

How do you take your tea?

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PRESENTED BY COMMUNITY DEFENCE MARSHALLING SYSTEM (CDMS)
AND WORKERS INTERNATIONAL DISCUSSION

Moses

Well, welcome, welcome to Balam Balam Place, guys. My name is Moses. I'll be emceeing for you tonight. I'm with CDMS. the Community Defence Marshalling School or System, however you like to call it.

So we stand today and meet on the lands of the Woiwurrung and Boonwurrung people of the Kulin Nations. I would like to remind us all that sovereignty was never ceded.

Welcome again. This is part of CDMS's series of political workshops. I hope you guys may have come along to Professor Gary Foley's thing a couple of months ago, that was fantastic. So CDMS is branching out. We're trying to keep the community together, trying to do more. And part of that is about learning. and communing.

So today we have ourselves a seminar with Menaha Kandasamy, who is from the Red Flag Union in Sri Lanka. The Red Flag Union represents workers from tea plantations, rubber plantations, factories, garment workers and domestic workers. And she's flown all the way over here from Sri Lanka just to talk to us, which is, I think, freaking fantastic. So let's give it up a little bit for that. [applause]

So guys, The Union movement is a global movement. We love to stand up for workers in Australia, but it's important to remember that we stand up for all workers. My understanding is that the tea plantation workers that Menaha represents, they make our tea for us. If you drink Lipton, you drink Dilmah, you drink T2, any of that hipster shit, you most likely are drinking tea made by somebody who's making what I'm told is like eight dollars a day. And their government is trying to push that down. They're trying to take away their rights.

And so it's us, the consumers. who can do something by standing up to our government, standing up to those companies and saying, that's not cool. We want workers to get a fair go. And by doing that We do our part as people, as unionists, as all of those things.

So I'm going to pass over to comrade Guinevere, who can introduce Menaha. I wish you all a lovely evening. Thank you.

Guinevere

Thank you, and welcome everybody. I have to say, I have the advantage of having known Menaha now for Oh, 17, 18 years. So a very long time. And Menaha will tell you the history of the plantation workers, so I'm not going to go into it to any great extent.

Menaha is the daughter of tea pluckers, which is one of the major people in the tea industry. and unlike many others, got away from not being only the only option for them for the rest of their lives.

And so she went and got educated and these sorts of things. And people went, Oh, wow, you got educated Isn't that great? Now you can go off and do all these things at the whatever And she went, What do you mean? I'm a plantation worker. Plantation workers have got rotten conditions. I'm not going off there to be one of these rich people. I'm using the skills I learned to help other workers. That's what it's about.

And the other thing to understand, and this is my comment from when I have visited Sri Lanka. And I have met quite a few unions there, and I never met any women who were union officials. Not one.

There were many unions that had a lot of women in them, but there weren't any women in their leadership. And the major way that Menaha has worked in this as working with the people on the ground and building people from the ground up so that now within her union, half of the officials are women. The General Secretary is a woman. And so there have been dramatic improvements, but nowhere near the improvements that she wants to make. There's a long way to go.

Now I'll leave it to Menaha. to tell you about the plantation workers and what horrible attacks against them are happening.

By the way, I advised Moses that they were paid \$8 a day. I was wrong. It's \$6 a day that they're paid. It's even worse. Okay?

Menaha Kandasamy

Thank you so much. I'm so happy that so many people here are really interested to hear the plantation workers story. because maybe some of you are well aware that the plantation workers always kept isolated, voiceless. So here's the space for me to talk about their issues. And also I need to just tell you, English is not my First language, this is my third language. Therefore, I will make a lot of mistakes. Wear it. If you can't understand what I am talking, please put your hands up. and say, please repeat it, I will do it. And I'm not a person that stand and talk, right? I really prefer just walk and talk casually.

So anyway today i have a mic i have to be here i will try my best! Okay. So maybe some of you are not aware, maybe some of you well aware about plantation sector and workers and the community. Therefore, I will try to explain you a little bit about the history, where they came from, just two, three lines.

