

Mamdani, speaking with comedian Adam Friedland, reviews “productive” meeting with fascist Trump

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Last Tuesday, just days after his meeting and White House press conference with Donald Trump, New York City Mayor-elect and Democratic Socialists of America member Zohran Mamdani appeared on comedian Adam Friedland’s online talk show, *The Adam Friedland Show*. Beneath the vacuous nature of the discussion lay a cynical intent to obscure Mamdani’s public capitulation to the fascist despot and the reactionary character of his transition team and appointments.

Most of Mamdani and Friedland’s half-hour discussion consisted of casual, empty-headed banter, punctuated by soccer score updates and ad breaks for nicotine and sexual performance products. The overall absence of political content serves to deaden thought, while presenting Mamdani as a representative of the “common man.” He likes soccer, loves his wife, and enjoys meeting with fascist warmongers—truly the salt of the earth...

When the conversation finally turned to Mamdani’s meeting with Trump, Friedland seized every opportunity to turn it into a punchline.

Friedland asked Mamdani how he “kept such a straight face” during the press conference. Mamdani replied, “Honestly, the whole time I was thinking about the difference between a White House working toward an affordability agenda and one that’s making it harder to live in the city.”

In more exact words, Mamdani’s intent for the Trump meeting was to forge a “partnership” with the fascist cabal running the government, while claiming that a government that is waging an unprecedented war on the working class can be won over to an “affordability agenda.”

Without delving into the specifics of what any proposed agreement with Trump might entail, Friedland asked whether Trump was attempting to hijack Mamdani’s popularity. In response, Mamdani acknowledged, “There are a lot of places of disagreement with the president,” but stated that they agree on the issue of affordability, pointing out that many Trump voters cited the cost of living as a key concern in the election.

Here, Mamdani performs a sleight of hand. It is undeniable that many workers voted for Trump out of opposition to historic inflation under the Biden administration, waves of job cuts and the absence of any proposals from the Biden-Harris campaign to address the erosion of working class living conditions. But it is an entirely different matter to conflate these sentiments with the

actual actions of the Trump regime and the interests of the financial oligarchy it represents.

Since returning to the White House—four years after attempting to overthrow the Constitution and establish a presidential dictatorship—Trump has transformed the executive branch and military apparatus into a reactionary bludgeon against both US imperialism’s international rivals and the working class at home. Across the country, he has deployed the National Guard and military, occupying several major cities while carrying out mass raids against immigrant workers orchestrated by ICE agents.

Furthermore, under the guise of a hollow “peace” agreement, Trump has accelerated the genocidal war in Gaza, carried out by the Zionist Israeli regime with the backing and direction of US imperialism. Domestically, Trump—like the Democratic Biden administration before him—has escalated attacks on workers and youth opposing the extermination and displacement of the Palestinian people, as part of a broader assault on democratic rights.

At no point during the half-hour conversation did Mamdani or Friedland mention the central political issues confronting workers and youth in the US and internationally. While they found time to joke about soccer scores, there was no discussion of the ongoing genocide in Gaza, the mass ICE raids terrorizing immigrant communities or the broader assault on democratic rights by the Trump administration.

None of this appeared to trouble Mamdani, who, when asked by Friedland to reflect on his meeting with Trump, replied, “Honestly, [it] felt like it was the most productive meeting we could have had.”

Friedland’s scattered remarks echo the narrative promoted by the DSA and other pseudo-left mouthpieces, claiming that Mamdani somehow “charmed” Trump during their meeting—though Friedland couches this in juvenile terms, jokingly asking Mamdani if Trump wanted to have a “sleepover” or “hang out” with him after the press conference.

If their comments on the Trump meeting were not revealing enough, Mamdani and Friedland’s discussion of the mayor-elect’s incoming administration and transition team was outright damning.

In perhaps his most coherent question, Friedland asked Mamdani:

Do you remember the night Obama won? It felt like, now, America was different. You feel, to me, like a generational talent that's come out of the progressive side of politics, but we saw [with Obama] that popularity didn't translate to legislative success. Did you learn or take any notes from that?

