

The Greening and Fall of European Civilisation

Civilisations don't collapse, they crumble

Salvatore Babones

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The European Parliament election results are in, and the *Guardian* has proclaimed a 'green wave'. Winning roughly 9 per cent of the seats, up from 7 per cent in 2014, it seems that the European Greens really are on a roll, or at least a mini-croissant. Nearly half of their gains came from the UK, where the Greens' campaign slogan ('Stop Brexit. Fight climate change.') honestly admitted that environmentalism was only their second priority. Post-election commentary invariably portrayed the Greens as a 'Remainer' party, not a 'climate' party.

In Germany, the Greens won a record number of votes because virtually every other responsible party is in government, meaning that anyone who disapproved of Chancellor-for-Life Angela Merkel's performance pretty much had to vote Green – or neo-Nazi. Merkel, it should be remembered, was the one who decided in 2011 to close down Germany's nuclear power plants and convert the country to wind and solar. So it's not entirely clear that a vote against Merkel's governing coalition is a vote for climate action.

The situation was even worse in France, where voters who opposed Emmanuel 'Make Our Planet Great Again' Macron's grand coalition had to vote either for the Greens or for Marine Le Pen's rebranded Rassemblement National. The French Greens set a new record. So did Le Pen. She actually won the election.

Meanwhile in Australia, 2019 was also supposed to be the year of the ‘climate change election’. After all, the *Guardian* said so. The Australian Conservation Council said so, too. As did the Climate Council, the Wilderness Society, and Greenpeace, to say nothing of the Greens themselves.

One particularly persuasive Australian Greens election slogan for 2019 was ‘Vote Greens on May 18 to Unf-ck Our Future’. Well, maybe it was persuasive in Warringah, where it really was the climate change election. But Warringah has a wonderful climate, so it’s hard to see what Warringans are so worried about. In that extraordinarily unsustainable little corner of Australia, beer bottles and cigarette butts on the beach are bigger environmental threats than bushfires or cyclones. If Australian society really does collapse under the weight of climate change, at least Warringans can afford to collapse first class.

Europe doesn’t have cyclones or Aussie-style bushfires, so it’s harder to tell what makes European intellectuals so worried about climate change. Their biggest concern seems to be that climate stress will bring ever-larger numbers of refugees fleeing drought, famine, and disease in Africa and the Middle East. But those same intellectuals generally believe (or profess to believe) that African and Middle Eastern refugees are on the whole a good thing for Europe. That seems to put the issue back at square one.

Of course, European civilisation was overwhelmed by refugees once before – back in the fifth century. The Visigoths who sacked Rome in AD 410 first entered the Roman Empire as refugees. Facing genocide at the hands of the Huns, they were offered food and shelter inside the Roman borders. But when the Romans failed to deliver the promised aid, the Visigoths went on a rampage, killed the Emperor Valens, and eventually toppled the empire in the West. Then settled down to a comfortable retirement in Spain.

But Rome didn't fall because of its (inadequate) hospitality toward refugees. At least, not according to Edward Gibbon, the much-admired but little-read author of *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. According to Gibbon, Rome fell as 'the natural and inevitable effect of immoderate greatness'. So there you go. If you're going to be great, you'd better be really great, or not bother being great at all.

More seriously, Gibbon described the Roman Empire as a 'singular and perfect coalition of its members'. As he explained, none of the provinces of the later Roman Empire were particularly Roman, not even Rome. They hung together more from moral inertia than from any sense of mutual belonging. Each province just wanted to be left in peace to enjoy the fruits of civilised life. No one was particularly willing to fight for Rome. And so: *Prosperity ripened the principle of decay; the causes of destruction multiplied with the extent of conquest; and, as soon as time or accident had removed the artificial supports, the stupendous fabric yielded to the pressure of its own weight.*

Today, London's Remainers, Europe's Greens, and even Australia's GetUp! are all, in their own ways, very civilised. But not one of them is willing to lift a finger for civilisation. Quite the contrary: many of their leading intellectuals openly condemn civilisation, or at least their own civilisation. They routinely express admiration for indigenous cultures, just as Tacitus and other Roman scolds extolled the virtues of the barbarians beyond the borders.

Condemning the luxuries of civilisation is one thing; giving them up is quite another. Tacitus never moved to the Teutoburg Forest, and few Green Warringans are likely to move to the Kimberley or Cape York. The simple life has its virtues, but good flight connections and high speed internet are not among them. Whatever your politics, civilisation has its rewards. Easy to denounce, they are much harder to renounce.

Those who denounce civilisation do so at their own (and our own) risk. Contrary to the Green narrative of environmental crisis, civilisations don't collapse. They crumble – from the inside. Right-wing race warriors get this just as wrong as left-wing champagne socialists. To save civilisation, we have to believe in our strength, not bemoan our weakness.

The European Union may indeed 'yield to the pressure of its own weight' any day now. Luckily for civilisation, Australia and the English-speaking world are made of sterner stuff. Environmental catastrophism is the house philosophy of the European Union, but it doesn't fly in Australia. And while the European Union is facing an existential crisis over a foreign-born population of just 7.5 per cent, Australia is 28 per cent foreign-born and going strong.

The 2019 European Parliament elections highlighted Europe's immoderate greatness with spotlights on both extremes of the political spectrum. But if Australia's 2019 elections are any indication, Clive Palmer doesn't have to make Australia great. It already is.