Actually these plantation workers all came from um India. Actually I don't I should not use the word came from. They didn't come you know, came with willingness. Right. It's an extreme poverty situation. They were cheated. They told that If you go to Ceylon, that time Sri Lanka called as Ceylon, if you go to Ceylon, you will get free coconut. And free moldy fish. I still until today I can't connect why these two things were told, right?

So these are the things they said. So, the poor people who thought, Oh, we got we can have these free things, then there's a um so called I never believe, but I have to say this: the history so-called upper-class people, little bit upper than workers, they were hired. by British to bring called Kanganis to bring these workers to Ceylon. But by that time, what is their task? They have to clean the jungle. Right, clean, start up the you know the land for plant. So they started with actually coffee. Then only it came tea, right? So tea, rubber, coconut, and everything. But these workers, their journey started with cheating. Today, two hundred years gone, their history, still they are cheated. cheated by politicians, cheated by companies, cheated by governments.

So you can imagine, right, the word when I use cheated, it's not correct because it's just for simple terms people use. Right? This is like a two hundred years exploitation history, extreme exploitation history. And the situation there, it's you can't believe it's we are living in 2025. All the country talking about now AI and still I'm not familiar with that. But Sri Lanka too talking about digitalising everything. But the plantation workers, how they are living.

Until today, the workers, they don't have toilets at the workplace. It's more than fifteen years we are campaigning, we are lobbying, we are advocacy, doing none of the politicians or companies can understand. Why this toilet is important. Imagine you are working in a field more than ten hours, right? put you in that situation and think, if there is no toilet, what you will do. Our workers come and we they talk, they say You know how we manage with this situation? We stop drinking water. We stop drinking water. You know so many plantation workers has kidney problem. Nobody connected with this toilet and drinking water and kidney problem. never ever connected. Even if you go and tell the doctors, they never connected. They just individually they say it's a disease for that particular person. It's there's a root for the this disease. Right.

And I really like to say one example how these workers when we say no toilets, it's a technical term. No toilets, okay, can build a toilet. Right? Two hundred years

imagine it's a feminised sector. So more women work, men also work. But all the Kangani supervisors, all men. So field is like a open field. Imagine like so many workers working. You need to pass urine. How? You have to get permission from Kangani. They they are working class, but they trap you know what this is the capitalism, you know how the company trap the workers. to put into their side, right?

So these women go and ask, I need to pass urine. And it's *what? What?* So in Tamil, they just ask because they want to hear again and again. This woman needs to say it loudly so everybody can hear. You know, they enjoy, they think that's a joke. They enjoy. And this woman needs to go away from that field to find out a place, but other field also workers working. It is not just a one place and they can go anywhere. So it's so hard, right? It's talking itself, my heart beats. You know, you you get like how difficult.

Okay, somehow they manage to find a place and they just go, he will shout. It's why you're late. You know, come soon, come soon. You know, it's and then she has to find a place and hide and go to pass urine. Then the leeches. You know, when you hurry, you can't see leeches won't tell you and come, it's everywhere. So when she Quickly finish her job and come to work, then she realises here and here in front of this Kangani male people, she can't pull her sari and take it out. You just leave it.

So this is not one day story. I'm talking of two hundred years they are living with this.

So it's one example for health and safety. One example for health and safety, how the companies are maintaining and taking this serious I'm not joking. It's true. It's a true story. Okay, so I start with this and the situation is Now already it's mentioned, it's I think this morning I checked with Australian dollars, the wage, it says six point seven five seventy five cents. It's for a day. So if you calculate like for a month, if they get like 148 Australian dollars or something, and it's not for one person. That income, theoretically one hundred and forty eight it has to come, but companies will manage their best to deduct You know, if you they there is a gnome system, they fix gnome for every every day you have to pluck like 18 kilos or 20 kilos, even if it's rubber tapas, there is a seven kilos, six kilos they had to bring. But that norm, that is again it's the high exploitation happening through that process.

So when they fix the norm, workers bring the tea for a day twice, some states three times, they have to wait their once when they fill their bag, they bring they have to come out from the mountain and they weigh it, then they keep the record. Again they go back and work until the end. Then they will find out for a day how many kilos they pluck. So when They will again say, oh, you didn't bring because the scale always skipped towards the person who is it's always a male. Kangani or supervisor someone. So the scale will be just hang like this, and he will keep it like this. The women will stay behind the scale and they will bring their basket or bags.

and put it there, then this person will say how many kilos. Then she has to believe. And again the fight is they are going to because I remember long time back Red Flag did taught them how to read the scale.