Mamdani, in reply, gave a revealing answer that indirectly acknowledged the working class's experience with the Democratic Party over the past several decades: "There are a lot of people who don't know if they should give themselves permission to hope again because of how many times they've been disappointed, and you have to prove they were right to believe."

The comparison of Mamdani's campaign to Obama's 2008 presidential run and its "Hope" slogan is perhaps more apt than Friedland intended.

As many are already experiencing with Mamdani before he even takes office, the veneer of Obama's "Hope" quickly wore off as he presided over the greatest upward redistribution of wealth in US history following the financial crisis, expanded presidential powers to include the drone assassination of US citizens, and set the course for US imperialism's escalating war plans against China and Russia.

Mamdani sees as his task the resurrection of "hope," by which he means support for the Democratic Party and the capitalist two-party system.

While discussing Mamdani's transition team, the pair highlighted Elle Bisgaard-Church, a fellow DSA member appointed as chief of staff, and Dean Fuleihan, a Democratic Party insider, selected as his first deputy mayor.

In Mamdani's words: "Dean is somebody who's been in government for 47 years. He's worked as the first deputy mayor before, he's worked as the head of the budget, he worked in Albany. And the thing that I love about him is that he's worked through all of that and his orientation is, how do we make a 'no' into a 'how' when it comes to any political problem."

Fuleihan, in fact, embodies the pro-corporate and establishment character of Mamdani's transition team. He has been involved in New York's Democratic Party machinery for five decades. Speaking of Fuleihan to *City & 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."

The glorification of Mamdani's meeting with Trump by Friedland during the interview underscores the reactionary character of the pseudo-left milieu surrounding the Democratic Party, including the so-called "dirtbag left," with which Friedland is associated.

In August, Friedland, who is Jewish, publicly condemned the Gaza genocide during a widely viewed interview with Democratic Congressman and Zionist mouthpiece Ritchie Torres. That moment, uncharacteristically free of his usual cynicism and vulgarity, resonated with many viewers opposed to the crimes of Israel and American imperialism.

Despite this glimmer of political opposition, Friedland appears intent on avoiding any direct discussion of political issues or

perspectives. Even his rebuttal to Torres concluded with the evasive remark, "It's difficult for me to talk about this publicly." The greater part of Friedland's career remains defined by the political murkiness and unprincipled vulgarity that was on full display throughout his conversation with Mamdani.

Friedland rose to prominence primarily through his role in the now-defunct *C*m Town* podcast, which he co-hosted with Nick Mullen and Stavros Halkias. Running from 2016 to 2022, the podcast concluded its run ranked among the top 25 comedy podcasts on Apple Podcasts and Spotify. After Halkias's departure in 2022, Mullen and Friedland quickly launched a new project, *The Adam Friedland Show*.

During its run, *C*m Town* became associated with the so-called "dirtbag left" tendency, largely due to its promotion of Bernie Sanders and other DSA-aligned candidates. The show built its identity around a brand of supposedly edgy humor steeped in the reactionary and derogatory language of the far right. Slurs and racial stereotypes, along nearly every expletive in the English language, served as the glue for improvised bits that frequently touched on inflammatory subjects.

In accepting and repeating, with a tongue-in-cheek twist, the xenophobia, vulgarity, and backwardness of fascist provocateurs like Joe Rogan, the "dirtbag left" claims to be somehow subverting the far right.

Like the rest of the "dirtbag left," *C*m Town*'s promotion of reactionary and provocative humor served to dull and obscure political perspective, appealing above all to politically disoriented and right-wing individuals. Other figures in the "dirtbag left," such as *Succession* actress and *Red Scare* co-host Dasha Nekrasova, have direct associations with the far right.

In October, *Red Scare* platformed fascist Nick Fuentes in a roughly two-and-a-half-hour discussion released on YouTube under the title "Fuentanyl OD – Nick Fuentes x Red Scare (Dasha Nekrasova and Anna Khachiyani)." During the interview, Nekrasova and her co-host, Anna Khachiyani, echoed Fuentes' antisemitic conspiracy theories about "international Jewry" and his bigoted claims about the "replacement" of white populations in Western societies by non-white immigrants, among other far right and fascist talking points.



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