



## Episode 1,123: What's Happening in South Africa?

Guest: Ernst Roets

**WOODS:** I've had people begging me to talk to somebody to help figure out what's happening in South Africa. Let's start off with what we have been reading in the headlines here in the U.S. about land being taken, expropriated without compensation. Can you describe what exactly is happening and to whom? And then after that we'll talk about the rights and wrongs of the situation? Right now just tell me what's going on.

**ROETS:** Yeah, thank you. Well, there's a lot of confusion at the moment about what is going on. The most important thing to note at this stage is the South African parliament took a decision fairly recently that they would change the South African constitution or that they intend to change the constitution. So in our constitution, of course South Africa is a democracy and it's supposed to be governed by the rule of law.

And we have a clause in our constitution, section 25, which is the private property clause, which basically states that you have a right to private property and your right to private property should be respected. And then it states in the constitution that your property can be expropriated in certain exceptional circumstances, but then there would have to be compensation. So the argument behind that is that if they're building a big railway line, for example, there might be cases where expropriation is necessary, but then there has to be compensation.

The issue now is that we have the ANC, who's the ruling party, and then we have the so-called Economic Freedom Fighters, which is doing everything other than fighting for economic freedom, who are pushing the notion that land has to be expropriated without compensation. So what happened now in terms of the process is our parliament took a decision that the constitution will change and they are now embarking or they have now started a process to change the South African constitution so that they can start expropriating people's property without compensating this.

But the underlying narrative here that, it's seen in the motion to a small extent, but the more important point here is there's an underlying racist narrative that's very evident. You can see it in the way in which the motion was argued in parliament with members of parliament making statements such as: white people are criminals, and if you are white and you own land, then you are a thief, and so forth. And so we are now in the process of public consultation, which is basically a window-dressing process, which would be followed then by the changing of the South African constitution.

**WOODS:** All right, so that's what we've been reading about. Now, let me ask you right off the bat just a theoretical question before we get into more of the gory details. Can a case be made that any of these, let's say, land confiscations could be justified on the grounds that the original owner is not really a legitimate owner from the point of view of strict justice, that the land was in some way itself confiscated from a previous owner? In other words, is there any way that, according to any Western standard of justice, these expropriations could be considered legitimate?

**ROETS:** Yes, I think that's the most important question of the whole debate. And the answer is: it's not a yes-or-no answer, because the short answer to what you are asking is yes in some cases, but not in all cases. But it is now argued as if it is applicable in all cases. So the underlying argument that we frequently hear or continuously hear is: Africa is black people's continent and white people are visitors here, and if white people want to live in Africa, they must abide by the rules of Africans. And of course, their interpretation of what an African is, the underlying notion is if you are white it's not possible for you to be an African.

So South Africa obviously had apartheid. We have a very controversial history of racial segregation. And the argument — part of it, it's drawn to the 1913 Land Act. It was a piece of legislation that was drawn up in 1913, according to which land was attributed to different racial groups. And the argument at the time was that South Africa should be like Europe, that South Africa as a country should be divided because we're a very diverse country. We have 11 official languages in our constitution, not even counting other languages as well. So the argument was that different tribes or different nations living in South Africa should each have their own piece of land.

And then there was this Natives Land Act, and a fairly small part of the South African surface was then attributed to different black groups. And that amounted to about 13% of South Africa's surface. So what is now said today is black people were taken by white people and they were stuck into patches of land that only comprised 13% of this surface. But what is not said — and I'm not trying to justify the piece of legislation at all; I'm just trying to provide historical context. What is not said today is that black people occupied 12% of the surface of South Africa at the time. And what is also not said is that it's only possible to survive on 30% of South Africa's surface if you do not have the technology to dig a bore hole, which of course is something that was brought with Western civilization.

So just bringing it to the question you were asking is: there were cases of dispossession. There were even cases where white people were dispossessed in order to provide their land to black people. So yes, that has happened, and that's why it's so important to differentiate between restitution and redistribution. So restitution is to say land was taken from someone and that land has to be taken back. And there's been a process to do that, and that process is basically finished.

And now there's a new process, and this is more than just redistribution. So redistribution is to say: we're going to look at the color of your skin, and the color of your skin will determine if you are a legitimate landowner, if you have the right to own that land. This is more than just that. This is a policy of nationalization, because what the policy's about is nationalizing land, having the state own the land, and then having the people work it. So ironically, or tragically, rather, it's very similar to the policy of the Soviet Union, the collectivization of farms policy that we had in, I think it was the 1960s. So that's what it boils down to.

