

The political significance and implications of Mamdani's victory in New York City

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The victory of Zohran Mamdani, a member of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), in the Democratic primary for mayor of New York City is an event of profound political significance, with national and international implications.

In the financial center of world capitalism, where the banks, real estate firms, and media conglomerates wield immense power, the Democratic Party establishment suffered a major defeat. Former New York Governor Andrew Cuomo, backed by Wall Street and the corporate media, was decisively rejected by voters. A series of high-profile endorsements and huge campaign contributions not only failed to rescue his campaign—they fueled its collapse.

For workers and young people, it is necessary to understand clearly what the elections do and do not demonstrate—and what political conclusions must be drawn.

The election has shattered a number of myths of American politics. First, there is the myth that socialism is “toxic.” Mamdani openly identified as a “democratic socialist.” His reform proposals—related to soaring housing costs, child care, and other social problems—clearly struck a chord with workers and young people, along with layers of the middle class, in one of the most expensive cities in the world.

Second, there is the claim that criticism of Israel's genocide in Gaza amounts to antisemitism. The billionaire-backed smear campaign led by Cuomo, which centered on accusations of antisemitism against Mamdani, backfired. Mamdani received tens of thousands of votes from among New York's 1.2 million Jewish residents. Popular opposition to war and what Mamdani explicitly called a genocide was a major factor in his electoral victory.

Third, Mamdani's win refutes the media narrative that Trump's re-election in 2024 marked a right-wing shift in the American population. Mamdani's campaign benefited from mounting popular opposition to the Trump administration, with the candidate pointing out that Cuomo was backed by the same billionaires bankrolling Trump. Just ten days before the vote, the largest anti-government protests in American history were held against Trump's dictatorship, and Mamdani pledged to resist Trump's attacks on immigrants.

Fourth, the basic questions animating the great mass of the population center not on issues of race and gender politics,

relentlessly promoted by the Democratic Party and their affiliated media outlets, but class.

The sentiments animating the vote for Mamdani are bringing masses of people into conflict with the entire political order. What terrifies the ruling class is not Mamdani's relatively milquetoast program, advanced within the framework of the Democratic Party, but that his victory shows socialism can gain mass support in America, and in a far more radical form.

The fascist Trump administration has responded, predictably, with hysterical denunciations. In a social media post Wednesday, Trump declared, “Zohran Mamdani, a 100% Communist Lunatic, has just won the Dem Primary, and is on his way to becoming Mayor.” Trump articulates, in the most naked and debased form, the brutality of the ruling elite and its fear of socialism.

The Democratic Party establishment, which bitterly opposed the Mamdani campaign, is responding with a mixture of flattery and threats. Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries, and New York Governor Kathy Hochul all congratulated Mamdani on his victory Wednesday, with Schumer praising what he called Mamdani's “impressive campaign.”

They embrace as a boa constrictor squeezes its victim. Indeed, the primary election took place the same day that House Democrats, Jeffries included, demonstrated their hostility to the developing mass opposition to Trump when they voted to kill an impeachment resolution on Trump's criminal and unconstitutional military aggression against Iran.

The nervousness of the Democratic Party was most clearly expressed in the comments of former Treasury secretary and Harvard president Larry Summers, who denounced the “anointment” of a candidate who “failed to disavow a ‘globalize the intifada’ slogan and advocated Trotskyite economic policies.” Summers declared that Mamdani must “evolve” to reassure those committed to a “market economy as an American ideal.”

By “market economy,” Summers means, of course, the unchallenged dictatorship of the financial oligarchy.

If Mamdani were to resist these pressures, the Democratic Party would not hesitate to sabotage his campaign and attempt to throw the general election to incumbent Mayor Eric Adams,

who is running as an independent, or some other compliant representative of Wall Street.

Under these conditions, the most dangerous illusion would be that the Democratic Party can be transformed into a party of the working class—a view that Mamdani advanced in his speech Tuesday night when he declared that his campaign was the “model for the Democratic Party,” as a “party where we fight for working people with no apologies.”

