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Zondo commission – Agrizzi used commission for selfish business interests, Zondo told

Angelo Agrizzi was the de facto CEO of Bosasa, and every attempt he made to vilify Gavin Watson as a corrupt private businessman, during his state capture commission testimony in 2019, was because he wanted to use the potential collapse of Bosasa as a vehicle for his own business empire. Agrizzi, who was COO of Bosasa, wanted the company to get liquidated so that he could take over its contracts.

He even rubbished the image of the ANC to gain favour with the DA, with the impression that he would find protection for business ventures he sought to pursue after Bosasa's collapse.

This is the view of Kevin Wakeford, the former CEO of Armscor which had dealings with Bosasa between 2006 and 2015, as a consultant negotiating the latter's collaborations with government departments in that time. Wakeford made substantial opening remarks before the commission on Thursday after chairperson Deputy Chief Justice Raymond Zondo gave permission.

Agrizzi made several allegations against Wakeford during his appearance in January 2019, many of which the latter says are unfounded, but were only made to diminish the businessman's credibility in the public eye.

Agrizzi's move to submit evidence to the commission did not come until Bosasa had terminated its contract with him, following criminal charges laid against him by two of its directors, added Wakeford, and he realised that he was out in the cold. To bolster his image as a whistle-blower – even suggesting that his health issues in 2017 were a turning point that spurred him to come clean about Bosasa – he even coerced some of his former colleagues into deposing to affidavits in which they fabricated allegations against the company.

These are all characteristics of a greedy, racist, narcissistic Agrizzi who hated playing second fiddle to Watson, and disliked working with Bosasa's black directors, Wakeford said. He resists black economic empowerment, while Watson operated on an opposite principle of building up people for better opportunities, and anyone who held similar views to Watson had a difficult relationship with Agrizzi.

"It was a company that led the pack in terms of understanding the essence of black economic empowerment and bringing dignity to people," Wakeford said.

Agrizzi's motivation to implicate Wakeford in corruption during his tenure as a consultant for Bosasa had more to do with the former's selfish ambitions within the company. The two had a contentious relationship, stemming from Agrizzi's jealousy of Wakeford's relationship with Watson, which he said goes back to the 1980s. He frustrated Wakeford's efforts within Bosasa, often holding back payment due to him for his consultancy work. "This man was the de facto CEO of the company. He had built an institutional moat of control around Gavin Watson." When Wakeford would demand his due payments, these would come back dated, but Agrizzi twisted their

appearance on the company books, presenting the extra funds to the commission as bribes that Wakeford would solicit from Bosasa for work done.

Agrizzi disliked anyone who appeared to conjure up a relationship with Watson, as he sought to exploit every relationship he had with business associates. When Wakeford took on the role of Armscor CEO in May 2015, Agrizzi attempted to “muscle in” the business of his son Jean Carlo on the parastatal. The business is registered on the Companies and Intellectual Property Commission as being a specialist in the defence sector, said Wakeford, but it had existed long before he moved to Armscor, which suggests that it was not effectively operated by the younger Agrizzi.

“Why would this man perjure himself to the point of extinction by attacking me so viciously?” Wakeford asked, reading from his affidavit. It was because Agrizzi believed that he played an integral part in the termination of the former’s employment with Bosasa.

Wakeford is expected to answer detailed questions relating to the consultancy work he did on behalf of Bosasa with several government institutions.

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