

Mamdani proclaims fictional unity of “all New Yorkers” in inauguration speech

Jesse Thomas, Joseph Kishore
5 January 2026

Zohran Mamdani was inaugurated as mayor of New York City on January 1, 2026, following his election victory over former governor Andrew Cuomo and Republican candidate Curtis Sliwa.

The rise of Mamdani, a member of the Democratic Socialists of America, to mayor of the center of American finance capital, is a significant political event in the United States. His election campaign drew support particularly from younger people, sections of the middle class, and wide layers of the working class whose living standards have been ravaged by decades of austerity, deindustrialization and social counterrevolution. Among those voting for Mamdani, opposition to the genocide in Gaza and hostility to Trump’s fascistic assault on immigrants were also major factors.

However, the aspirations of those who voted for Mamdani stand in stark contrast to the political reality of a Mamdani administration.

In his inaugural address, Mamdani couched his administration in populist terms, promising a new era of “New York for New Yorkers.” He concluded his remarks by affirming, “I was elected as a Democratic socialist and I will govern as a Democratic socialist. I will not abandon my principles for fear of being deemed radical.” At the same time, however, Mamdani’s speech presented a false perspective of unity that seeks to harmonize antagonistic class interests and contain social opposition within the political structures of the capitalist system.

Mamdani invoked the New Deal to justify what he described as an agenda of “safety, affordability, and abundance,” and pledged to “return the vast resources of this city to the workers who call it home” by delivering policies such as universal childcare “by taxing the wealthiest few,” a rent freeze for rent-stabilized apartments, and free public buses. These promises, he claimed, would transform lives by making freedom “belong to more than just the privileged few.”

It is first of all necessary to point out again that Mamdani’s program is not socialist and amounts to a mild revival of the liberal reformism of an earlier period. He proposes to achieve these reforms—and to guarantee “abundance” for all—by uniting all New Yorkers in class harmony.

“This will not be a tale of one city, governed only by the one

percent,” he said, “Nor will it be a tale of two cities, the rich versus the poor. It will be a tale of 8 and a half million cities, each of them a New Yorker with hopes and fears, each a universe, each of them woven together.”

Mamdani insisted that his administration would “answer to all New Yorkers, not to any billionaire or oligarch who thinks they can buy our democracy.” But this was paired with the assertion that his government will deliver for “every one of us,” including those who have directly benefited from the vast social inequality that defines life in the city. “No matter what you eat, what language you speak, how you pray, or where you come from,” Mamdani declared, “the words that most define us are the two we all share: New Yorkers.”

Social and class interests are dissolved by Mamdani into the most abstract of abstractions. We are all “New Yorkers,” separate universes woven together! Trump is a resident of New York, as are significant sections of the American corporate and financial oligarchy. What is the content of their shared identity as “New Yorkers” with the masses of workers and young people struggling to live?

Mamdani’s appeals to collectivism and “solidarity” are ultimately marshaled to promote reconciliation with, not the overthrow of, the ruling elite.

Mamdani concluded his remarks by stating that his administration aims to inspire in people the belief that “it is right to hope again.” In other contexts, Mamdani has made this point in specific and positive reference to the Obama campaign. What it in fact means is that the basic aim of his campaign is to bolster the political credibility of the Democratic Party under conditions of growing social anger and unrest.

The character of the inauguration itself made clear that Mamdani’s administration is not a break with the political establishment but a reshaping of its image. Far from a grassroots rebellion against the status quo, the event was a carefully orchestrated ceremony of the Democratic Party.

In addition to Bernie Sanders, who insisted that Mamdani’s program was not “radical,” speakers included New York Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and New York State Attorney General Letitia James. Mamdani acknowledged the presence of New York Governor Kathy Hochul, former New York City mayor Eric Adams, and Representative Nydia

Velázquez. Former mayor Bill de Blasio was also in attendance, along with a number of guest artists and celebrities associated either directly with Mamdani's campaign or with the broader orbit of the Democratic Party.