And it's not a digital scale, right? It's so when those women got understand how to read and they started to say, I want to see the scale. They said, No, it's not your job. You pluck tea. My job is seeing how many kilos.

And always they deduct if they pluck 20 kilos, if it's a norm fix for 20 kilos, if they pluck 20 kilos, they deduct for bag heavy. That bag is it's like I I don't think it's kilos. It's a very light bag. They deduct one kilo for that. And they deduct they say, oh, it's water in the Leaves, they deduct again one kilo. For a day, they deduct three kilos from them. So when it's the twenty kilos, some places went twice. twice they do, three, three, six kilos. Then they won't paid full day wage. They paid half of they call half pay. So half pay means you are losing not only your wage, you are losing your EPF because EPF calculated according to how they work. So everything you're going to lose from there, right?

So this is a systematic oh systemic exploitation, right. Systematic, it's the systemic exploitation, right? This is not just it's happening, right? exploitation, right?

So the wage from wage, they are not getting enough wage, the norms fix actually according to companies' interests because we had a collective agreement that was companies refused to sign in twenty nineteen. After that, the laws, all the rights, how to fix norm and trade union rights, everything in that collective agreement. And None of the people, even yellow trade unions and government, don't care after twenty nineteen what is happening to these workers. No laws cover only except EPF, ETF.

So trade unions are kept away also, you know, because of this collective agreement is just stopped. Until today, there is no any other laws covers. So companies that give them a space to easily Exploit whatever they want because before the collective agreement was there, there is a system to fix known. The local leaders and the management come together, all the trade union leaders, State Committee leaders and the manager will fix the norm for according to the weather, according to the season. But after twenty nineteen, companies just took over and they fix what they want.

So always they fix high amount which pluckers can't pluck, then it's easy them to go for right less pay. Actually, every time if you read and carefully if you see, every time when wage increase As soon as they will increase the norm. So that's not a wage increment. So you increase one side, other side when you increase the norm, what will happen? they can't get that paid. So they paid less than what they earned before. So they have systems how to go you know, behind these workers and cheat them and exploit. So this is the wage issue I want to say. So from here If

you see like their living condition, so still they are living in lion rooms. There are very few houses Indian government gave and you know, it's through the yellow trade union politicians they are part of political leaders, party politics and the trade union leaders, both role they play.

So they use they misuse that money and they built a few houses, very few houses, and that is the bad condition than the lined row. Right? Because why I'm saying that, when every time when I say it's the housing condition is very low, they will point out: What about these few houses? That's not land room, it's a separate house Indian Government gave us.

So for six hundred thousand workers, if you are giving twenty five houses, can we say housing situation is good. It is a ten feet ten into ten feet house. You can imagine one room. You sleep there, you cook there, children study there, you change your clothes, you do everything in that line room. Right?

So I'd like to give you one one of my comrades said it's interesting example I use, so I want to share with you. Um actually it's a sad uh example. One worker uh said it always when we discuss, they tell. But we had recently a workers' tribunal last year and she gave a testimony. So then She just said to the judges, she asked, Do you know how I am living? Right. I have all the photos evidence here to prove that I am living in this condition. But I want to point out one example to you, sir. She used like this. And she said, every day when my daughter wants to change clothes, I have to ask my husband to step out from the house. Until she changed the clothes. She's adult. She wants her privacy. So I am Trapped into this too, I have to ask my husband, it's raining or it's sunny day, whatever it is, he needs to get out from the house and he needs to wait until I call him back in. So this example she gave in her testimony, she said.

And I remember another woman in her testimony, she said. I am sir, I am forty years old now. My married life is like twenty-five years. I married and I have three children. But until when they are small, okay, but once when they started to grow up, you know, I never ha had sex with my husband. Do you think, sir, we don't have feelings? We are not human? Do you think my husband doesn't have feelings? So do we want to live in this condition? And she said, I can't bring this evidence to this court. She said that, this is my word. I believe you trust this evidence.

