



29 January 2019

Zondo Commission – Agrizzi asked to take the fall for Watson and co at Bosasa

Angelo Agrizzi continued to paint a picture for the commission of inquiry into state capture of his life after Bosasa, and the tricks employed by CEO Gavin Watson's family to lure him back into the company. By the lunch break, he had outlined plan after plan by Watson and his brothers – with the support of company attorney Brian Biebuyck – to buy his silence over the corrupt activities he had seen and taken part in, in his almost 20 years with Bosasa.

Several meetings happened, as recently as late 2018, at which Agrizzi was offered money in return for his loyalty. He had testified the previous day that upon resigning in August 2016, he had been pressured by the Watson brothers, Gavin, Cheeky and Valence, as well as the latter's son Jared, to cooperate with them by keeping silent on the bribery for lucrative government contracts that directors of Bosasa, including Agrizzi, had indulged in for years. Bosasa's first contract with government was for catering and facilities management services in the country's prisons in 2004, and the precedent set there was that officials who were instrumental in securing this contract would be rewarded with large cash payments. Several other contracts followed afterwards, with the same pattern repeated – many were with the Department of Correctional Services (DCS), under which prisons are governed.

When the irregularities in these contracts caught the attention of the Special Investigating Unit (SIU) in 2007, and an investigation ensued, there was anxiety in the company as what would be found, according to Agrizzi. Gavin Watson was paranoid and did not know who to trust, and once the investigation began, information began to leak from inside Bosasa. For several years, depending on which politician was dealing with the matter, the legal case that grew from the SIU probe was either stymied, or progressed with the National Prosecuting Authority (NPA). Bosasa had senior prosecutors within the NPA on their payroll to give them intelligence on progress on the case, while on the other hand politicians were used to stall the investigation. By Agrizzi's evidence, between R4-million and R6-million in cash was leaving the company every month to pay for these and many other favours.

In November 2017 Agrizzi was invited to a meeting at the Bosasa office by Biebuyck, who needed him to help convince four employees who wanted to blow the whistle, not to continue with the action. He himself had already decided that he would divulge all he knew to law enforcement agencies, but discouraged the other from doing the same, fearing for their safety.

"You don't understand," said Biebuyck to Agrizzi at the time, "If you don't stop them from whistleblowing, you go to jail." He told him he too was working on the instruction of Gavin Watson. "Gavin wants you to speak to them, he'll pay you to do it.

"If you don't, you will go to jail."

By then, Agrizzi said, he had become used to the veiled threats he was getting from his former colleagues. Once after his resignation, he had been asked – at the advice of Biebuyck– that in light of the investigation against the company, he should "take the fall" for Watson and admit to everything,

because the most that could happen was that he would be fined about R30-million, which the company would be prepared to pay, and he would avoid jail, but carry a criminal record for life. Agrizzi told commission chair Raymond Zondo that he felt betrayed and offended by this and refused.

The interventions by Gavin's brothers was meant to soften Agrizzi up and gain his loyalty, he said. Several attempts in August last year were made solely to buy his silence and protect his former boss. The last offer they made was for him to agree to certain limits, set by the family, on what he could not share publicly. He was to be given R250 000 per month to live on, and a guaranteed R5-million per year. He noted a change of attitude in the brothers when they realised that he was not keen to just sign the offers they repeatedly made him.

Agrizzi continues to testify

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