

# Mamdani appoints Julie Su, who worked to suppress class struggle under Biden, to major economic post

Jerry White  
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New York City Mayor-elect Zohran Mamdani has selected Julie Su, the former acting US Secretary of Labor under President Biden, as the city's first Deputy Mayor for Economic Justice. Su's appointment is the latest signal by the self-described "democratic socialist" that his administration will be committed to protecting the corporate and financial elite against an increasingly restive and politically radicalized working class.

Mamdani's campaign won popular support—especially among young people—by denouncing Israel's genocide in Gaza, criticizing Trump's dictatorial measures and promising relief from catastrophic housing and living costs. From the outset, however, Mamdani has done everything to appease the corporate and political establishment and disorient and demoralize his own supporters.

Su's appointment follows Mamdani's fundraising with billionaires, his White House meeting with Donald Trump and his decision to retain Jessica Tisch—the billionaire heiress who led the spying and provocation campaign against anti-genocide protesters—as New York Police Department Commissioner.

Announcing Su's appointment, Mamdani posted on his social media pages, "As former US secretary of labor, Julie played a central role in fighting for workers, ensuring a just day's pay for a hard day's work, and saving the pensions of more than a million union workers and retirees."

This is political theatre. The concrete record of Julie Su reveals the role she will play in City Hall: promoting the labor bureaucracy and collaborating with the unions to suppress class conflict and impose Wall Street's dictates.

## What is Su's real record?

Su served as California's Secretary of Labor from 2019 to 2021 under Democratic Governor Gavin Newsom. After the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, she worked with the union apparatus to reopen workplaces and schools on a timetable set

by business and state managers, subordinating the health and safety of workers, teachers and students to the needs of big business.

From the beginning of 2023 through the end of the Biden administration, Su served as the Acting US Secretary of Labor. As the *World Socialist Web Site* documented during the heightened labor struggles of 2023–24, the Department of Labor (DOL) under Su repeatedly intervened at critical points to bolster the labor bureaucracy, suppress strike momentum and preserve critical supply chains.

Prior to this, on February 10, 2021, Biden appointed Su to be the Deputy Secretary of Labor under Secretary Marty Walsh. This coincided with a growing strike wave in 2021–22, that included workers at Volvo Truck, Deere, Kelloggs, Warrior Met Coal and tens of thousands of educators and healthcare workers across the country.

In many cases, rank-and-file workers repeatedly rejected sellout contracts brought by the labor bureaucracies, including at Volvo Trucks in Dublin, Virginia, where workers formed a rank-and-file committee with the assistance of the *World Socialist Web Site*.

Functioning as second-in-command at the Department of Labor, Su oversaw day-to-day operations and filled in for Walsh when necessary to reassert the authority of the union bureaucracy and sabotage the rising strike movement.

This included:

- In February 22, 2022, the day after the Russian invasion of Ukraine goaded on by the US and the NATO powers, Biden and other administration officials secretly met with United Steelworkers (USW) President Tom Conway to block a strike by 30,000 oil refinery and petrochemical workers and prevent any interruption of oil production. Shortly afterwards, the USW announced it had reached a tentative agreement, which Conway boasted "did not add to inflationary pressures." Instead, it led to exhausting and deadly conditions, resulting in the fatalities of brothers Max and Ben Morrissey at the BP Husky refinery in Toledo, Ohio, in September 2022.

- In late 2022, Biden invoked the reactionary Railway Labor Act and established a Presidential Emergency Board to block a

strike by over 100,000 railroad workers. After workers overwhelmingly rejected the president's contract proposal, Walsh, saying a rail strike would be economically "devastating" and jeopardize supply chains, worked with the unions to delay a walkout until a bipartisan Congressional vote in November 2022 to outlaw the strike and impose the deal workers had rejected. Those voting in favor of the strikebreaking legislation were four members of Mamdani's Democratic Socialists of America, including Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez.

- In June 2023, three months after being appointed acting secretary after Walsh's resignation, Su personally traveled to the West Coast as wildcat and rank-and-file actions erupted among longshore workers. Within days of her arrival, the Labor Department, working hand in glove with the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) bureaucracy, pushed through a mediated settlement that ended the job actions and channeled the dispute back into institutional negotiation, paving the way for the ILWU to push through a job-cutting sellout deal.

- In September 2023, while Su called for a negotiated settlement, Biden joined United Auto Workers President Shawn Fain on the picket line to promote the bogus UAW "stand up strike" and then praised the pro-company deal signed by the UAW bureaucracy as "historic." It was anything but, paving the way for the firing of thousands of temporary workers, thousands of permanent layoffs and the deaths of Stellantis workers Antonio Gaston and Ronald Adams Sr.

- In 2024, Su would directly intervene to mediate and contain a strike by 33,000 Boeing workers, who rejected multiple sellout deals brought back by the International Association of Machinists (IAM). The Biden administration saw the strike as a threat to the major US exporter and military contractor pivotal for US imperialist strategy (WSWS Boeing coverage; WSWS analysis of wartime logic in labor disputes).

## Su and the anti-democratic UAW election

Perhaps the sharpest expression of the anti-working class record of Julie Su and how she has collaborated with the DSA against workers was how she upheld the disenfranchisement of workers during the UAW's 2022–23 officer elections.

In July 2023, Mack Trucks worker Will Lehman filed a lawsuit accusing the Department of Labor, Acting Secretary Julie Su and the court-appointed UAW Monitor of effectively abetting the union bureaucracy's suppression of millions of members' votes in the 2022–23 direct election for UAW national officers.

Lehman charged that the UAW "failed to provide effective notice" of the election to its membership, resulting in a historic

low turnout—fewer than 9 percent of over 1.1 million eligible members cast ballots—and that more ballots were returned as undeliverable than were actually counted. This evidence was central to his complaint that the election deprived members of the right to participate meaningfully in union democracy.

Instead of conducting a transparent, robust inquiry into mass irregularities, the Department of Labor (DOL) accepted accounts from union officials, delayed decisive action and produced findings that effectively papered over the scale of the disenfranchisement.

A federal judge was forced to chastise the department for its foot-dragging and to demand compliance with judicial requests. Su continued to delay until the Trump administration took over. The result was a bureaucratic whitewash that defended the union apparatus rather than vindicating rank-and-file members' democratic rights.

Fain, who is now facing further corruption charges and a rank-and-file revolt, backed Mamdani in the New York City elections. Immediately after his victory, Mamdani populated his transition team with representatives of the corrupt UAW apparatus, including UAW Region 9A Director Brandon Mancilla. The stated rationale—preparing the administration "to hit the ground running in January to make life affordable for working class families"—conceals the political effect: placing the union apparatus and its allies inside the machinery of municipal governance helps to ensure that class conflict is suppressed through institutional channels rather than expressed through independent rank-and-file action.

As the record shows, the Department of Labor under Su and her Democratic Party predecessor functioned as an arm of capitalist governance, whose primary role in moments of class conflict was to work with the union bureaucracy to discipline labor, protect production and shield the economic order from destabilizing mass action.

These are the credentials Mamdani is seeking, knowing full well that he will confront enormous opposition from the working class as he betrays the aspirations of his voters and pursues his "partnership" with the fascist in the White House.



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