So what I'm trying to say is these are the workers build up the economy to country. They are the backbone of this country economy, but they are still living in I'm not joking, still until today they are living in this life. So nobody wants to talk about it. They don't want to talk about this.

As I said, this is well planned way, it's very patriarchal system, and it's like a captive labor system I will call modern slavery now. They vote as a slaves, but still they are slaves. And this community kept they are living inside their lime rooms, working

there. So outside community connection, they don't have any connection. So there are issues issues also, until they die, it's with them. So While this all I'm just thinking, I think I should not take too much time and when I when you allow me to talk, I just talk. So, I you know, it's so many things to say, but I will I want to just point out another thing before I stop. What is happening now? Right, we are really worried. There's a big risk for these workers.

With this old condition, now companies are trying to casualise. the plantation sector. So casualise means um this sector British started with that colonised period they call checkroll system, it's the payroll system. I hope you will understand it's the permanent job. You can't just terminate workers because they need workers. Even if workers want to go, they want to keep them because it's an economy, country economy, and their income.

So in situation, the companies try to actually start a long time back, but it very difficult to identify this casualisation. They started with like only Sunday workers, you work and you all you know it's a poverty, poor, you need to earn more. So therefore, Sundays We will give you chance as much as possible, n free you any time you can come, any time you can pluck tea, you can bring your children, you can whatever you do, how much you pluck, we pay. So the workers, when you are in extreme poverty situation, you try to go to work Oh, Sunday we got extra work. And they tried their best and they pluck, pluck, pluck. When You know, it it takes time, you know, it happen like this. For us even for trade unions, it takes time to understand what is behind this. They never give time you to think.

So while when this is happening, Red Flag Union clearly understood there are so many problems going to be. Because they are going to lose working days, because one day if you pluck with everybody, your friends, neighbours, everybody, and pluck all the tea, and you are going to lose the working days. It's going to hit you, your wage, your EPF, ETF, everything.

So we started to make aware the workers slowly, but it's difficult workers feel like it's extra money coming in. And where are we now? Today, that well planned way they casualise some of the down south estate, totally they casualise. They cheated. They asked workers, they gave the blank paper and asked workers to sign. And they said, we are thinking to put your salary all in the bank. So we need to open bank account. So everybody signed, they they are not aware, they are clueless. Even there is no bank inside plantation. You had to go somewhere and I don't know what they thought they quickly. Then they said, You sign, we will give you a grativity. Right? You take your grativity, but don't worry. From tomorrow you work how you work before.

So now and also they you know how I don't know how they design this, you know, cheating examples. They said you are going through poverty situation. Your children are starving. Why can't you take your gratitude money now? Enjoy after

you die, why this money? Workers went for it. They didn't understand once when you get the gratuity, you are out of the work. Your permanent work is end there.

So some of our members, even our members also sign. Some of our members most of the members didn't sign. Then we were able to file a case against that. This happened, I think, 2017 through industrial relations section. We won the case, but company appeal it. Now it's still in court of appeal. So through this story, what I'm trying to say, it cases against to government because it came from government's order, against to government and against to red flag, we were also the opponent.

But former governments, so many governments, came through, none of the governments are willing to file an objection. If they are not filing objection, only red flag file objection, but the main person who needs to file, they didn't file because they don't care about these workers. So until today it's in a case.

So what I want to just a little bit sorry, I'm taking more time about this casual casualling or informalisation. That's the word we are using, casualisation. What is happening? The workers are given a plot of land and they ask to work there. They say you are free. You're free. You can work, right? You can work, you can wing, and one day you will be a owner of this land. That is the word they are using. The lands are owned to the government. Sri Lankan plantation lands are owned to not company, government, long lease government companies got it. to manage there. So the workers believe that, oh, we are going to own this, then it's a good option. We have our they didn't think it's the small plot of land. You pluck tea and also they say under this casualisation, you pluck tea, but you have to give t to us only. You can't sell your own wherever you get. The price we will decide. And that's the lower price they decide.

