



People stand in a queue to buy kerosene oil for home use at a petrol station in Colombo, Sri Lanka on March 17, 2022. (Ishara S. Kodikara/AFP via Getty Images)

PREMIUM VIEWPOINTS

Sri Lanka's Tragic Tale of 'Going Green'



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July 28, 2022 Updated: July 28, 2022

Print

Commentary

The story of [Sri Lanka](#)'s demise into chaos, poverty, and lawlessness is tragic—but another warning sign of what happens when leftist ideas take hold.

If you haven't been following the day-to-day crisis on the streets of Sri Lanka—an Asian nation that was not long ago a thriving middle-class country with wealth and commerce—the country's demise into complete anarchy in the streets is almost too bizarre to believe.

Several years ago Sri Lanka's government started listening to the advice of the radical anti-growth greens. They went all in on the anti-capitalist agenda—so much so that Sri Lanka achieved one of the highest ESG (environmental/social/governance) scores in the world. They were going to help save the planet and get rich and healthy in the process.

Oh, wait. Things aren't going so well there.

Sri Lanka is in a state of total economic collapse and anarchy. The schools and businesses are shut down. The nation has run out of fuel. Earlier this month, violent demonstrators stormed the official residence of the president and then set fire to the residence of the prime minister. A few days later, the president boarded a plane in the middle of the night. He's now resigned and is in exile—and there's no real functioning government today.

There are many factors behind Sri Lanka's demise, but [green policies](#) are one of them.

Sri Lanka was self-sufficient in food production until 2021. Then-President Gotabaya Rajapaksa issued an overnight ban on all synthetic fertilizers and pesticides in a drive to promote "organic agriculture."

The production of rice, a staple food in Sri Lanka, fell by between 40 and 50 percent nationwide. Food prices rose by over 80 percent and now there are severe shortages, which has led to malnutrition and widespread hunger.

Michael Shellenberger, a liberal analyst who specializes in environmental issues, explained on his blog what went wrong. Sri Lankan leaders, he [reported](#), “fell under the spell of Western green elites peddling organic agriculture and ‘ESG.’” Sri Lanka’s leaders bought into myths that organic farming is trouble-free and that pesticides and fertilizer were dangerous.

The enviros got what they wanted. “Sri Lanka has a near-perfect ESG score (98), which is higher than Sweden (96) or the United States (51),” according to Shellenberger. It also can’t feed its people and it has run out of nearly everything.

Now the country is under emergency law, and food is being shipped in to prevent hunger or even famine. Living standards have fallen by half or more for most residents. Decades of economic progress have been squandered.

How many times does this story have to be repeated? The rise of leftist Marxists in partnership with radical green environmentalists has destroyed one country after another. Chile became rich when it adopted free market policies in the 1970s, ’80s, and ’90s, but now it has installed Marxist leaders and the progress has faded fast. Colombia was marching in the right direction until last month when an anti-free market regime was elected into office. Capital is now flowing freely—*out* of the country. The same heartbreaking story can be told about Cuba, Venezuela, and Argentina.

Free market capitalism is the tried and tested way to march toward broad-based prosperity. But that lesson keeps getting lost in cries of equality, justice, and save the planet. Sri Lanka’s 20 million people are the latest victims of these false promises. Will we ever learn?

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