

Sri Lankan workers in Europe speak out on mass uprising against Rajapakse

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This weekend, as a mobilization of the Sri Lankan working class took over Colombo, stormed the president's office and forced President Gotabaya Rajapakse to flee, Sri Lankan workers in Europe took to the streets to demonstrate their solidarity. Rallies were held in London, Paris, and other cities across Europe.

WSWS reporters intervened at the rally in Paris to interview the demonstrators and discuss the perspectives of the Socialist Equality Party (Sri Lanka). They distributed the SEP statement on the July 9 mobilization that toppled Rajapakse.

WSWS reporters spoke to Renuka and Edouard, who worked as a plumber in France after immigrating from Sri Lanka. They had traveled back to Sri Lanka and were present earlier this year as protests broke out against Rajapakse over surging food and fuel prices and growing shortages of basic goods. They said they had attended several #GotaGoHome protests on Galle Face Green in Colombo and knew that after their departure, protesters had defied a state ban in order to continue to protest.

Renuka told the WSWS that she was very happy that the protests had finally forced out Rajapakse and his cronies: "I stayed there for three months, it was catastrophic. People cannot buy food, they eat once a day. It is horrible. ... There is no gas. Even flour to make bread or wraps is too expensive, people do not have enough money to buy a kilogram of flour. So we are very happy they are gone."

Edouard denounced the government for looting the Sri Lankan people: "We do not have anything anymore in Sri Lanka, they have stolen everything. The entire government must leave and we want a new one. Prices have skyrocketed, doubled, tripled, but wages have not gone up. People can no longer live with what they earn."

He explained, "We do not need to import rice in Sri Lanka, we have supplies for more than a year. But rice prices are rising, we do not know why. It's the same with sugar. We do not have gas because they are hatching

schemes to keep getting even more money. ... The government is a family. They are everywhere, they have stolen all the hard currency we had. Now they will have to give back what they stole."

When WSWS reporters asked about the SEP's perspective of abolishing the executive presidency and transferring power to the workers as part of a struggle for socialism, Edouard agreed. He said: "People must involve themselves all the time in politics, year round. It's not the parliament that should decide, as normal. Now the people must decide, that is what we must do in Sri Lanka. The people must take power in Sri Lanka."

Demonstrators at the rally presented the WSWS reporters to Chandana, a member of the Maoist Front-Line Socialist Party (FSP). He said, "We must set up an interim government with all the other parties. The people from #GotaGoHome should come sit down with all the political parties. There are laws. This is not a revolution, or if it is, it's a revolution for change."

When WSWS reporters asked why he insisted the mass uprising is not a revolution, Chandana repeated his call to build an interim government including the Sri Lankan Freedom Party (SLFP), Rajapakse's former party. He said, "We need an immediate solution. We need an interim government and then we can look for it. ... Like it or not, we need all the parties, the Tamil nationalists, the Muslim Congress, the SLFP, all the parties, whether you like them or not. Because there is nothing else that can be done right now, we must do that."

When WSWS reporters said that the SEP had refused to attend the all-party coalition talks the FSP is proposing because power must go to the working class, not an interim government made of corrupt bourgeois parties, Chandana left, saying: "I do not have time to talk to you, because I know your party."

Finally, WSWS reporters also spoke to Triyan, a young Sri Lankan worker in Paris. He called for the overthrow of

the establishment parties in Colombo, saying: “We, the people, should all gather together and overthrow them. ... All these parties continuously take turns colluding among themselves to control the situation.”

Triyan said it was necessary to overcome religious and ethnic divisions incited by the Sri Lankan ruling elite, notably during the 1983-2009 civil war, to unite and overthrow the regime.

About the existing Sri Lankan regime, he said: “All of us, Tamil, Sinhalese and Muslim people must come together and overthrow it. We are divided because the politicians have divided us for their political purposes and the people do not have such a problem. We think it is politicians who have created the problem. My opinion is that it should not happen again, everyone should have equal rights and everyone should have equal justice. This is the opinion of most youths today.”

Asked the causes of the revolutionary struggle emerging in Sri Lanka, Triyan said it was rooted in an international crisis and the Sri Lankan civil war: “Food and fuel shortages, inflation, the coronavirus pandemic, the Russia-Ukraine war, the problems are the same as in all countries. But Sri Lanka is not a superpower, it is a small country. It has already spent a lot of money on the civil war. It's people's tax money. Corrupt governance must be abolished.”

After WSWS reporters noted that millions of workers internationally are following and discussing what the revolutionary uprising in Sri Lanka means for them, Triyan pointed to the explosive discontent mounting with capitalist governments around the world: “This is the situation all over the world today. They are not spending money to control the coronavirus. Millions are poured into the war ... The people who work and live in Sri Lanka are the ones worst affected by these problems, and so they are the ones who have burst into the President's office.”



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