In its lead article on Mamdani’s win, *Jacobin* magazine, affiliated with the DSA, declared, “The race has the potential to reshape national politics, upsetting the balance of forces within the Democratic Party and pointing the way to a new era of possibilities for the Left.” The DSA seeks above all to maintain the political grip of the Democratic Party and thereby strangle opposition.

In fact, figures like Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, a member of the DSA, and Bernie Sanders—both of whom endorsed Mamdani relatively late, as he had already begun to rise in the polls—have played a critical role in facilitating the violent shift of American politics to the right.

In 2016 and 2020, Sanders directed his “political revolution” behind Hillary Clinton and Joe Biden, and in 2024 he threw his support behind Kamala Harris. Both Sanders and Ocasio-Cortez served as chief defenders of Biden up to the very end, and throughout the genocide in Gaza and the US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine. In this way, they helped pave the way for the re-election of Trump, who capitalized on the deep hostility to the Democratic Party.

In his response to the Mamdani victory, Sanders is promoting the same line. “Will the Democrats learn from Zohran Mamdani’s victory?,” he wrote in the *Guardian*. While expressing the view that the Democratic Party leadership is unlikely to change its course, Sanders proclaimed, “The future of the Democratic party will not be determined by its current leadership. It will be decided by the working class of this country.”

As Trotsky remarked, one might as well pray for rain. The Democratic Party, no less than the Republican Party, is not an empty vessel. As with the state itself, parties represent class interests. The Democratic Party is a party of Wall Street, the military-intelligence agencies and privileged sections of the upper-middle class. It is the “graveyard of social movements.” What must be “decided by the working class” is not the future of the Democratic Party, but the imperative of breaking from it and the entire framework of capitalist politics.

The New York election demonstrates that there exists enormous possibilities for the development of a genuine socialist movement. Conditions are ripe, indeed overripe, for such a development.

This makes all the more essential a correct understanding of the basic political issues, which those who have given their support to Mamdani, and for that matter Mamdani himself, will have to confront.

The immense social problems facing the working class—imperialist war, dictatorship, fascism, and unprecedented levels of inequality—cannot be resolved within the existing political framework. It is absolutely impossible to conduct a progressive, let alone socialist policy within the Democratic Party.

Socialism is not a campaign slogan or series of reformist proposals. Even the limited social reforms advanced by Mamdani cannot be achieved without a frontal assault on the wealth and power of the capitalist ruling class. The ruling class is turning toward fascism, dictatorship and world war. Its power over society can only be broken through the expropriation of its wealth and the transformation of the gigantic corporations upon which this wealth is based into publicly owned utilities.

Workers internationally have had a wealth of experience on the results of movements that promise reform but do not touch the foundations of capitalist society: Syriza in Greece, Corbynism in Britain, the Left Party in Germany and many others. The outcome is inevitably a political betrayal and the strengthening of the right.

The fulfillment of a socialist program requires the intervention of the working class as an independent social and political force. The New York primary is part of a broader process: a series of events giving expression to the emergence of enormous social and political opposition among workers, young people, and sections of the middle class.

The Socialist Equality Party has insisted that the predominate tendency within the working class, both within the United States and internationally, is toward political radicalization and opposition to capitalism. The New York mayoral election is a confirmation of this assessment. However, we do not mistake the indication for the fulfillment. While the SEP recognizes the significance of Mamdani’s victory, it does not adapt its political program to the illusion that his electoral success will lead to a change in the nature of the state, the class character of the Democratic Party, and the violent and oppressive character of American capitalism.

There is a growing mood of resistance fueled by war, repression, inequality, and the open turn toward dictatorship. But the great task of developing the politically independent movement of the working class as an organized, conscious force must be carried forward. This is the perspective of the Socialist Equality Party, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality and International Workers Alliance of Rank and File Committees. The ramparts of Wall Street will not crumble beneath the pressure of electoral oratory.



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