

Jacobin's defense of the Trump–Mamdani pact and the capitalist state

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In the aftermath of New York mayor-elect Zohran Mamdani's White House meeting with Donald Trump, in which the so-called "democratic socialist" and the fascist would-be dictator exchanged pleasantries and mutual praise, *Jacobin*, the unofficial organ of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), has published a series of articles hailing the meeting and praising Mamdani's capitulation to Trump as a political tour de force.

One of the most significant of these articles is a commentary by Christopher Marquis headlined "Trump and Mamdani Agree on the State, Not on Whom It Serves." In the course of the article, Marquis, a professor of management at the University of Cambridge, argues that the capitalist state is not intrinsically hostile to the interests of the working class and can, through prodding from the "left," be either pressured to serve the needs of working people or captured outright by them.

This argument exemplifies the role of the DSA and the middle class pseudo-left more broadly in promoting illusions in the Democratic Party and propping up the capitalist system, which is careening toward fascism and world war, defending it against the coming revolutionary challenge from the working class.

The article is not an academic exercise. It is a political manifesto by the DSA and *Jacobin*'s privileged petty-bourgeois milieu, justifying their open collaboration with a fascistic administration and defending the capitalist state itself. The headline's claim that "Trump and Mamdani agree on the state" is correct. There is an underlying agreement between the two, as well as the DSA, that the existing state is sacrosanct.

Marquis and *Jacobin* go out of their way to reassure the corporate oligarchy that it has nothing to fear from their so-called "democratic socialism."

"On the basic questions of how the economy is organized," Marquis writes, "Trump is not all that different from Mamdani." At one point he sums up the pathetic goal of Mamdani and company as giving the state "a firm nudge toward public value." Lest there be any remaining concerns, he writes, "When Mamdani advances democratic socialist policies, he's not suggesting we abolish markets..."

Marquis defines the "underlying issue" as "economic governance" (emphasis in the original). This is a false statement that could be taken from the talking points of any run-of-the-mill Democratic politician.

In reality, the underlying issue is the social relations of production under capitalism, in which the capitalists own the means of production, and the workers, who produce all of the wealth, own nothing but their ability to work, which they must sell to their exploiters in return for a wage. These relations generate an irreconcilable class struggle, leading either to the revolutionary

overthrow of capitalism by the working class and the establishment of a workers' state and socialism, based on common ownership of the means of production, equality, and production for social need rather than private profit, or a descent into fascist barbarism and nuclear war.

There is not a hint of class struggle or working class revolution in the *Jacobin* article, or in the politics of the DSA and Mamdani. On the contrary, this is their greatest fear, which leads them into the arms of the fascist representative of the oligarchy, Trump.

It is striking that Marquis' presentation of the political situation, couched in abstract, academic jargon, provides no sense of the staggering and unprecedented levels of wealth concentration and social inequality in today's America. It says nothing about Trump's fascist pogrom against immigrants, his unconstitutional deployment of troops to major cities, his assertion of dictatorial powers, his support for genocide in Gaza, or his illegal military attacks on Iran, Venezuela and other countries.

This, however, is not surprising in a commentary that argues the state machine is not by its nature an instrument of the ruling class and that it can be won, at least in part, to the side of workers. It would hardly be convenient to acknowledge the facts that show the Trump administration is a government of, by and for an unaccountable financial oligarchy that consists of a tiny fraction of the population.

In his recent lecture, "*Where is America going? Oligarchy, dictatorship, and the revolutionary crisis of capitalism*," the chairman of the *World Socialist Web Site* International Editorial Board, David North, painted a devastating portrait of contemporary US society. He reviewed the "historically unprecedented breakdown of American democracy" under conditions of the rise of a super-rich oligarchy wielding direct political power. He noted that 16 of Trump's top 25 appointees are among the country's 813 billionaires, in a country where the richest one percent hold tens of trillions of dollars in wealth while 75 percent of Americans live paycheck to paycheck and nearly half of all children are poor or low-income. As the WWSW has repeatedly pointed out, such levels of inequality are incompatible with democratic forms of rule.

In his foundational work of 1916, *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, Vladimir Lenin wrote of the monstrous depredations against the working class of "state monopoly capitalism," with its massive concentration of wealth and economic power in the hands of a relatively small number of corporate behemoths. Imperialism, Lenin wrote, meant "reaction all along the line." But the growth of oligarchic rule today has put the concentration of wealth at the very top, far beyond what existed in Lenin's day.

