

The class issues in the New York City mayoral election

Socialist Equality Party (US)
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Election day in New York City is less than a week away, with early voting already underway. Polls indicate that Democratic Socialist of America (DSA) member Zohran Mamdani will be elected, which would make someone claiming to be a socialist the mayor of the largest city in the US and the home of Wall Street, the center of global finance capital.

Mamdani rose from a virtual unknown last year to defeat ex-governor Andrew Cuomo, the favored candidate of the city's political establishment, in the June Democratic primary. Since then, Mamdani has maintained a comfortable lead in the polls over Cuomo, who shifted to independent, and Republican demagogue Curtis Sliwa.

The widespread support for Mamdani's campaign reflects a deep hatred for the pro-corporate politics of the Democratic Party, which Andrew Cuomo ruthlessly implemented throughout his tenure in Albany. Workers and youth are disgusted with the Democratic Party's accommodation to Trump and are looking for a way to fight back against staggering levels of inequality, soaring rents, poverty wages, endless war, the genocide in Gaza, and ICE immigration raids.

The elections in New York are taking place amidst the escalating conspiracy of the Trump administration, backed by dominant factions of the oligarchy, to establish a fascistic dictatorship in the United States. This has included the deployment or planned deployment of military forces throughout the country and the massive assault on the working class taking place through the government shutdown.

If Mamdani wins, New York City will immediately become the next battleground in Trump's war against the working class. Last week, the president sent a warning of what is to come, deploying ICE thugs, armed to the teeth with military equipment, to rampage in lower Manhattan, abducting immigrants and citizens alike. Trump has repeatedly denounced Mamdani in fascistic language, calling him "a 100% Communist Lunatic." Republicans in Congress have called for Mamdani, a naturalized US citizen, to be deported.

There is broad and growing opposition to Trump's dictatorship, expressed in the outpouring of millions in the October 18 "No Kings" demonstrations. These are the popular moods to which Mamdani has appealed and which have propelled his rise.

The Socialist Equality Party, however, does not call for a vote for Mamdani, or for any of his rivals. Mamdani's platform and program do not represent a way forward in the fight against

oligarchy and dictatorship, but a political trap.

There are, first of all, fundamental questions of principle involved. In calling for a vote for a candidate, one takes responsibility for their political program. Despite his pretense of being a socialist, Mamdani is a Democratic Party politician, and the Democratic Party is a capitalist party, a party of Wall Street and American imperialism. All political experience demonstrates that workers and young people cannot take a single step forward within the framework of the Democratic Party.

In relation to the specific issues in this election, Mamdani, together with the DSA as a whole, is seeking deliberately and consciously to channel opposition back into the Democratic Party by promoting the lie that it can be pushed to the left and become a vehicle for advancing the interests of workers. Mamdani's own campaign, however, exposes this as a political fraud.

Over the past five months, Mamdani has bent over backwards to reassure the very billionaires he claims to oppose. Amid the ongoing genocide in Gaza, he has backtracked on his defense of the Palestinians, declaring that Israel has a right to exist and Hamas should lay down its arms.

Bowing to right-wing pressure, last week Mamdani announced that he plans to retain the billionaire heiress Jessica Tisch as commissioner of the New York Police Department. This has been a key demand of big business, symbolizing that, amid explosive social conditions, when it comes to controlling the state's armed apparatus, a trusted figure will be at the helm.

Mamdani appeals to opposition to the oligarchy, but his program is nothing more than a modest call for a few liberal reforms: A pause on increases for half of the city's renters, a modest lowering of transportation expenses for some transit riders, and an expansion of publicly funded child care, financed by a slight tax increase on the wealthy. Even if enacted, these policies would do nothing to resolve the problems of historic proportions facing the working class.

