

New York State Assemblyman Zohran Mamdani, a DSA member, enters New York City mayoral race

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The WSWS invites readers to attend an important online discussion Wednesday evening of the outcome of 2024 US presidential elections: “Of the oligarchy, by the oligarchy, and for the oligarchy, Trump’s cabinet & the restructuring of the American state.” Please register here.

The New York City chapter of the Democratic Socialists of America has endorsed and is actively promoting New York State Assemblyman Zohran Mamdani for mayor of New York City. Mamdani, a member of the DSA, announced late last month that he will run in the Democratic Party primary next year.

The candidate, who represents the Queens neighborhood of Astoria in the State Assembly in Albany, is the fifth Democrat to challenge incumbent Democratic Mayor Eric Adams. The mayoral race has been fueled in part by Adams’ indictment on bribery and other corruption charges, announced two months ago. The incumbent has refused to resign, and says he plans to run for reelection in 2025.

Although the corruption charges have politically weakened Adams, the city’s social crisis is an even bigger factor in the willingness of rivals to come forward to challenge him. Millions of working people, particularly in the city’s outer boroughs, are on the verge of exploding over rent hikes, wages that have not kept pace with inflation, decaying public services, increased police brutality and the massive social inequality that dominates every aspect of life.

All of the candidates seeking to replace Adams are presenting themselves, to one degree or another, as progressive alternatives to the current administration, which is notorious for its law-and-order, anti-immigrant and austerity policies. City Comptroller Brad Lander and State Senator Jessica Ramos, for instance, are pledging action to deal with the housing crisis and the soaring cost of living. Also running are State Senator Zellnor Myrie and former city comptroller Scott Stringer.

Mamdani stands out a bit among this group, since he calls himself a “democratic socialist.” In addition, he has put

forward a radical-sounding three-point platform, centered around a rent freeze for the two million who live in rent-stabilized apartments (the increase in their housing costs is currently determined by annual votes of a rent guidelines board); the elimination of fares on the city’s buses; and free childcare for children between the ages of six weeks and 5 years.

While the above proposals will certainly meet with support among struggling working class families, Mamdani has said nothing about how they will be achieved. He has also denounced the genocide in Gaza, but his words are hollow, cynical and completely dishonest. What is decisive is his insistence that he can defend working people as a Democrat, a supporter of the party of Wall Street and imperialist war. Like the DSA as a whole, he is determined above all to maintain the role of the Democratic Party as a political instrument of the plutocratic ruling class.

Mamdani was first elected to the State Assembly in 2020, as one of a slate of four DSA-backed candidates for state office. He was reelected in 2022, with the support of the most prominent DSA elected official, Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, whose much larger district overlaps with Mamdani’s Astoria neighborhood. AOC, a steadfast supporter of Biden and then Harris, has become a leading figure in the Democratic Party.

The DSA-backed candidate comes from a prominent liberal family. He is the son of well-known Indian American filmmaker Mira Nair—*Mississippi Masala* (1991) and more recently *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2012))—and of Indian-born Ugandan academic Mahmood Mamdani.

What is behind the decision of Mamdani and the DSA to contest the mayoral election for the first time? The New York City chapter of the DSA recently endorsed Mamdani’s effort by an 81 percent majority.

The DSA, a faction of this imperialist party, is clearly worried by the signs of anger in the working class, in New York and around the country. This has taken the form both

of a growth of strike struggles and the repeated repudiations of contract sellouts negotiated by the trade union bureaucracy, as well as a mounting revulsion at the role of the Democrats in making possible the genocide in Gaza. The disgust with the Democrats was demonstrated on Election Day, when Harris's vote fell sharply in New York City compared to Joe Biden's four years ago, and significant numbers, including black and Latino workers, cast their ballots for Trump.

Mamdani himself gave voice to the DSA's fear last May, in the context of the enormous student and youth protests against the Zionist mass murder. "I'm absolutely terrified" of students and youth breaking with the Democrats, he declared in an interview at that time. "I am concerned that right now it is looking increasingly difficult for President Biden to defeat Trump and that must be the ultimate mission of what we have this November."

The victory of Trump intensifies the crisis of the DSA and the Democrats. The DSA endorsed "strategic voting," that is support for Kamala Harris, which helped to pave the way for Trump. Based on its support for strikebreaking union betrayals and unlimited war funding in Ukraine and Gaza, the DSA's role in providing a "left" veneer for the Democrats' policies of war, austerity and capitulation to dictatorship is becoming clearer to many, including inside the DSA itself. The need for a "facelift" is reflected in the majority vote to endorse Mamdani.

There is a section of the DSA that is nervous about Mamdani's candidacy, however. According to a report on the Politico website, DSA elected officials raised strong opposition to the New York City chapter's endorsement. Assemblymember Emily Gallagher warned that Mamdani's campaign "carries with it the risk of blemishing" the work of DSA members who have won elected office.

"Other candidates for mayor who are more likely to win will likely perceive Zohran as a spoiler and be reticent to work with the other (DSA elected officials) for their connection to him," she said. "This is unfair to our project as a whole and could be ruinous." Gallagher was supported by DSA City Council members Tiffany Caban and Alexa Aviles, who said the endorsement could disrupt their ability to further integrate themselves into the Democratic Party apparatus.

Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez is the best-known example of what Mamdani's critics inside the DSA aspire to—increasing influence within the Democratic Party. They are only demonstrating the real nature of the DSA, what Mamdani would become tomorrow, despite his demagogic campaign promises.

The tactical nature of the dispute was shown by Mamdani himself. Shortly after announcing his campaign, he insisted

in an interview with Politico that he would not sabotage the other "progressive" Democrats in the mayoral race. "I would not be doing this if I thought that this would hurt the possibility of defeating Eric Adams," he said. "I believe that I can defeat Eric Adams, and I believe that just by running, I increase the possibility of anyone defeating Eric Adams." Mamdani has also said that he is willing to cross-endorse the other candidates under the city's ranked-choice voting system.

There you have it. The DSA's most "left-wing" official insists that his role is that of increasing the odds of "anyone" defeating Eric Adams. Any other Wall Street Democrat will do, any left-talking official, who will, of course, do nothing to challenge the stranglehold of the billionaires on economic and political life.

The crisis facing the working class cannot be overstated. Just days ago, the *New York Times* began a series of articles under the headline, "Why 'Affordable Housing' in New York Can Still Cost \$3,500 a Month." Approximately 56 percent of the population, more than 4 million, live in poverty or are classified as "low-income," struggling to make ends meet. Jobs in hotels and restaurants have still not returned to pre-pandemic levels. But the city is home to 110 billionaires, hoarding trillions of dollars in wealth. Just below them are over 350,000 millionaires and multi-millionaires.

The crisis cannot be solved or even mitigated by working through the capitalist parties and the capitalist state. The purpose of socialists contesting the elections must be to explain this, not to sow further illusions just as workers are drawing conclusions based on the record of both major capitalist parties.

Workers and young people must draw the critical political lessons of the DSA's role, and especially from Trump's successful campaign for a second term. His victory is entirely the responsibility of the Democrats, who have based themselves on Wall Street, the intelligence agencies of imperialism, and the affluent upper-middle class.

What is necessary is the complete political independence and international unity of the working class behind a revolutionary socialist program, and an all-out assault on social inequality and the capitalist profit system that produces it. This is the program fought for by the Socialist Equality Party, and bitterly opposed by the DSA, the "left" faction of the Democrats.



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