Submission the challenges we face building a new labor movement between the organized and unorganized.

This proposal is a summary based on the perspective on community labour organizing and how we situate our work at the IWC, with in the labor movement. Using the Centre as an example of new strategies to organize for workers rights but for mostly organize workers themselves to challenge the structural issues they face caused by globalization.

The other aspect of why the IWC organizes immigrant workers cause of the challenges faced by the entire labor movement currently in the need to respond to the economic crisis, the changing face of the workers, and the real impact of the shift in labor trends caused by globalization. Thus want to focus not just the work of the IWC but also how to build relationships with communities and organized labor in order to address the broader issues faced by immigrants and workers.

What we do: The Immigrant Workers Centre attempts to engage immigrants, migrants, employed and unemployed who have become the vast majority in urban centres, in unorganized sectors, in service, restaurants, cleaning, taxi’s, temporary agencies, textiles, and now have becoming a growing population of the unemployed due to the crisis and neo-liberalization of the textile industry in Montreal, which I will go into more depth later.

**Globalization and impacts on the Textile Industry in Montreal and organizing amongst laid off textile workers:**

In the last five years Montreal has seen a steady decline in manufacturing jobs in the garment industry, the direct consequence of a WTO-GATT mandated ending of quotas and tariffs on garments between 1994 and 2005 and the shift of garment manufacturing jobs to lower-wage regions such as India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and China. A clear example of the effects of this policy shift was the unceremonious lay-off of over 500 workers at Lamour Textile Inc. factory between 2005 and 2008.

Out of these lay-offs arose the Lamour campaign, which, beginning with one worker almost a year ago, is now an active and diverse committee of over 60 laid-off workers, many of whom worked for this company for almost 20 years and some for as many as 35. Most of the workers came from India, Bangladesh, Haiti, Philippines, and Sri Lanka. Some of the workers’ entire families were employed by the Lamour factory.

This worker-led campaign has, over the past year, enabled them to mobilize, build leadership amongst the group’s members, create space for them to begin to express their grievances, and plan many actions and events to build broader support throughout the city. Meeting with trade unions and participating in media interviews, they were able to get past initial fears of speaking up and take ownership over organizing for their own dignity and most basic rights.
**Movement questions and challenges**

The organization out of which the Lamour workers organize is The Montreal-based Immigrant Workers Centre, a space which is arguably unique to the possibilities of both a migrant justice movement and to the labor movement. Labour can no longer be considered in isolation from its fundamental tie to migration.

The Immigrant Workers Centre is engaged in several different campaigns and community organizing efforts that are to a large extent needs-based organizing or focused on the “bread and butter” of people’s livelihood. From the Justice for Lamoure workers, to the Centre’s engagement with migrant Philipina domestics workers who have no access to work safety compensation in Quebec, to the outreach it has initiated to migrant farm day laborers, to the work it is doing with Tamil migrants and refugees facing deportation on a large scale in Montreal. These efforts are very specific campaigns rooted in the needs of those directly-affected and are based on casework that happens at the Centre. The question then remains how to incorporate a larger politic and understanding of neoliberalism and imperialism in order to build a movement that can challenge these structures while still remaining linked to the day to day work on the ground caused by these larger systems of oppression.

Mobilizing more migrant workers requires that we be able to show our collective strength and build upon it. It is clear that labor is shifting and that we should use this potential collective strength to expand the current analysis in the labor movement and create spaces for hybrid projects in order to organize in these newer sectors and to help build broader campaigns that can address immigration and labor together.

Changes in the labour movement alone will not be enough, however. Immigrant workers must take the lead in building a broader-based fight because they are currently the most exploitable group by the increasingly internationalizing labour market. They need to fight for a living wage across the NAFTA countries, to fight against neoliberal restructuring, to fight the way work is becoming more and more temporary and precarious, and to root all of this in a fight for status for all.