**WOODS:** How many people potentially could be affected by this?

**ROETS:** Well, potentially the entire country could be affected, and that's where there's a bit of a nuanced difference between the ANC, the ruling party, and the Economic Freedom Fighters. So this motion was proposed by Julius Malema, who's the leader of the Economic Freedom Fighters, which is a more or I would say even more radical group than the ANC. So the policy of the EFF, and they state it quite clearly, is that the entire country, everything, all private property has to be nationalized and has to become the property of the South African government, because government knows best. Government knows better than people or than the private sphere how things should be done. It's a planned-economy argument.

And there are people within the ANC, which is the ruling party, who agree with this and there are people who disagree. So some within the ANC would say: no, we are only going to expropriate land that we believe is not utilized effectively, and then we will make sure that we will hand it to someone who will utilize it more effectively. But then of course what is not said is the underlying narrative that we've seen in Zimbabwe as well, and we know that, knowing the ANC, which is a Marxist-Leninist liberation movement, that what will end up happening is it will be cronies and people who are politically connected who will get the land.

So there's a dispute within the land expropriation activist community about to what extent this should be executed. There are some that want the entire country, all property to be expropriated and become government property, and some say they want to decide which property will be expropriated and which won't.

**WOODS:** Wow, that's astonishing. All right, so the term Economic Freedom Fighters means something a little different over here in the U.S., I guess, than it does with that group, which I've been reading about recently. Tell me about the African National Congress, though. I never thought I would be thinking of them as being more moderate than another group, but they've been the ruling party for quite some time now in South Africa. And as you say, it's pretty clear where their philosophical inspiration comes from. How exactly have they governed over the years? I mean, they haven't seized the means of production.

**ROETS:** Yes, well, I actually made a documentary film particularly about this question that you're asking now, and we might give the link to the readers if they want to watch it on YouTube. But the ANC has to some extent a very good reputation abroad, because it's seen as: it's the party of Nelson Mandela and it's the party that fought against apartheid.

But if you really know the ANC and you know what their policies are, you would know that it's a very radical movement. As I said, they proudly refer to themselves as Marxist-Leninists. Many within the ANC openly revere people such as Robert Mugabe and Hugo Chavez and Fidel Castro as heroes. There's a dispute at the moment, because there's a proposal to change one of the main streets in Pretoria, which is the capital, to Mao Tse Tung Street. There are people frequently quoting Joseph Stalin. And so it's basically a party that's hero-worshipping the world's worst dictators.

And part of the problem, I think it's a problem with all liberation movements, but the ANC is a very good case study of this, is it's not possible or it's never been possible for a liberation movement, especially a left-wing, Marxist liberation movement to govern efficiently. They are extremely efficient at struggling, in other words, at protesting and rioting and so forth,

but when it comes to governing, the movement is very socialist. But the ANC has succeeded in portraying itself to an extent as being not that radical.

And part of the reason is actually a deliberate strategy, and it's been written down in some of their Strategy and Tactics documents. So in the early '90s when there were negotiations for a new democratic South Africa, one of the main leaders of the South African Communist Party, which is an alliance partner of the ANC, was a man called Joe Slovo. And Joe Slovo was a hardened communist, and he actually said – he was a friend of Nelson Mandela, and he actually said to Mandela and to the leadership of the ANC that the ANC should not position themselves as being hardline communists; they should position themselves or portray themselves as being pro-freedom and being pro-democracy.

So that's why the ANC speaks of what they call a national democratic revolution, and what that means – it's written up in their own Strategy and Tactics documents. It's fascinating to read, but what it boils down to or what the strategy was in the early '90s is they must portray themselves as being pro-democracy so that they can get and harness a wind of international approval and popularity in South Africa. And once they achieve that, they would become the ruling party. They would become the state, and then there would be a constitution. And once they become the state, they can then – and this is their own words that I'm quoting now – they can then "utilize the state mechanisms to further the revolution." And the aim of the revolution according to their own documents is to transform South Africa into a socialist state. But I think the main difference between the ANC, which is a much bigger party, and the EFF, which is smaller, is that the ANC has a better sense of strategy, and the ANC puts effort into positioning itself or portraying themselves as being not that extremist.

**WOODS:** So the EFF helps them in this, then.

**ROETS:** Yes.

**WOODS:** Really? By saying: look, if you don't want these people, you're going to get us. Is there any third option that's even remotely plausible?

**ROETS:** There is a third option. There's the Democratic Alliance, which is actually the opposition, or I should say the de jure opposition. It's the second-biggest party in parliament. But there's increasing consensus in South Africa that the Economic Freedom Fighters are the de facto opposition. So the DA is more liberal. I think the DA is very similar to the Democratic Party that we have in the United States, which many would argue is still pretty left-wing. But so the DA is in favor of policies that are socialist in nature but not that extreme. So there's not really a conservative option in South Africa or a libertarian option. There's not really something along those lines, and I think that is something that's a big matter of concern and something that really should be addressed.