Even so, Mamdani has come under attack from sections of the Democratic Party establishment. Their favored candidate, Cuomo, has denounced Mamdani's proposals as a fantasy while launching a vicious smear campaign branding Mamdani as an Islamic jihadist. New York's US Senate delegation has refused to endorse the victor of the party's primary, while House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries withheld an endorsement until last week.

The Democratic Party's machinations are meant to hold Mamdani in check while promoting gubernatorial candidates like

Navy pilot Mikie Sherrill in New Jersey and CIA officer Abigail Spanberger in Virginia as models for the midterms in 2026.

The way in which the DSA Democrats seek to rescue the Democratic Party, despite itself, was underscored at the mass campaign rally last Sunday in Queens, when Mamdani walked on stage to extricate Governor Kathy Hochul, raising arms together to quell the heckles and “tax the rich” chants from the 13,000 in attendance.

Mamdani is following the same path of political deception laid down by Bernie Sanders and, more recently, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez—both of whom appeared on stage with Mamdani at the election rally on Sunday.

For nearly a decade, Sanders has served as a lightning rod for opposition, consciously channeling the growing hostility to capitalism back into the dead-end of the Democratic Party. In both 2016 and 2020 he ran for president, received millions of votes based on false promises of a “political revolution,” only to endorse the chosen candidates of Wall Street and the Pentagon, Hillary Clinton and Joe Biden. On foreign policy, Sanders has repeatedly lined up with American imperialism, backing the US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine and funding for Israel.

Mamdani’s fellow DSA member Ocasio-Cortez, too, has presented herself as an opponent of the Democratic Party establishment only to prove herself a faithful defender of the interests of the ruling class. She voted to illegalize a strike by railroad workers in 2022 and backed funding for Israel amid its genocide in Gaza, while urging her supporters to “be adults” and rally behind the war criminal Biden.

The DSA is playing an ever more direct role in the framework of establishment bourgeois politics in the US. This is, moreover, the expression in the United States of an international tendency. For years, figures like Jeremy Corbyn in Britain have provided left cover for bourgeois political parties that implement austerity at home and imperialist war abroad. Corbyn himself was expelled from the Labour Party amid a witch hunt over supposed “left-wing antisemitism,” paving the way for the reactionary Keir Starmer to lead the Labour Party as prime minister.

In Greece, the Syriza experience demonstrates the role of the pseudo-left when it comes to power. Within months of winning national elections in 2015, the “Coalition of the Radical Left” repudiated its promises to take on the European banks, defied the results of a popular referendum, and imposed the austerity agenda demanded by the bankers. It thereby handed the initiative to the far-right. Such experiences have been repeated countless times, in country after country.

Should Mamdani win, he has already demonstrated in the course of his campaign that there will be very little difference between a mayoralty headed by himself and one headed by Cuomo.

The sentiments driving support for Mamdani among workers and young people—opposition to dictatorship, inequality and war—cannot and will not be realized through the Mamdani campaign, nor within the framework of the Democratic Party. As the Socialist Equality Party wrote following Mamdani’s primary victory in June:

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.

The developments of the past four months have entirely confirmed this assessment. Trump has violently escalated his conspiracy for dictatorship. Meanwhile, the Democrats have done nothing to stop him, collaborating instead in the destruction of jobs, social programs and democratic rights. Mamdani and the DSA, for their part, have demonstrated the bankruptcy of their entire perspective, working to channel mass opposition back behind the very capitalist establishment responsible for the crisis.

The SEP insists that the fight against war, dictatorship and social inequality cannot proceed through illusions in “progressive” Democrats or appeals to the existing political institutions of American capitalism. It requires the independent political mobilization of the working class, in the United States and internationally, on the basis of a socialist program. The working class—the great social majority—must organize itself as a conscious political force to take power, expropriate the billionaires and reconstruct society on the basis of equality, peace and social need, not private profit.

The working class must intervene as an independent political force, armed with a socialist program. The SEP calls on all workers, students, and young people who oppose dictatorship, war and inequality to take up this fight.



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