wisdom that would enable him to pay back taxpayers' money spent on his Nkandla home.

But I digress. The point is, Cronin, a member of the ANC and the SAPC, was among those who found the political climate in the ANC increasingly stifling under Mbeki's presidency.

Unlike Tutu, he did not need to give up his membership. With no viable weapon to silence Cronin, race insults became the effective weapon. But Cronin, an ANC MP at the time, continued to be an honest intellectual from within.

When Zuma's star began to rise, Cronin didn't mince his words. He analysed the implications. His conclusions were as incisive as they were graphic. "He (Zuma) is a congress traditionalist with a strong working class/peasant demeure about him. In my view, Zuma does not (as some have argued) represent the left within the ANC," Cronin noted.

"He concentrates, rather, in his own specific way, within his personality and politics all of the contradictions of the post-94th class project that depends upon the ANC and alliance for electoral reproduction but which seeks to hollow out the movement at the same time." The contradictions, Cronin wrote, were "the problematic and corrupt-prone relationship between the new political elite and emerging and established (business), the schizophrenic balancing act inherent in a project that represents itself simultaneously as western modernising on the one hand, and African on the other; and related to the above, the over-burdening and excessive personalisation of the presidential centre".

For Zuma to stay in power, he needs to use the ANC and the alliance for "electoral reproduction", but the ultimate aim of Zuma's politics is to "hollow out the movement at the same time". But, where is Cronin to claim prophesy of his words?

Well, he surfaced recently, criticizing public protector Thuli Madonsela for releasing the Nkandla report to the "profit-driven" media and in the process "sabotaging" parliament. A week ago, in an article published in Umsobonti Online, an SACP-issued ANC mouthpiece, Cronin does not say anything about the "problematic and corrupt-prone relationships" and how the "excessive personalisation of the presidential centre" has resulted in Zuma ignoring a litany of Madonsela's questions and the inexplicable anti-ANC propaganda.

He says, "It's a toxic mix of private sector corruption, venal officials, BEE fronting and the misguided neoliberal restructuring of the state in the mid-1990s." Cronin says he does not refer to the corruptives.

He states: "This restructuring replaced scores of sector professionals with generic managers." As a result, public works has been stripped of professional capacity - engineers, architects, quantity surveyors, property evaluators - leaving it vulnerable to external and internal manipulation. A property management entity is now being formed to solve the crisis.

Cronin concludes: "Whether it's the public protector's office or a line department, we need to professionalise, democratise and consolidate our constitutionally mandated public institutions."

Looking in this analysis is what the Cronin I miss would have said about the one man who allowed all the "venal officials" to play dirty in his front yard of Nkandla.

Could it be that Cronin's independence of thought has been "hollowed out" since the principal of Nkandla appointed him deputy minister of public works?"