



PALESA MORUDU

## Reinvention of weasel wordsmith Cronin

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# Reinvention of weasel wordsmith Cronin

On April 22 2014, this column appeared under the headline "Facts are stubborn and history will not be kind." I wrote that, "Twenty years from now, we may consider which side of history we stood on as the Zuma project did unforgivable damage to Mandela's legacy."

Among those on the wrong side of history was the South African Communist Party (SACP). "Rest assured," I wrote, "the SACP will have an explanation for its slavish devotion to Zuma. But will it be a standard Stalinist mea culpa, à la the post-Soviet reckoning? Or will the likes of Jeremy Cronin claim that SACP leaders were really working secretly against Zuma all along?"

Fortunately, we didn't have to wait two decades to find out. Last week, Cronin announced at his party's congress that he would not be available to run again for his long-held position of deputy general secretary. But he was available for major interviews,



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in which he tried to distance himself from President Jacob Zuma. The most exquisite specimen, written by Ranjeni Munusamy, appeared in the Sunday Times on July 16 under the improbable headline, "I was never happy with Zuma cult".

In keeping with our protagonist's inimitable ability to almost say something, without quite saying it, while leaving a vague stain on the consciousness, he declares that, "looking back, perhaps I should've been firmer in my views. I expressed them in the party but perhaps not as forcefully as I should've done."

Cronin is a poet in more ways than one. With time, one could develop a powerful study of weasel words based on his public utterances. But

time is short. Fortunately, his theoretical essence has already been set out in the memorable work *On B\*\*\*\*\*t* by Harry Frankfurt, emeritus professor of philosophy at Princeton University.

"What b\*\*\*\*\*t essentially misrepresents is neither the state of affairs to which it refers nor the beliefs of the speaker concerning that state of affairs. Those are what lies misrepresent, by virtue of being false. Since b\*\*\*\*\*t need not be false, it differs from lies in its misrepresentational intent. The b\*\*\*\*\*ter may not deceive us, or even intend to do so, either about the facts or about what he takes the facts to be. What he does necessarily attempt to deceive us about is his enterprise. His only indispensably distinctive characteristic is that in a certain way he misrepresents what he is up to."

Exactly! Though I will concede that those who argue that Cronin is simply a liar, covering up for a lying party, may have a point.

Cronin has always demonstrated remarkable

flexibility. Consider his willingness to toss a comrade under the bus. He now says SACP leader Thulas Nxesi, who was minister of public works at the height of the Nkandla scandal, "misstepped" in communicating about Nkandla, while Cronin himself did his "best as deputy minister to express a slightly different perspective".

Brilliant! Cronin, in fact, was a chief provider of the intellectual cover his party offered for the Nkandla thievery. Remarkably, he and his SACP comrades remain in Zuma's Cabinet, while criticising it from "the left".

Writing in his *Left Turn* column in the Cape Times on March 27 2014, Cronin said the Nkandla scandal was "a toxic mix of private-sector corrupters, venal officials, BEE [black economic empowerment] fronting and the misguided neoliberal restructuring of the state in the mid-1990s," all of which left his department "highly vulnerable to external and internal manipulation".

In other words, Nkandla

had its genesis in the "1996 class project", rather than in the conduct of a venal president who believes his position gives him the right to loot the public purse.

Cronin's weekend public relations makeover included a City Press article in which he said, "I was publicly known as not being happy with [former president] Thabo Mbeki, but I was not a huge fan of Zuma ... but I knew then that he was not entirely uncompromised as a person."

"Not entirely uncompromised" is not how one describes a man who had unprotected sex with a child of a friend. It is not how one defines the person who mobilised an SACP-supported

goon squad to bay for the victim's blood when she accused him of rape. It is not a fitting characterisation of a man who faced more than 700 charges of corruption in 2007, when Cronin and his party repackaged Zuma as a working-class hero.

To sum up: for 10 years, Cronin has served as an apologist for Zuma's grand political project of destroying public institutions, repositioning the state to serve a criminal enterprise and assaulting the Constitution.

Cronin does not bear sole responsibility. The Zuma presidency was the project of his party and other enablers – including some media friends. Some have realised how they aided and abetted a national tragedy and have apologised. Others, not so much.

For Cronin, it's too little too late. But we should recognise a master craftsman. Jeremy Cronin is no apprentice or journeyman. He is a true bulls\*\*t artist.

**I WAS PUBLICLY KNOWN AS NOT BEING HAPPY WITH THABO MBEKI, BUT I WAS NOT A HUGE FAN OF ZUMA**

**Jeremy Cronin**  
SACP deputy general secretary

● Morudu writes from Cape Town.