The class function of the state has never been more naked, rendering absurd the DSA's politics of tinkering around the edges of the

capitalist status quo.

Marquis' argument is not merely wrong in theory. It serves a definite class function. *Jacobin* is an organ of the DSA and a broader affluent middle class layer clustered in academia, NGOs and the trade union bureaucracy. This milieu has grown socially and politically dependent on the capitalist state: on public grants, tenured posts, foundations, and the managed "left" spaces supplied by the Democratic Party. Its material interests bind it to the preservation of the existing order, even as it cultivates a left-wing image through rhetoric about "democratic socialism" and identity politics.

Against *Jacobin* and the DSA, it is necessary to restate the ABCs of Marxism on the state. Engels, in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, explained that the state is

a product and a manifestation of the irreconcilability of class antagonisms. The state arises where, when, and insofar as class antagonism objectively cannot be reconciled. And, conversely, the existence of the state proves that the class antagonisms are irreconcilable.

The state is not an umpire standing above society, but the organized power of one class to suppress another. Its "special bodies of armed men, prisons, etc." exist to maintain the domination of the exploiting class.

In September of 1917, in the run-up to the October Revolution, Lenin wrote *The State and Revolution* precisely to combat the type of reformism now propagated by *Jacobin*. Lenin wrote while in hiding from the repression unleashed against the Bolsheviks by the bourgeois provisional government following mass working class demonstrations in July. He wrote the pamphlet, following the failed military coup by General Kornilov at the end of August, to prepare the party to lead the workers and soldiers in the armed overthrow of the bourgeois government and establishment of a workers' state.

Lenin waged theoretical and political war against all those who sought to adapt Marxism to bourgeois parliamentarism and social reformism. This included Karl Kautsky, a leading theoretician of the German Social Democratic Party and Second International, who opposed the revolutionary overthrow and destruction of the capitalist state and preached a peaceful, parliamentary road to socialism. Lenin was at the same time combating right-wing tendencies within the Bolshevik leadership.

In the beginning of his preface to *The State and Revolution*, Lenin wrote:

The struggle to free the working people from the influence of the bourgeoisie in general, and of the imperialist bourgeoisie in particular, is impossible without a struggle against opportunist prejudices concerning the "state."

He explained that the central lesson of the 1871 Paris Commune was that the working class could not simply take over the bourgeois state machine and use it for its own purposes. It had to dismantle it and replace it with organs of workers' power.

Lenin, under conditions of war and revolutionary upheaval, undertook a systematic "historical excavation" of Marx and Engels on

the state to arm the Bolshevik Party and the international working class for the seizure of power. Trotsky noted that Lenin considered this so critical that, fearing assassination, he asked comrades to publish his preparatory notebooks on "Marxism and the State" should he be killed. (See, "From the July Days to the Kornilov coup: Lenin's *The State and Revolution*")

Lenin stressed that under imperialism the repressive apparatus of the capitalist state assumed "monstrous proportions," while democracy became a fig leaf for militarism and police violence. The task of the proletariat was not to "re?draw boundaries" (re: *Jacobin*) within this apparatus, but to smash it and build a workers' state based on new, radically democratic institutions (soviets) as the instruments of socialist transformation.

This is all the more true today. The anti-Marxist purveyors of illusions in social reform, from Syriza in Greece, to Podemos in Spain, to the Left Party in Germany, to Sanders in the US, have all betrayed the working class. The working class must establish its political and organizational independence from all parties and agencies of the capitalist class, from the Democrats to the pseudo-lefts and the trade union bureaucracies.

Rank-and-file committees must be built in workplaces, schools and working class communities in the US and internationally, affiliated with the International Workers Alliance of Rank and File Committees (IWA-RFC). The revolutionary party—the International Committee of the Fourth International and its American section, the Socialist Equality Party—must be built to lead the struggle to expropriate the oligarchy and overthrow capitalist rule.

The objective conditions for socialist revolution are maturing rapidly. The same technological and economic processes, such as AI, which have driven the rise of the oligarchy are also creating the material basis for the mass political radicalization of the working class. The decisive issue is the building of a revolutionary leadership capable of turning this objective movement into a conscious struggle for power.



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