

New York City Mayor Mamdani seeks to stop aid to homeless while grandstanding on taxing the rich

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Following his endorsement last week of New York's right-wing Democratic Governor Kathy Hochul, New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani—a member of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA)—took a major step on Wednesday toward halting the expansion of a critical rental voucher program for the city's poor.

The move is part of an effort to close the city's budget deficit, which was revised down this week from \$12.6 billion to \$7 billion, in part due to a reassessment of revenue from Wall Street bonuses.

In a reversal of a central campaign promise, the Mamdani administration has moved to block the expansion of CityFHEPS, a rental voucher program that currently supports roughly 140,000 of New York City's poorest residents. The program, aimed at preventing homelessness and eviction, was set to be expanded under legislation passed by the City Council in 2023 and upheld in court after legal challenges by Mamdani's predecessor, Eric Adams.

Mamdani, who denounced Adams at the time for refusing to implement the law and pledged to "ensure expansion proceeds as scheduled and per city law," is now requesting that the case be delayed in order to renegotiate the scope of the program. His administration is actively working to convince the Council to scale back or entirely halt the planned expansion.

Roughly 47,000 additional households would become newly eligible for the vouchers under the expansion, but Mamdani and budget officials have claimed the cost—projected at \$17 billion over five years—is "unsustainable." At least 40,000 people are in limbo waiting for aid in the least affordable rental market in the United States.

Mamdani's decision to try to block funding for the CityFHEPS program, a move applauded by the conservative "fiscal watchdog" Citizens Budget Commission, spells disaster for tens of thousands of working class families.

This is the first open admission by the DSA mayor that his

administration's priority is not meeting the urgent needs of the poor but balancing the budget in the interests of Wall Street. Far from a break with austerity, Mamdani is exposing himself as a conventional bourgeois politician.

The housing situation for millions in New York City is not simply unaffordable—It is desperate. Roughly 157,000 public school students, or about one in seven, are homeless. Another 300,000 people live in deteriorating public housing maintained by the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA).

As an article in the *New York Times* pointed out this week, Mamdani has so far failed in his attempts to regulate private landlords, including his campaign pledge to freeze rent hikes on rent-regulated buildings.

Also on Wednesday, Mamdani appeared before a joint budget hearing of the New York State Legislature in Albany to request funds to help close the city's budget gap.

This largely pro forma annual visit to the Democratic-controlled state legislature gave the city's pseudo-left mayor an opportunity to grandstand in support of his proposal for a 2 percent income tax on New Yorkers earning more than \$1 million a year.

It is widely understood that neither the governor nor the legislature will make the slightest move to tax the wealth of the ruling class. Every politician in the room, Mamdani above all, understood that the call to "tax the rich" was meant to paper over the austerity program the DSA mayor has begun to implement.

Mamdani's comments were marked by a fawning obsequiousness toward Hochul: "I am encouraged by the partnership we have built with Governor Hochul, and the results it is already yielding," apparently referring to the limited and provisional funding the governor has provided for Mamdani's pledge to establish city-sponsored daycare for two-year-olds, a program whose continuation after 2026 is entirely dependent on fluctuating state tax revenues.

Mamdani has struck up an alliance with Hochul—much as

he did with Donald Trump in November—in which all the advantages accrue to the right-wing governor, who has herself presented an austerity budget for the state.

In an article published Tuesday, “Kathy Hochul Is a Good Problem for Zohran Mamdani to Have,” *Jacobin* magazine, the unofficial organ of the DSA, does its best to cover for Mamdani and counter outrage over his endorsement of Hochul.

The article reveals in passing that the alliance between Hochul and Mamdani was part of what were doubtless quid pro quo dealings, carried out with the connivance of the Democratic Party leadership. The relationship, *Jacobin* reported, grew “out of talks between the two last summer and fall. Those talks and the friendly relationship that grew out of them resulted in Hochul’s endorsement of Mamdani.”

The article argues that Mamdani’s alliance with Hochul is a necessary evil and, indeed, proof of “success.” It claims that Mamdani’s relationship with the right-wing governor is “a partnership” that is “embedded in huge victories.” *Jacobin* insists this is not “selling out” but “what effectively wielding state power looks like.”

Even when acknowledging that the endorsement took place while Hochul was actively helping break the strike of 15,000 nurses, *Jacobin* portrays this betrayal as a noble “dilemma” of “socialist governance” to secure supposedly “historic” gains.

In fact, Mamdani has no doubt played a key role in talks behind the scenes to shut down the nurses’ strike, along with his Deputy Mayor for Economic Justice, Julie Su, formerly of the Biden administration.

Within the past week, the New York State Nurses Association (NYSNA) shut down the strikes at two out of the three hospital systems where workers are striking, Mount Sinai and Montefiore. At New York-Presbyterian, workers voted “no” on NYSNA’s tentative agreement, a massive repudiation of the trade union apparatus.

The article presents Mamdani’s betrayals as a masterful piece of political maneuvering. *Jacobin* writes: “Socialists in New York have long succeeded with an inside/outside strategy, gaining state power while also organizing grassroots pressure. The Mamdani administration is a triumph of that strategy.”

What DSA “success” *Jacobin* is touting it never makes clear, but supposedly Mamdani is “inside” and has little choice but to endorse Hochul; his supporters on the “outside” can help him by pressuring Hochul to the left. This “inside/outside strategy” is in fact a formula for shielding those “inside” from criticism and trapping those “outside” within the Democratic Party.

Mamdani’s austerity measures and his endorsement of Hochul’s re-election bid have exposed him as an operative

of the ruling elite.

All of this has thrown the DSA into a crisis. In response to the Hochul endorsement, the New York City Democratic Socialists of America (NYC-DSA) released a statement cynically attempting to distance itself from the very mayor who is a member of its organization and for whom it campaigned. It reads in part:

NYC-DSA does not believe that Governor Kathy Hochul has risen to meet this moment. ... [W]ith fascism here, and ultra-wealthy hospital CEOs refusing fair pay and benefits for nurses amid a historic strike, New York cannot afford to let the Governor continue to protect billionaire donors at the expense of SNAP, Medicaid, truly universal childcare, and the enactment of the mayor’s affordability agenda.

The NYC-DSA and several other organizations, including United Auto Workers Region 9A, have organized a protest in Albany for February 25 designed to pressure Hochul to include progressive tax hikes in the final state budget. This is a desperate antic to hold on to the credibility of Mamdani and the DSA itself, predicated on the conception that, no matter what rotten alliances one of their own makes in office, popular pressure can still force concessions from the Democrats.

In fact, these developments expose the real function of Mamdani and the DSA: to provide left cover for the Democratic Party, politically disarm the working class and impose the demands of Wall Street.



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