**WOODS:** We heard something about a libertarian mayor of Johannesburg. What was that all about?

**ROETS:** Yeah, there is. Herman Mashaba is very libertarian or much more libertarian in his line of thinking. He's a black millionaire. He actually started a small business I think in the 1980s, and he started selling products out of the boot of his car, and he's grown into one of the richest people in the country by expanding his business. So he was a candidate for the

Democratic Alliance, the DA, and he's the mayor of Johannesburg, and part of the friction at the time was the fact that his policies or his views were not so much aligned with the party that he represents.

So for example, Herman Mashaba at least before he entered politics was quite outspoken that affirmative action is not good for black people, despite the fact that it claims to promote or empower black people. In South Africa we also have a policy called Black Economic Empowerment, which is basically government intervention and so forth. And he was quite outspoken against those policies. He was outspoken to an extent against social grants and so forth. And the party that he's representing now is in favor of those things. So yes, he's more libertarian and more freedom-aligned or oriented, but I think he's being constrained to a degree by his political party.

**WOODS:** After the ANC took over, surely there must have been some South Africans who thought: maybe these people's agenda is something other than racial reconciliation, as the world is being told. Maybe there's something else that they intend to do. And maybe are we now observing the end game of this?

**ROETS:** Well, I think to an extent, yes, because what the ANC has been saying with this so-called national democratic revolution is that they must now in their most recent Strategy and Tactics document – it's very fascinating. When the ANC has national conferences, they always issue a Strategy and Tactics document, which basically describes their strategy. And they say in their own Strategy and Tactics document that we must now reach the second phase of the revolution. And I'd like to read you a quote just to put this in context by the current state president, Mr. Cyril Ramaphosa, who also has a pretty good reputation abroad. He's sort of seen as the pro-business guy because he's very rich. He's one of the richest people in the country, or maybe the richest person. So he's seen as being very pro-business and as someone who understands the economy.

But what happened, Cyril Ramaphosa, who just recently became the state president, was the chief negotiator for the ANC during the '90s for a new constitution. And I'm going to read you a quote here by Dr. Oriani-Ambrosini, who was a member of parliament, and he spoke with Ramaphosa, and he said in his memoirs that were published very recently – he says during that time – in other words, in the early 1990s.

He said: "In his brutal honesty, Ramaphosa told me of the ANC's 25-year strategy to deal with the whites. It would be like boiling a frog alive, which is done by raising the temperature very slowly. Being coldblooded, the frog does not notice the slow temperature increase. But if the temperature is raised suddenly, the frog will jump out of the water. He meant that the black majority would pass laws transferring wealth, land, and economic power from white to black slowly and incrementally until the whites lost all they had gained in South Africa, but without taking too much from them at any given time to cause them to rebel or fight."

And I think what happened in the last few months in South Africa is that the temperature was raised not by one degree, but maybe by five degrees, so there's a bigger outcry all of a sudden, which ironically is a good thing, because I think people are starting to see the bigger picture about what is happening South Africa.

**WOODS:** But the trouble is if there's no real political alternative to this that really intends to fight back against it, then maybe your only alternative is emigration. And even then, which is

a very, very difficult thing to expect somebody to do – even then, I don't see how you could sell your land and then go, because if everybody knows the land is subject to expropriation, the price of that land has to start approaching zero at some point.

**ROETS:** Yeah. That's a big problem at the moment, is the value of property. And I am personally an example of this. I'm not a landowner, although I'm regularly accused of being a land thief, despite the fact that I don't even own land. I'm just called a land thief because I'm white. But I would very much like to start a small company and start buying properties to rent out and sort of investing in urban property. But I've decided not to do that because it's not a secure investment in South Africa to invest in property. So that is a problem.

In terms of the organization that I represent, we're a very big organization. We've got 206,000 members who make monthly contributions. And we very firmly believe that we want to find some sort of a solution within South Africa. We don't want to start exporting people, so we believe that there is stuff that can be done. And part of the good news is that this is mostly a problem that was created and that is being driven by politicians that's very much out of touch with the feeling on ground level. It's repeated frequently by politicians that there's a hunger for land, but if you look at all of the available data, it indicates that there's really not, especially among black people.