So and the first few months, the workers get more money. That's the way they because it's a crop is there and they interested, they pluck more, more, more, more. And after that a plant it's the normal practice within seven days the tea will grow. you can pluck after seven days in the same bush. But now, because of the bad agriculture practices, now fourteen days Right. And this plotland were asked to maintain by workers where they will go, you know, where money how they will maintain. It's someone else's plot, someone else's earning.

Why these workers should maintain the plantation. Right? How much exploitation they are going through. So they will they are going to lose all their EPF, ETF. Even their wages, there is no fixed wage, how much you pluck you paid. If you are sick, no, the main thing, the maternity benefit, they will lose. There is no maternity benefit. If you want to give a birth, it's up to you. You go and give. If you are not working in that plot land three days, we will take the land and we will give to another person. So you are jobless. Because you are going to give birth, you are going to be jobless.

Can you believe this is happening in plantation sector? So they are going to lose all the compensation. Right. Any and plantation sector, you know it's not like a flat land, it's a it's difficult, right? So many problems are there. So and no compensation and no trade unions. That is the easiest way them to just kill these workers. Right. So it is a slow killing.

I don't know. It's once I used this word and all the companies were against to me, even the commissioners are against to me. you know, you are spreading some rumors. So I'm sure you all can see how it's a slow killing happening, right, in the plantation sector. So therefore, What we want, what is our demand, right? We don't want couple of rupees increase. We want dignity to these workers. We want justice to these workers. That is what we expect. And I'm expecting from you all, whenever you have your cup of tea, just think about it. Just think about it. what behind the scene what is happening. Thank you so much.

Moses

So guys, do we have any questions that we would like to ask? Seeker in the back. Hi.

Audience member

Sorry, I just wrote this down for you speaking before. You're speaking on the conditions in the plantations, how oftentimes the workers are struggling. with very difference between constantly thinking about where the next meal is going to come from and then also the struggle to talk about unionisation at the same time. [How do you] get these workers who are hungry, who are tired, and very poor to start also thinking on top of that [about joining a union]? Thank you.

Moses

So just to repeat the question was with regards to Menaha's achievements in getting workers who are extremely oppressed and struggling with like real material needs to unionise and participate in the movement?

Menaha Kandasamy

Yes, it's a good question. Yes, it's a working class conscious. That's our first step. Right? And we will make them aware that if they are alone, they can't do anything. So it's a bigger enemy in front of them. So they need to come together. and we will also make them aware that what is workers' power. So we have a series of training To get them, it's not so easy, but when you are in a difficult situation and when they see some changes happening. and they get interested. So it's hard, but it's um organizing, mobilizing them, right, and make them understand how capitalism works and how workers should come together and what is workers.

Power, right? What is trade union power? So, this whole way. Did I answer your question?

Moses

Actually, if I could ask a further question on that one. So I guess as a unionist who's on site at your workplace, you would meet a lot of workers who are generally quite dissatisfied, really unhappy with things. This isn't working out for me. How do you sort of capture that frustration and I guess break through the sense of hopelessness? and help them be like, yes, I can join my union, I can do something. In that almost in that one to one personal level, how do you convince someone to actually join the union instead of feeling hopeless?

Menaha Kandasamy

Actually, we have a it's a union, so therefore, there is a structure, you know, the state level and called state committees. there is a state committees and each district we have a union representatives and also district committees are there. So it is the support system is there, but You know, it's always convene you know, it's they will see that how the Union is working on the ground and how we are winning. you know. So the other workers mostly we have a it will help our local leaders who already with us. They are the powerful tool for us to talk to those workers who don't want to join union and who, you know, they will talk and they will explain what they gain. And also, it's an estate, you know. All live together, stay together. They can see that red flag union, how we are working, and because of that, for example, in one estate. They were trying to sell the land to the local politician. And it's that already that the state is starving with lack of working days because there is no much crop.

So but in the meantime, the company is trying to sell the a piece of land to the local uh politician and he planned to build a hotel there. So this issue is a common issue. It's going to affect all the plantation workers. It's not only our union members. So we had like day and night we blocked the street, main street, and day and night we all were in the street. We didn't a single minute we didn't move.

