

Mamdani reassures Wall Street with deputy mayor appointment

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New York City mayor-elect Zohran Mamdani announced Tuesday the first appointments of his incoming administration, including Dean Fuleihan, a Democratic Party insider, as his first deputy mayor. The unusually early appointment—just a week after Mamdani’s election victory—of the long-time operative sends a clear signal that his incoming administration will operate well within the limits acceptable to the political establishment.

Fuleihan, who is 74 years old, has been involved in Democratic politics in New York for five decades. Most recently, he was appointed by Governor Kathy Hochul to the New York Financial Control Board, which was created amid the city’s near bankruptcy in 1975 to enforce budgetary discipline on behalf of finance capital.

Mamdani tapped Fuleihan to return to the role he held from 2018 to 2021 under Mayor Bill de Blasio. Prior to that, Fuleihan was de Blasio’s budget director, where he was responsible for negotiating contracts with the city’s 300,000-strong municipal workforce.

Fuleihan worked with the union bureaucrats to set pattern contracts with around two percent annual wage increases, together with cuts to benefits, including setting the stage for the privatization of health care for city retirees. Resolving these contracts—all of which had been expired for years—on terms advantageous to the city without provoking mass worker resistance was one of the principal tasks facing the de Blasio administration.

Fuleihan has also held several positions in the state Assembly, rising to become the right-hand man of former Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver. Silver was the embodiment of the Democratic Party establishment in Albany, a capitalist power broker known as one of the “three men in a room” (alongside the governor and

State Senate Majority Leader) who controlled state government. Ultimately, Silver died in prison in 2022, while serving a six-and-a-half-year term for taking \$4 million in bribes.

Speaking of Fuleihan to *City and State*, Kathy Wylde, the CEO of the business association Partnership for New York City, quipped, “He knows where all the bodies are buried. Let’s put it that way.”

Mamdani’s appointment of Fuleihan drew praise from other quarters as well, including US Representative from the Bronx Ritchie Torres, an outspoken defender of Israel’s genocide in Gaza. Torres was a bitter opponent of Mamdani in the primary. He called Mamdani’s Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), “despicable, detestable, disgraceful, and disgraced.”

On Monday, Torres posted on X, “There are few people on earth who know the workings of city and state government as deeply as Dean Fuleihan, who has served as the First Deputy Mayor of NYC, the Director of NYC OMB, the chief fiscal advisor to the Assembly Speaker, and a seasoned negotiator on the state budget. An exceptional appointment in more ways than one.”

Governor Hochul added her support for the appointment as well, writing that Fuleihan’s “experience and integrity will be invaluable in this role. A great choice and a win for New Yorkers.”

Alongside the appointment of Fuleihan, Mamdani announced that Elle Bisgaard-Church, his chief of staff while he was a State Assemblyman, will continue in that role when Mamdani is sworn in as mayor. Bisgaard-Church headed up Mamdani’s mayoral campaign. Like the mayor-elect, she is a member of the DSA in New York City.

This week’s appointments follow Mamdani’s announcement last week of his transition team, which

will, among other things, make recommendations for candidates to fill the remaining posts of the incoming administration.

The five women who make up this team are notable for their continuity with previous mayoral administrations. They served not under not only de Blasio but also the outgoing administration of Eric Adams, the corrupt former cop and Trump ally, as well as the billionaire Michael Bloomberg, who bankrolled Andrew Cuomo's failed mayoral bid.

One member of Mamdani's transition team, Lina Khan, who previously served on Biden's Federal Trade Commission, was praised last year by Trump's Vice President JD Vance.

In the closing week of the campaign, Mamdani announced that he supported retaining Jessica Tisch as the head of the NYPD, meeting one of the key demands of New York's business elite. Tisch has not said whether she will accept the offer to stay on.

By staffing his administration with Democratic Party operatives acceptable to the city's corporate and financial leaders, Mamdani is underscoring that his incoming administration is not aimed at breaking the stranglehold of the ruling oligarchy, but instead working with them to contain opposition.

The situation facing broad masses of workers in New York City, as elsewhere around the country, is explosive. Social conditions are characterized above all by a deepening social crisis in which the cost of housing, food, transportation, and other necessities is increasingly out of reach. At the same time, the level of wealth of the top layers on Wall Street and in corporate suites is obscene.

Mamdani attracted the largest number of votes in over 50 years, based on his appeal to rein in higher prices and thus deal with the affordability crisis. The broad popular discontent behind Mamdani's election is what has fueled the vicious attacks on the mayor-elect from the Trump administration.

What those who voted for Mamdani are getting, however, is misdirection, a fresh face that rhetorically speaks to workers' concerns while behind the scenes preparing an administration staffed by those with a long history of serving the ruling class.

Mamdani's appointment of Fuleihan is a demonstration that the new mayor will abide by the dictates of the ruling class. His promises of free

childcare, free buses and a rent freeze are contingent upon whatever they are willing to accept. He is speaking to the oligarchs to reassure them, not to mobilize a struggle against them.

Speaking to reporters at a New York Democratic Party conference in Puerto Rico Saturday, Governor Hochul ruled out one of Mamdani's key planks, free buses. "I cannot set forth a plan right now that takes money out of a system that relies on the fares of the buses and the subways," she said. "But can we find a path to make it more affordable for people who need help? Of course we can."

Mamdani, meanwhile, at the same conference, stressed his desire for unity with Hochul and the rest of the Democratic Party machine. "Together in this room, on this stage, I feel something that has felt all too rare in our politics: a united front," he said, transforming the historical meaning of the united front as an alliance of the working class against capitalist barbarism into its opposite, the subordination of the struggle of workers to the oldest capitalist party in the US.



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