There's a hunger for urban land, and that's the irony, is about 23% of people in South Africa, which is mostly black people in this particular case, live on state-owned land. So it's informal settlements and so forth. And half of them are complaining about the quality thereof. They are saying it's state property, they're not doing anything about it, it's very poor quality. So part of the solution could be, if the ANC is truly interested in what they refer to as radical economic transformation, they should provide those people with title deeds. That would be a major economic injection.

But I think another point that I want to make about the fact that this is sort of out of touch with reality is that, so we've had a land claims process. Remember, I spoke about the difference between restitution and redistribution. So there's been a few hundred thousand people who have filed land claims based on the notion of restitution. So they would say that their ancestors were deprived or dispossessed from a particular piece of land, and then they would argue that, and if it's true, then that land would be given back. 97% of those claims have been settled already, but what is very fascinating about this is 93% of those people have said that they actually don't want land; they would much rather have money than land. So that's one very interesting figure.

Another interesting figure is a survey done by the South African Institute for Race Relations. Very recently they asked South Africans what do they think are the most important things that could be done to improve their lives. And the amount of people who said they believe land reform would improve their lives was 1%. So there's a massive dissonance between what people feel on ground level and what people experience and what politicians are pushing in South Africa.

**WOODS:** Yeah, no kidding. Tell us about, I've been reading a bit about Orania. Tell me what's going on there.

**ROETS:** Yeah, well, Orania is a town that was started in the 1990s. The notion there, there's a lot that's being said about Orania. The negative stigma is that it's a new apartheid town and

so forth. But the argument – I've been to Orania. The argument behind Orania is that for the Afrikaner community in particular – which is stereotyping or generalizing, but the white Afrikaans-speaking community in South Africa, which is a cultural community. For them, there's nowhere in the country where they are a majority. Everywhere they are – there are actually many of us. There are 2.7 million of us. But everywhere we are, we are in a minority. In other words, there's no place in this country where we can actually make decisions that affect our own lives. We cannot make legal decisions about our schools, about community initiatives, and so forth.

So the argument behind Orania is that there needs to be a place where Afrikaners can also be a majority so that they can be in a position to, to a degree, govern over themselves. So South Africa has a very centralized state, and we believe that a bigger degree of federalism would already be very good for South Africa. And that's sort of the reasoning behind Orania. I'm deliberately explaining it to you from the Orania perspective. But of course it's a town that has received a large degree of criticism, especially in the media.

**WOODS:** I have to ask you about how the South African media has been portraying this expropriation initiative. I've seen you in clips on South African media.

**ROETS:** Yes. Well, I've been in quite a few interviews and so forth about this, but what we are very concerned about and we've actually done research on this, which we will publish soon, quantitative research, is that there's a severe double standard in the South African media, especially with regard to farmers and especially with regard to white farmers, to be more particular.

So we have done, for example, a study where we've gone through two years of media reports. We took the 15 most-popular media outlets in South Africa and we took every single article that was published in the media about an incident of violence on a farm. And then if you take out all the variables and you put it in a few graphics, you can clearly see that if, for example, the perpetrator is white and the victim is black, it's being reported probably about 16 times as much or close to that as when it's the other way around, when the perpetrator is black and the victim is white. So there's a severe double standard in the South African media. And some journalists, not all, but some have very open agendas, very revolutionary agendas, I almost want to say.

So we do find, while there are some journalists in South Africa who are excellent and who are really writing about this in a positive manner and just stating what's happening, I think the problem in the South African media is that many of our journalists are very informed about what's happening – in other words, who is saying what – but they don't have the ideological depth to, for example, explain what Marxism really is. So they believe that communism sounds good because the idea is to eradicate inequality and inequality if evil and communism will fight that, so probably communism is something that's worth experimenting with. That's a type of notion or sentiment that we regularly pick up among journalists in South Africa.

**WOODS:** In your conversations with people, are you hearing talk of emigration, of people who want to stand and fight, or people who are so bewildered and disoriented they don't know what to think?

**ROETS:** Yes. It's a combination of those. We get people calling our offices on a daily basis asking for advice. There are people who are considering emigration, but most of them regard

that as a plan B, so if all else fails. What I think is important to mention here, and it goes back to what I've said in the previous question about media reporting, is that the ANC has been saying, and the EFF, the parties who are pushing this policy – they've been saying that South Africa would not be like Zimbabwe. What happened in Zimbabwe would not happen in South Africa, because in South Africa it would be done without violence, and we can rest assured that they would not use violence when they take people's land.

And many in the media have sort of accepted this, and they would then criticize us and say: well, are you deaf? Didn't you hear that it would be done without violence? It would be done orderly. But what is also a reality is that many people who live on farms have done so their whole lives. It's been in their family for four to eight, even ten generations in some cases. And many of them say they would rather die on their land than to be forced off that land and forced to go to a city somewhere. So the argument that there would not be violence, it's really a moot point coming from the person who intends to do the stealing, because the violence starts when people resist.