So, it was if I want to go to toilet, then that place another person, all the workers came, and we started with Red Flag. Right? It was started with like only two hundred workers. But it increased. Other workers understood, oh, it's our problem, our problem, they come. together. So this is uh one then finally we were able to stop that. They didn't sell until today, no. So how this is the way we gain the trust from workers. And they can see Red Flag very clearly. We took a stand that always we will be with workers. We don't have any hidden agenda. So we have a proper mobilisation process to win mentor them. There is a process, mentoring process. Always we keep on mentoring them and others can see. You know, that's the way we attract people. And if people we try our best, yes, people doesn't want to be

unionised. So we will give them a chance, we will take them and they don't need to be our union, but they can see what is happening, then they get interest.

It's a long process, it's difficult to explain, but it's we work very hard. It's a groundwork. Groundwork.

Moses

So it sounds like it's sort of a combination of demonstrating the things that you have done and the things that you are doing and also like Getting delegates involved, like people that people personally know, and creating that closeness. I love that. I recently signed up to be my union delegate, and you should too. Yes.

Audience member

Hi, thank you very much for talking today and sharing your experiences. They're very, very harrowing. I'm just wondering, you mentioned a number of issues. Specific to the workplace that relates to women. Can you share with us how Red Flag Union organises women around the issues that affect women workers in particular?

Moses

So just to repeat for the microphone, the question was about how does the Red Flag Union organise women around the issues that affect women in particular. Is that correct? Yes.

Menaha Kandasamy

Yes, actually, that's just before answering your question, that's the main reason we want women also to part of the union because it's a feminised sector. It's always male-centered union. So when I become I elected uh first woman general secretary, then that was my target, right? What are the issues affecting women workers? And I can give one example. For the pregnant woman, when I was elected as a general secretary that time. I saw so many field of pregnant women, they still need to go up. and pluck teas and tap rubbers, everything. So we really fought for it, right? And finally, we bought a system like okay, they will work, but you have to give the ground level work, right? They you should not ask them to go up or carry things. And the feeding mother So, you need to give break for them to feed. So, it d particularly we select the issues and work around it. And it's a long campaign. It's not just one day or two days you get everything, but it's a long campaign. And we always our campaign, we made women workers aware about the problem because sometimes when you are you know, more than two hundred years, you are into the problem, you won't see that as a problem. You will say, oh, this is what these things are, right? So you make them aware that this is your right, this is your problem. then automatically they will come out. Then easy to organise, easy to protest, easy to campaign. So that's the way we do. Thank you.

Moses

Thank you so much. Also, absolutely insane that you have to argue for Breastfeeding women's right to take a break to breastfeed. That's I am not a childbearing human, but that makes me very upset that that's something you have to fight for. Fantastic work. Yes, question.

Audience member

Hello, my name is Marina. I wanted to ask you about an article that I read. to do with sexual violence and the killing of women. I read a story that a young girl was taken from a family of plantation workers. and she disappeared. They found her murdered and her body burnt. And you intimated in your earlier discussion that Women were humiliated by the men who were in charge. So I just wanted to ask if this is a very bad problem on the plantations.

Moses

So your question is whether the phenomenon of women of sexual assault and sexual violence And the disappearing of women is a serious, well, obviously serious, but like a widespread and regular problem to be addressed.

Menaha Kandasamy

I will say sexual harassment is yes, right. It's very serious. it happens. You know it's in the that environment also, they take it like it's a verbal violence, sexual abuse, everything, you know, they that's what I said, you know, they always everybody forget that these are workers, they are human. right. So it it's a high level of domestic violence, sexual violence. It's happening, right? And yes it's I'm I'm not sure it's I I can't say like the the disappearing and all it's a very common common, but yes, even if it's one happen, it's happened. right. And it's a issue. It's a big issue, right. Yes, we heard there are couple of incidents like that. And mostly these issues won't come out You know, that is the reason. You know, sometimes it's very difficult. Yes, it's happening or not. The proof right, they won't go to police, they won't it this news won't come out, right? Then if it's not coming out means um it's hard to say how many happening, it's regularly but yes, it's happening.

Audience member

After the judges received people's testimonies, what happened after that? Did they or the government do very much or do they have much control over the plantation?

Moses

So Rain asks, after the judges received people's testimony, what happened next? And did was any action taken, essentially?

Menaha Kandasamy

Actually, that judgments recommendations are really good. It's a practical one. They gave like 11 recommendations, and we took by the time when we were. doing it's the former government we took that to the government because it's most of the things saying government should stop this because even though companies are managed, but government these are citizens of Sri Lanka, government should take care about the conditions. So therefore, we we handed over the all the documents to government and even ILO and wherever we can, nothing happened. So the new government Came and now again, just last week we gave to them and we asked them to do. But as red flag We already started the process. We filed a case we are filing it's already in the process. We are filing a case in the court against this toilet. problems and we are filing the case against wage. But the problem is I don't know about Australia and Sri Lanka When you are filing in the Supreme Court, it's a fundamental rights. Already you should have a law. So governments should breach that law, then we can file a case. But for these workers' toilets, there is no law. So, but we are we are we are going to do like a trial one. We'll see how can any judges say no, no need. I I we hope No, something will come out from this. And that's two cases there. And against to this casualisation, all these things, we are doing series of campaign. And I'm happy to say recently we did the black belt campaign. We started with red flag, but is Spreading like all other workers also joining, they just go to work, they won't lose their work, but they have a black ribbon. And the day one, you can see it's the black big Ribbon, it's going like this, someone wearing here, here. But day two, another worker said, Can I have a small piece? They are cutting, cutting. And the finally, I felt like the day six. Some workers are wearing like a batch, cut, cut, cut. So many workers got the black thing. So that means they joining. So the workers, this is the way red flag V works. We start with our members and it will go to other workers. So, to it's a then when the government got to know that everybody is involved and they are doing this, then they call us for a meeting. That's the meeting last week we had. And very clearly we made it. They have to do it before end of December. some of the recommendations. So we are trying to make it happen.

Moses

Thank you so much. So we'll just do the one more question. Yes?

Audience member

Menaha, I met you the other night and your story of how you got to where you got to was truly inspiring. So I hope you get to share that at some point as well with other women here. But around the actions that you take in Sri Lanka, here are unions, there's so many regulations and we're very, very restrictive about action that we can take and the government has to tick off and. We have to hop on one leg and pat our belly before we can take any action. Do you have similar

restrictions like that you were referring to, basically picket lines and things that you were holding? Are you restricted by government or regulation as to the actions you can take for your workers?

Moses

So the question was with regards to government repression and restrictions around the kinds of union activity that Red Flag can perform.

Menaha Kandasamy

Yes, we have, but we never follow. [crowd laughs and applauds] So how how how that happened: It's workers' power. You know, we were very sure government will say you can't block this road, right? Then if the more workers and workers, everybody coming. It's the they are not ready to leave, they are not re they will try to fear you, everything, and then they will just go. Right? So we never follow. What we want, we follow. What we don't want, we won't follow. If anything against us, we won't follow.

Audience member

And what are the repercussions if you don't follow?

Menaha Kandasamy

Of course, yes, they will come and they will erase and they will try to you know do so many things. right, we are not fear about it. If I go inside and another person will start, so it's not one person. So one thing we will make sure, uh we won't isolate ourselves. and we make sure that so many workers and they understood the situation, they are powerful, they are not going to leave the picket line or anything. We will plan in that way. And it's the organizing worker more concentrating organised workers more will give us the power to do these things.

Moses

So I guess you might say that laws are threats, and threats are only as good as your ability to follow through.

Audience member

Thank you for sharing the struggle that you're having. So my question would be It looks like the struggle you have is not an easy one in the sector. What can we here do to support either in any way, whether the political level or just how can we support the struggle that you engage?

Moses

So the question was how can we here support the struggle?

Menaha Kandasamy

Of course, that's the solidarity because you I think you all are consumers. So everybody drink tea or somehow, right? So you got a power in your hand. So how you are you can use it, right? How can you pressurise the brands or companies? So right? I think yes, it's very important. And I hope you all will do it.

