"Bordering on Injustice: International Perspectives on Migrant and Immigrant Worker Organizing"

A Seminar Paper by

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(McGill University)

13:00 – 14:30, Tuesday 18th October
Room: B13 Amenities Building
Jubilee Campus, NG8 1BB

Abstract: There is growing interest in migrant and immigrant worker struggles and forms of organising. These organizations and alliances emerge from community/labour organizing efforts, often outside of formal trade union structures (Fine, 2006, 2011; Suzuki, 2012), as well as trade union initiatives. Drawing on research and engagement in organizations and networks of migrant and immigrant workers, including the Immigrant Workers Centre in Montreal, and two recent collections on migrant and immigrant worker organizing (Choudry and Hlatshwayo (2016) and Choudry and Smith (2016)), this presentation critically reflects on migrant workers’ struggles today.
In many countries, besides more traditional forms of unionization, older traditions of community organizing outside of trade unions have influenced a range of labour organizing practices and migrant worker resistance to exploitation. While suggesting that innovative forms of organizing shaped by the daily struggles and difficult contexts in which migrant workers are of major importance, this presentation will also discuss the possibilities and limitations of these strategies and models.

Finally, it argues that the struggles of migrant workers help to illuminate and challenge the transformation of work under global capitalist restructuring, and the spread of neoliberal immigration measures, including the expansion of temporary labour migration programs (Rodriguez, 2010; Choudry and Hlatshwayo, 2016; Choudry and Smith, 2016). It is suggested that notwithstanding the challenges that they contend with, that these organizations are potential sites from which to rethink collective action, existing labour union and working class movements, and in turn, that they contribute towards future struggles for social and economic justice.

Aziz Choudry is associate professor in the Department of Integrated Studies in Education at McGill University, where he holds a Canada Research Chair in social movement learning and knowledge production, and is visiting professor at the Centre for Education Rights and Transformation, Faculty of Education, University of Johannesburg. He is author of Learning Activism: The Intellectual Life of Contemporary Social Movements (University of Toronto Press, 2015), coauthor of Fight Back: Workplace Justice for Immigrants (Fernwood, 2009), and coeditor of Learning from the Ground Up: Global Perspectives on Social Movements and Knowledge Production (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), Organize! Building from the Local for Global Justice (PM Press/Between the Lines, 2012), NGOization: Complicity, Contradictions and Prospects (Zed Books, 2013), and Just Work? Migrant Workers’ Struggles Today (Pluto, 2016), and Unfree Labour? Struggles of Migrant and Immigrant Workers in Canada (PM Press, 2016). He serves on the board of the Immigrant Workers Centre, Montreal.