And I can tell you now that there are people, there are people that – I personally know people who would resist if they find some government official, and if your listeners are libertarian, they would understand the concept of monopoly on violence. So the government has a monopoly on violence, so if they wake up one morning and there's armed guards telling them to get off their property, they're just going to say no. And what happens then? Then they would have to be forcefully removed. And then they would resist, and then there would be bloodshed. So there's no point in arguing that we don't need to worry because we've learned from Zimbabwe; we're going to do the same thing but without violence. It's a moot point.

**WOODS:** What can we who are on the other side of the world do that could possibly be helpful?

**ROETS:** Yeah, I think there is something that people can do, and I think that's part of what our organization's strategy is based on. Remember I mentioned the ANC's Strategy and Tactics document. So one of the things that the ANC as an organization is very focused on is what they call the balance of forces. And it's also sort of a Marxist idea or way of doing things, but their strategy is they have all these ideas about things that need to be done, but there always need to be [inaudible] of the balance of forces. In other words, what would the reaction be if they do this? And there's been many cases where the ANC wanted to do very radical stuff, and as a result of public pressure, they changed their tune. So what we think – and the other attitude that we also know that the ANC is very sensitive about is their image abroad, what the rest of the world thinks of them, because they have been enjoying a very positive image given the fact that they are the party of Nelson Mandela.

So what I think can be done and what we intend to be doing – I, for example, will be going to the U.S. soon, hoping – and I've been in contact with some organizations there, so I'm hoping to meet with some think-tanks, some journalists, and so forth. We will also be sending people to Australia and to Europe to raise awareness about what exactly is happening in South Africa. And I think if people abroad can simply – they can contribute even if only by talking about this online, on social media, or in some public sphere.

And if people have a degree of influence, if they have particular companies or if they are involved with trading and so forth, then they could put pressure on the South African

government, because the South African government's being extremely dishonest at the moment, because the president went to the World Economic Forum in Switzerland, this last one. And he's encouraged the international community to come and invest in South Africa, and he even said, "Your investments are safe with us." Now they've gone even further saying that they encourage the international community to come and invest in agriculture, and we know the basis of a secure investment is property rights. So while they are encouraging the international community to invest in South Africa, they have this whole plan to basically scrap the right to own private property, or at least downplay it significantly.

So I think we're not calling for disinvestment in South Africa, although disinvestment would be a better alternative for us than what the ANC's planning. But what we would like the international community to do is to put pressure on the South African government by saying to them: if you continue with this, we will disinvest, or we plan to disinvest. We plan to take our investments out of South Africa. We might stop doing business with South Africa. And I think if they experience that and if they feel the heat quite significantly from that perspective, our experience has shown that they have tended to change their position. And we are hoping this would be the way of solving this issue.

**WOODS:** Tell us your website, if people want to follow up on this.

**ROETS:** Yes. We have Afriforum's website, [Afriforum.co.za](http://Afriforum.co.za). We actually opened a new website, and that is where people can make a difference. It's called [Expropriation.co.za](http://Expropriation.co.za), "za" for South Africa as it used to be known earlier. So if people just go online and they type in "Expropriation.co.za" they will see there's a letter. It's like a memorandum that people can sign, and there's a very brief explanation, and then you can add your name and email address – you can add your name and surname and contact number, and we will remain in contact with people who sign this. We will keep them updated with what's happening and what we are doing to stop this. And we are also hoping to receive at least 500,000 names, possibly even a million if we can, of people saying that they are against this policy.

And listeners will see there's a tick box where you can say: do you live in South Africa or do you live abroad? So we would very much like to get support from abroad as well, people in the U.S. especially, going on line and signing this petition so that we can have a stronger mandate when we go – because I will be going to parliament in this time to respond to this policy while there's a process of public consultation. And the more support we have on this petition, the stronger our mandate to say that the consequences of this would be destructive for the entire country.

**WOODS:** All right, so definitely we want people to go to that website. I'll put all this stuff up on the show notes page for today, which is [TomWoods.com/1123](http://TomWoods.com/1123). Well, Ernst, I appreciate your time and this is very valuable information, and I hope you can be our go-to guy for follow-up appearances as events unfold.

**ROETS:** Yes, thank you very much. I would gladly keep you in touch. And as I said, I plan to go to the U.S. probably in April or May, so maybe there would be some opportunities to raise awareness about this problem.

**WOODS:** Absolutely. I hope so. Thanks so much again.

**ROETS:** Great, thank you very much.