Even before taking office, Mamdani made clear that his administration would operate within the framework of the existing political and economic order. He launched a series of high-dollar fundraising events with New York's corporate and financial elite. The political character of Mamdani's incoming administration was further revealed in his earliest staffing decisions. Among his first appointments was Dean Fuleihan as First Deputy Mayor. Fuleihan is a longtime Democratic Party insider who played a central role in enforcing austerity budgets under both Andrew Cuomo in Albany and Bill de Blasio in City Hall.

Mamdani also signaled his willingness to placate the city's financial and policing elite by announcing his support for retaining billionaire heiress Jessica Tisch as NYPD Commissioner, despite her central role in expanding surveillance and suppressing anti-genocide protests.

Most significant was Mamdani's November 21 meeting with Donald Trump, held at the White House just weeks before his inauguration. Following the closed-door discussion, Mamdani declared that the two had established a "partnership." The overture to Trump—who returned to power in 2025 following a fascist coup and is presiding over mass deportations, military-National Guard operations in US cities, and a criminal war of aggression in Venezuela—demonstrates the real character of Mamdani's administration.

The inauguration took place just weeks before the first anniversary of Trump's return to power, under a regime that has carried out mass deportations, escalated war abroad, and slashed domestic programs. Yet Trump's name was mentioned only once during the entire ceremony—in a brief aside by Mamdani, in reference to Trump voters backing him—and there was no reference at all to Venezuela, Iran, Gaza, fascism or dictatorship. "ICE raids" was mentioned only in passing, stripped of any political context.

Since his meeting with Trump more than a month ago, Mamdani has avoided any public criticism of the fascist president. The only partial exception was his brief statement following the invasion of Venezuela and the kidnapping of its president on Saturday. Without actually using Trump's name, Mamdani called the action a "act of war and a violation of federal and international law." He did not propose any action, only that his administration "will continue to monitor the situation and issue relevant guidance."

Maduro is currently being held in New York City, but Mamdani has not called for any protests over the blatantly illegal action of the Trump administration. Instead, he said he placed a personal call to Trump in which, according to Mamdani, "I registered my opposition, I made it clear and we left it at that." Thus Mamdani, in relation to a blatantly criminal

action by a fascist president who is declaring war on the entire world.

Mamdani has never explained his White House meeting with Trump in any detail, but in exchange for allegedly reducing the threat of federal cutbacks in New York, Mamdani has proclaimed his willingness to cooperate with Trump. As for Trump, he can quickly turn on Mamdani in the event that he finds their "partnership" no longer of service.

It is essential that workers distinguish between Mamdani's rhetoric and his actual relationship to power. Mamdani and the DSA more broadly are not an oppositional force against the political establishment, but an integral part of it, serving as an ever more critical mechanism for bolstering the Democratic Party.

Recent experience provides numerous warnings of the consequences of subordinating workers' struggles to multi-class, "progressive" coalitions, which in fact represent privileged sections of the upper middle class. The most striking recent example is Greece, where the Syriza government—headed by Alexis Tsipras—was elected in 2015 on promises to end European Union-imposed austerity. Once in office, Syriza rapidly capitulated to finance capital and imposed cuts even more brutal than those enacted by its predecessors.

The social opposition that found expression in the vote for Mamdani will not be satisfied by Mamdani's program. As the WSWs noted last month, growing protests in the New York and beyond

will not be limited to demands for merely a reduction in bus fares, which forms the center piece of New York Mayor-elect Mamdani's agenda. The working class will not be satisfied with minuscule reforms of capitalism, one bus stop at a time, which are, as Mamdani the magician hopes, to be achieved with the help of Donald Trump. They will demand the expropriation of the capitalist class.

The fight against austerity, militarism and authoritarianism requires the independent mobilization of the working class on the basis of a socialist program, aimed not at managing capitalism more "humanely," an impossible task, but at ending its domination altogether.



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact