

Socialist Equality Party campaigns at Sri Lanka solidarity rally in London

Our reporters
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The Socialist Equality Party (Britain) attended a rally on May Day in London's Parliament Square, held in solidarity with strikers and protesters in Sri Lanka.

Around 3,000 people protested, carrying homemade placards with slogans including, "The power of the people is stronger than the people in power", "No medicine! No food! People are suffering!", "Rajapakse, return our stolen wealth!", "Free Sri Lanka from violence, corruption, racism and Rajapakses", "Restore democracy", "Journalists under threat in Sri Lanka", "Let us live with dignity", "Listen to the masses, respect democracy" and "Make basic essentials available".

SEP members distributed hundreds of copies of the Socialist Equality Party (Sri Lanka) statement "A socialist program for striking Sri Lankan workers", addressed to workers taking part in a general strike in that country last week, in English, Sinhalese and Tamil. The leaflets carried an advert for the International May Day Online Rally, hosted by the International Committee of the Fourth International, which attracted wide interest.

An SEP stall displayed posters with the demands "Abolish the executive presidency!", "Oppose IMF austerity" and "Build Action Committees!". A group of protesters joined in a chant of these slogans led by a member of the SEP.

Many stopped at the stall to discuss this programme and leave their contact details. Several gave interviews to the *World Socialist Web Site*.

Malani, who has lived in Britain for 32 years, told our reporters there was a "huge financial crisis in Sri Lanka. The leaders are not really paying attention, people are suffering—no medication, foodstuffs are so expensive, no gas, no oil. The future is so terrible, people are in fear."

She continued, "Especially the food items are very expensive, even though people are queuing two-three miles for petrol, for diesel, for gas. Many hours there's no power in a hospital, and so many patients no medicine. People are so much suffering. They are so feared about their future."

Asked about the record of capitalist governments since independence, Malani replied, "For 74 years these two parties have been running [Sri Lanka]! They steal innocent people's money, so we want them to stop the stealing and do the best for the country."

Asked about the police murder of Chaminda Lakshan in Rambukkana, she said it had been ordered by those in high positions. "That's totally unacceptable. They should all go to jail," she said. "This was a peaceful demonstration; nobody should be killed!"

Sriyani said, "I am here to raise my voice against the Rajapakse family, because they corrupt our whole country. People are starving at the moment. So I want to raise my voice to tell them they should step down and go home now. Enough is enough. They are not fit to run the country."

She explained, "My whole family is in Sri Lanka. They are surviving at the moment, but we don't know what will happen in the future months. Their lives are at risk. My brother runs a company. He is really depressed as he doesn't have any foreign currencies to streamline his work. I also know a couple of people who are really struggling, they don't have food to eat. They are really starving at this moment, but the Rajapakses don't have any sympathy for the poor people. Not only the poor people, even the middle-class people are suffering because of expenses that they can't afford."

Sriyani said of the trade unions, "I am not very sure about unions, but even the unions are corrupted. They

are influenced by the politicians; they don't raise their voice for their own workers. That's what happened even with the teachers' union. They recently wanted a raise, but the politicians corrupted even the unions."

Hashini told us, "I live here in the UK with my husband and kids, but my parents, brothers and sisters are suffering in Sri Lanka. They don't have cooking gas, they don't have food and especially medicine. No matter how much money we are able to provide they don't have any goods there to buy."

"People are suffering, they simply can't live there. We want the corrupt people to leave the parliament, they are destroying the country."

Asked her opinion of workers setting up rank and file committees, she said "This would be the best time, Sri Lanka is not alone, there are Sri Lankans all over the world. I agree with the need for solidarity of workers all over the world."

Nirmala said, "In Sri Lanka we have protested for 20 days now against the government. They are demanding to take the government's powers and to get a new government to rule the country because there is no electricity, the inflation rate is more than 150 percent."

She continued, "We are now facing the worst case scenario. In 10 months to a year, the entire country is going to collapse. Now we need to get rid of this situation and hope that something better comes afterwards."

"People are discussing what's going to happen in the future. At the moment we can't change the system. Maybe next time, in 5-10 years. Now in parliament, everyone is in the same category. They are for themselves and their families and not for the people."

A group of doctors, **Aumanthi Ramasamy, Keith Chapman, Victor Mendis** and **Canisius Anthony**, discussed the situation in Sri Lanka. One said, "We are here today to express our solidarity with all the people of Sri Lanka. Our fellow beings in Sri Lanka, who are now undergoing a crisis. As you know, the current regime in Sri Lanka is very oppressive. They have bankrupted the country; the country suffers almost anything."

One explained that they had "just come back from Sri Lanka. I returned about a week ago and the people in Colombo, in the outskirts of Sri Lanka, people are on the streets. There is no fuel, there is no gas, there is no kerosene. The poor cook with kerosene and there is no

kerosene. There are massive queues all over the country."

Asked about how similar crises were affecting the region, another answered, "I am aware now that Nepal is going through a similar situation. So, it could well spread."

They pointed out that these events receive next to no coverage in the mainstream media and several reporters in the country had been killed. "We're just wondering how many more reporters are going to die before the international media is going to report on the situation in Sri Lanka. Because there's nothing in the international media. Today, when you look on the news, there's nothing on about the situation that is currently going on in Sri Lanka."

The doctors described how "Politicians in Sri Lanka, for decades, racially divided the country for their gain. Fortunately, the current generation is together. All nationalities, all ethnicities in Sri Lanka, they are together. Politicians know they can't mess with that generation."

"The youth have now come together. And there's a big revolution going on, a peaceful revolution. Whether they are Sinhalese or Tamil or Muslim or Buddhist, they're all together, and they want a regime change. So, I think we need new blood."



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