Moses

If you're looking for something quite material for yourself to do? We're doing a global campaign called How Do You Take Your Tea? We're looking for people to film themselves making a cup of tea, maybe like five seconds of you like filling the kettle, five seconds filling the cup. Five seconds putting in the tea bag. And then we're going to make like a massive montage of that as part of a campaign. This is a global campaign. So contact Celine to send your videos along to them. And that's something that you can do that is much more direct and material. Of course, you can also send letters of complaint to your preferred tea manufacturers as well, which is always fun. They certainly read those. Miguel?

Miguel

So I just want to say we're doing this meeting here because Menaha came and she said, can you help us, right? So and this is our latest in a series of political meetings. So we do marshalling every week. many events every week. We've done it for ninety weeks straight. We do marshal training every week, and we've done it for ninety weeks straight. But now in doing marshalling with so many different political protests, we see that simply being on the streets is not enough. We need to have a better understanding of the system. And we know, unfortunately, CDMS is just very practical organisation. Not very we haven't had many meetings. We have a lot of training and a lot of discussions about how do you move when the coppers come for you, but not that many meetings. And we saw that it is necessary to understand the system, it is necessary how to organise to oppose the system, and it is also necessary to understand what is the best effective organisation we need to have. A lot of political org this is sad to say, and I cry every night because of this. A lot of the organisations that were built in the movement for years, maybe for a hundred years in the workers' movement, in the democratic rights movement, in many movements, have become really ineffective. And they are not looking at the practical problems. So we have decided that we need to say to everybody, we need to start becoming a political educated, politically educated and politically organised. So there are leaflets there. We are trying to develop particular meetings that are very, very connected to the ground situations. So if you like to be involved with this, please be involved with this. If you don't want to because you're very busy, just try to keep in touch. So the next political meeting that we do you can come to it, but we will develop a campaign for this to support Menaha and the comrades in Sri Lanka, not just send them a letter, but to meet

them regularly. So we have Zoom meetings, we we have actual discussion, yeah. So that's what I would like to say. Thank you.

Moses

So, a couple of other things to do, guys. Obviously, this event was run by CDMS. I see a lot of fresh faces today, or maybe I'm I have a terrible memory for people. Please come along tomorrow at 11 o'clock at the RMIT courtyard for training. We will do marshalling defense for the pro-Palestine protest, which we often do. It'll be delightful. I might manage to hand out some snacks and take care of you as well. We also have there are books in the back if you want to learn more. The Lionel Bopage story, written by one Michael, missed your middle name [Colin], Cooke. Yes, would you like to talk about your book?

Michael Colin Cooke

Not really. [audience laughs]

Moses

Delightful. So the books are \$20, guys. They talk about Lionel Bopage, who was involved in the Sri Lankan People's Liberation Front. Oh, can I pressure you into blurbing your book?

Michael Colin Cooke

Look, I wrote a biography of a revolution Sri Lankan revolutionary and it's basically not a psychological or a private uh biography because I don't have that ability. But what it is, it engages Sri Lankan, modern Sri Lankan history from a Marxist perspective from a revolution. This is involved in an insurrection. You know, he started it because it's supported the minority community and his critique of the plantation economy that was out there. [unclear] It's all there in boring detail. And and I don't know what the prices are, but it all goes to whatever organisation is supportive.

Moses

That's amazing. And if the book is half as ... [crosstalk] ... if the book is half as charming as Michael, then I'm sure it'll be a fantastic read. Ah, Tasnim?

Tasnim

I just had a quick question to finish off on.

Moses

Yeah, go for it.

Tasnim

Are there any Australian-owned tea companies that are part of the these plantations? Or are they more like European and other kinds of companies?

Moses

Are there any Australian-owned companies that the Sri Lankan plantation workers are fighting? My impression is it's basically all of them.

Guinevere

What happens a lot of the time is the tea that gets picked on one plantation gets mixed with tea that's been picked on another plantation, and another one and another one, and then they are all taken by one company or another company but it's come from multiple plantations. So you can't say, oh, this plantation where people are really. And the other thing I would say is if you can find A packet of tea, a box of tea, or whatever it is. And it says it comes from Sri Lanka. You can be sure that it was picked on allow some plantation where they were exploiting the workers, because none of them are good.

Moses

So it's essentially an industry-wide problem, I guess. So guys, I think we will just wrap up here. Thank you very much, guys.