

DSA member Zohran Mamdani emerges as one of the leading candidates for New York City mayor

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Amid the crowded field of candidates running in the upcoming Democratic Party primary race for New York City mayor, State Assemblyman Zohran Mamdani from the borough of Queens, a member of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), has emerged as the foremost challenger to current frontrunner and former New York governor Andrew Cuomo. Mamdani has continued to strengthen in the polls, rising to within eight percentage points of Cuomo in a recent survey after starting off largely unknown.

Mamdani was the first mayoral candidate to qualify for public matching funds and has nearly three times as many individual donations as any of his rivals. His campaign has attracted more than 20,000 volunteers, far larger than any other campaign has been able to muster.

In winning this growing support, Mamdani has been able to capitalize on popular anger and dissatisfaction. However, his campaign is designed to divert this opposition away from a genuine challenge to the system.

Mamdani's platform of free childcare, fare-free buses, a rent freeze for many tenants and other demands related to the unbearable cost of living has clearly struck a chord at a time when masses of working-class New Yorkers are facing an intensifying crisis. It has become simply impossible for many residents to obtain anything resembling affordable housing. Median rents in Manhattan, for instance, have reached the astronomical sum of \$4,500 per month. The outer boroughs offer scant relief.

According to an assessment last year of the true cost of living in New York City, half of households with working-age residents lack sufficient income to cover bare necessities such as food, housing, healthcare and childcare. Over the last two decades, the rising costs of these basic needs have exceeded wage gains by 60 percent. The cost-of-living crisis is continuing to intensify. A recent PIX11/Emerson poll revealed that nearly half of city residents (49 percent) feel that they are worse off now than they were a year ago. This year Trump's trade war is poised to intensify the crisis.

Under these conditions, Mamdani's promises to control food prices through city-run supermarkets, to freeze many rents and to provide relief to families from the thousands of dollars a month in childcare expenses have clearly resonated. So have his proposals to tax corporations and millionaires to pay for it all, in the home of Wall Street, one of the most unequal cities on the planet.

Another significant element of Mamdani's appeal has been his criticism of the genocide in Gaza. Mamdani has been one of the few politicians who have used the term genocide and has described himself as anti-Zionist. This has attracted the support of many workers and young people in New York, including Jewish youth, with polls indicating that Mamdani is placing second among Jewish voters, again behind only Cuomo.

The Democratic Party apparatus in New York City, as elsewhere around the country, has viciously attacked and smeared opponents of the US-backed Israeli slaughter in Palestine, brutalizing campus and neighborhood protesters and collaborating with efforts to expel, fire, and detain those who dared to speak out against the genocide.

Current Democratic Mayor Eric Adams, who is running as an independent this year after his collaboration with the Trump administration precluded any prospects of emerging victorious in the Democratic primary, has led this effort. But he has been joined by the whole of the Democratic Party apparatus, including former governor Cuomo, the current frontrunner in the mayoral race, who has called antisemitism "the most important issue" in the race and made this slander a central focus of his effort to discredit Mamdani.

Mamdani's shift in rhetoric on the genocide in response to this attack is highly revealing, not only in relation to the anti-genocide movement but more fundamentally in what it expresses about his class orientation, political function and the fate of his proposals if elected.

In response to criticisms of his declining to sign on to an annual New York State Assembly resolution honoring Israel

and condemning the Holocaust in terms that equate antisemitism with opposition to Zionism, Mamdani's spokesman stressed he "absolutely supports the Holocaust Memorial Day resolution" and pledged that as mayor he would spend more money to fight "antisemitism."

In reacting to the recent killing of two Israeli embassy employees in Washington, Mamdani denounced the attack as being part of "an appalling trend of antisemitic violence," thereby giving support to the lie that opposition to Zionist violence is equivalent to hatred of Jews. Mamdani then made the media rounds explicitly supporting Israel's "right to exist," a code phrase that signals his approval of the war on the Palestinians, albeit disagreeing with how it is fought.

As Mamdani's position has been exposed, he has come under increasing attack from those fighting the genocide. His remarks defending the existence of the Zionist state amid an escalating genocide triggered a flood of denunciations on social media.

Mamdani's defense of Israel and invocation of the "antisemitism" slander is a demonstration to the ruling class that he can be trusted and that he operates on their behalf, while simultaneously attempting to square the circle by appealing to popular revulsion against the crimes of US imperialism and its agents in Israel.

Mamdani's promises for affordable housing, food, transit, healthcare and childcare are no less fraudulent, not in the sense that they are unaffordable, as his rivals charge, but in that they cannot be achieved through the Democrats, a party of Wall Street and big business.

Mamdani's proposed social programs rely on raising revenues of \$10 billion through increased taxes on millionaires and corporations—a proposal that must be approved by the state legislature and Democratic Governor Kathy Hochul, who has already rebuffed it. Mamdani's answer, to the extent he addresses it at all, is to rely on negotiations with the governor and legislature.

The fundamental fraud perpetuated by Mamdani's campaign is that the Democratic Party, which has long functioned to contain social opposition and class struggle, can be pressured into reviving a bygone era of capitalist reform. At a time when the ruling class is instead turning to dictatorship and fascism to defend its position, the consequences of such illusions will be disastrous if not consciously rejected in favor of a struggle for a genuine socialist alternative.

The support for Mamdani's campaign reflects in a distorted way the growing desire to fight against a system that functions for and is dominated by a parasitic elite. It is no accident that he has drawn such support in New York City, the home of Wall Street, situated amidst a historically restless working class. But the contradiction is that his

political role is precisely to sabotage this struggle by preventing workers and young people from drawing political conclusions about the necessity to direct its fire against the profit system itself and all its representatives.

Mamdani and the DSA's intervention in the New York City mayoral election mirrors the efforts at the national level by Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez to contain opposition via their "Fighting Oligarchy" tour. Their events have drawn large crowds looking for a means to struggle against the hated Trump administration.

However, what has been offered up is a cover-up for the Democratic Party, which paved the way for Trump with increasing attacks on the working class, brutal anti-immigrant policies, unflinching support for the US/NATO-instigated imperialist war against Russia in Ukraine and the US-Israeli genocide against the Palestinians in Gaza.

Sanders has repeatedly refused to characterize Israel's wholesale slaughter of Palestinians in Gaza as genocide. Both Sanders and Ocasio-Cortez consistently backed Joe Biden's reelection campaign without criticizing his enabling the Israeli genocide of Palestinians in Gaza. Pro-Palestinian demonstrators have been expelled from their events.

Ocasio-Cortez has thus far not endorsed Mamdani, though she reportedly met last month with him and "progressive" rival Brad Lander, the current City Comptroller, whom she endorsed in 2021 for his current position. The cautious approach by Ocasio-Cortez thus far toward her fellow DSA member reflects a deep anxiety in the Democratic Party about the danger of raising workers' expectations.

Six of eight DSA-affiliated state legislators have endorsed Mamdani, with State Senator Julia Salazar and Assembly Member Emily Gallagher withholding endorsements, at least for now. *Nation* magazine, whose president Bhaskar Sunkara is a prominent figure in the DSA, endorsed both Mamdani and Lander.

Mamdani's rise is occurring at a time when a social explosion could erupt at any moment in New York City and beyond. It is imperative that his campaign to politically confuse and disorient be rejected. The way forward is not through appeals to the ruling class via the Democratic Party but through conscious class struggle and the building of an alternative leadership for the working class in opposition to the Democrats and all parties of the ruling class.



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