

In Memoriam

Aziz Choudry (1966–2021)

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This past May we lost Aziz Choudry, a most beloved mentor, comrade, and friend.

The breadth of Aziz's impact is reflected in the innumerable memorials in all parts of the world honouring his life and legacy. These ongoing gatherings from the reaches of South Africa, Aotearoa New Zealand, Canada, the Philippines, the UK, and other parts of the world speak not only to Aziz's endless energy and commitment but also to his warmth, humility and generosity that spanned borders.

Aziz was a very accomplished and prolific scholar and a deeply committed and principled activist and educator. He authored and co-edited many books. These include: *Fight Back: Workplace Justice for Immigrants* (2009); *Learning from the Ground Up: Global Perspectives on Social Movements and Knowledge Production* (2010); *Organize! Building from the Local for Global Justice* (2012); *NGOization: Complicity, Contradictions and Prospects* (2013); *Learning Activism: The Intellectual Life of Contemporary Social Movements* (2015); *Just Work? Migrant Workers' Struggle Today* (2016); *Unfree Labour? Struggles of Migrant and Immigrant Workers in Canada* (2016); *Reflections on Knowledge, Learning and Social Movements: History's Schools* (2018); *Activists and the Surveillance State: Learning from Repression* (2019); and *The University and Social Justice: Struggle Across the Globe* (2020). Aside from these books, Aziz wrote dozens of journal articles on organising and knowledge production within labour and social movements. This includes his contributions to the *Global Labour Journal* and as the North American representative on the Board of the Research Committee on Labour Movements (RC44) of the International Sociological Association.

Aziz was a rarity in academia. He was constantly organising. He did this through his research, his role within academia more generally and in his concrete contributions to global justice organising. Aziz was more of a fixture at the Immigrant Workers' Centre in Montreal than at the university. He was also a long-standing instructor at the Labour College where he incorporated the knowledge of rank-and-file workers into the daily struggles for a more just workplace and society. While so prolific, he rarely missed meetings of the social justice struggles he was part of and regularly took on too many organising tasks. It is therefore no surprise that much of his research has served as a space of exchange among grassroots organisers, activists and community educators to strategise around contemporary inequities and injustices. He deeply valued the knowledge held by organisers and activists engaged in social movements without regard for official titles and degrees. In his role as an activist and labour educator, he exhibited genuine respect and curiosity for the way everyone made sense of the world, from the most experienced organiser to the newest rank-and-file worker. This orientation was clear to all around him – migrant workers, activist academics, trade unionists, social movement activists – that for him the theory and practice of radical education was rooted in a deep emancipatory vision for social change.

Aziz was very critical of the violence and oppression being produced within academia. He responded by engaging in what were often frustrating battles against endless forms of oppression

and exploitation that characterise academic institutions. The other side of this work was his generosity and commitment to supporting young activist scholars. An important part of this practice was his conscious effort to create spaces for underrepresented racialised scholars working to advance struggles for racial justice. No matter where Aziz found himself in the world, he would always make time for scholar activists who needed his mentorship and advice to navigate the challenges and obstacles in academia.

Aziz's connections to global movements were unparalleled. He was a global community organiser and brought many people together through his extensive networks built over years of work and travel throughout the world. Aziz was the kind of person who was hard not to adore immediately upon meeting. He was sharply witty, with an intellectual sarcastic humour that would enlighten the heaviness of political and academic spaces. He had an eclectic taste in music, from the hair bands of the 1980s to Balkan Romani pop-folk. All these sides made Aziz the approachable, humble and brilliant person we were so privileged to know.

This year, 2021, has been a difficult one as the pandemic has lingered on. We have lost many people and witnessed the suffering and oppression of the already vulnerable within our communities. Aziz would remind us to keep hoping, to keep learning and to keep building. He would want us to continue our fight for workers' justice. He has left us his work, his words and lessons that have imprinted us for the long haul in our academic and activist journeys.

We will miss you and honour you always.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

Evelyn Encalada Grez is a migration scholar and co-founder of the award-winning collective, Justice for Migrant Workers (J4MW). Currently, she is an Assistant Professor in Labour Studies at Simon Fraser University in the province of British Columbia on the Canadian West Coast. Her work centres diverse ways of knowing and precarious workers' experiences within the margins of the global economy. [Email: eencalad@sfu.ca]

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