

New York City Mayor Mamdani reneges on promise of free bus service

Sandy English
9 April 2026

April 10 marks the first 100 days in office of New York City's Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) mayor, Zohran Mamdani. They have been characterized by a betrayal of the aspirations of the million New Yorkers who voted for him and the tens of millions across the US who supported him. He has retreated from implementing his major campaign promises, given the New York Police Department (NYPD) license to spy on and repress antiwar and anti-ICE protesters, is preparing massive cuts to social services and education and has made a political alliance with the fascist in the White House, Donald Trump.

In his latest retreat from the minor but popular reforms he proposed during his election campaign, Mamdani has all but admitted that his promise of free bus service is dead. In an interview with *Politico* on Wednesday, after the interviewer noted that no proposal had been made to include funding for the program in the state budget, from which mass transit for the city is funded, Mamdani could only respond lamely: "It continues to be part of budget negotiations," and "We're encouraged by the conversations we're having with the governor."

This is the same governor, right-wing Democrat Kathy Hochul, who fled an appearance at an auto exhibition in Manhattan later that day after being besieged by protesters. One demonstrator shouted at her, accurately, "You're a millionaire protecting billionaires." On Thursday, Hochul canceled an appearance in Queens, no doubt out of concern that she might be run out of the borough as well.

Hochul, whom Mamdani endorsed in February for governor in her reelection bid and whom he refuses to confront on any issue, has been adamant that she will oppose his proposed 1 percent tax increase on incomes over \$1 million and 3 percent tax increase on corporations.

Two of the three major promises Mamdani made during his election campaign, free bus service and universal pre-K, simply cannot be fully funded on any long-term basis without these taxes, which were never in the offing. Even so, Mamdani and the DSA continue to promote the illusion that Hochul is willing or able to persuade the billionaires to give

up even a tiny fraction of their wealth.

On Thursday, Mamdani announced that his pilot 2K program will be extended to full day and full year—from 8:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., 260 days a year. This will affect about 2,000 children in the fall. Hochul granted Mamdani \$1.5 billion to fund the program but continuing it into later phases will be expensive and will depend on much larger commitments from the state in the future.

Mamdani has said little in recent weeks about his third major election proposal: freezing rents on the 1 million rent-regulated apartments in the city. While he appointed six of the nine members of the Rent Guidelines Board (RGB), which has the power to set rent increases, in February, there is no guarantee they will vote for a 0 percent increase, although most observers think this is likely. On Thursday, however, the RGB itself reported that the annual Price Index of Operating Costs, which landlords pay for building upkeep, had risen 5.3 percent.

The fate of these three programs, central to Mamdani's supposed effort to make New York City "affordable" for most of the population through minor reforms, must be seen in the context of much broader cuts to social programs and education that are almost certainly coming as Mamdani tries to close the city's \$5.4 billion budget gap, as he is legally required to do by July.

While he has floated an either-or scenario of, on the one hand, pressuring Hochul and the state legislature to pass the millionaires' tax or, on the other, increasing the city's property tax by 9.5 percent—a move that would devastate millions of working class and middle class homeowners and tenants, as well as small businesses—it has been clear from the outset that this was a nonstarter and that the only real option before Mamdani is to cut vital social programs.

Last week, the Democratic Party-controlled City Council, which also opposes a millionaires' tax, rejected Mamdani's proposed \$127 billion budget, including any property tax increases. While the council claims the city already has the funds to close most of the budget gap if it changes its accounting methods, it has spoken only vaguely of

“efficiencies and reforms.”

One of the proposals advanced by City Council Speaker Julie Menin, a millionaire whose family owns a Hamptons house worth \$22 million, is to collect delinquent property taxes. Some observers have noted that this would amount to an attack on working class homeowners, since the city would sell the debts to Wall Street investors, who would then pile on fees and penalties and push many into foreclosure.

Mamdani has already shown his willingness to renege on promises to defend working class living standards. His administration is appealing in court a city-mandated increase in assistance to CityFHEPS, a program that helps people in homeless shelters or those who have been evicted find new housing.

Any budget cuts will have serious implications for the overcrowded, underfunded and disease-ridden public schools in the city. Last week, Mamdani proposed that the state legislature include in its still-unfinished budget a reprieve from a legally mandated deadline requiring the city to reduce class sizes, since meeting the requirement would mean hiring more educators.

The DSA has now been in power in America’s largest city for 100 days. Not only has its mayor shown his willingness to meet with the city’s leading billionaires and seek to balance the city budget without touching their wealth; no DSA leader, least of all Mamdani himself, seriously entertains the prospect of significantly increasing taxes on them. Instead, the DSA is preparing to impose the full burden of the fiscal crisis on the working class.

To do so, the repressive apparatus of the capitalist state must function without restraint. The immense economic pressure bearing down on the working class in New York, nationally and internationally has combined with widespread dissent, first in opposition to genocide and now in opposition to war and dictatorship. Mamdani’s willingness to assure the ruling elite that he could govern the financial nerve center of world capitalism was signaled not only by his meetings with the city’s billionaires after receiving the Democratic Party nomination in June, but above all by his two cordial meetings with Donald Trump and his pointed refusal to criticize Trump by name—even as Trump threatened to destroy Iranian civilization.

In one revealing episode, *City & State* reported on Monday that the Mamdani administration had ordered the city to scrub all references to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) from its 375-page Preliminary Racial Equity Plan. While officials from Mamdani’s Law Department explained that this was done to avoid lawsuits from the Trump administration, the move clearly indicates the deep impact Mamdani’s meetings with Trump have had on the city

government apparatus.

That is the light in which workers should view Mamdani’s alliance with the NYPD and its commissioner, Jessica Tisch. He has systematically retreated in the face of any criticism of the NYPD or any serious effort to restrict its actions.

He has allowed NYPD officers to arrest striking nurses—after working behind the scenes to shut down the nurses’ strike at four major hospitals in February—and has continually backed away from his promises to disband the Strategic Response Group (SRG), the NYPD’s anti-terrorism unit, which beat and arrested George Floyd protesters in 2020 and pro-Palestinian demonstrators and others beginning in 2023.

While Mamdani has repeatedly said that the SRG would be disbanded, SRG officers arrested protesters on Monday at “Passover Seder in the Street,” a Jewish-sponsored event, after demonstrators sought to block the doors of Palantir’s Manhattan headquarters. Palantir is a tech company that provides data aggregation and relationship-mapping software to ICE. Significantly, Mamdani had attended the protest earlier while it was rallying in Union Square in Lower Manhattan.

The week before, at a press conference at 1 Police Plaza in Manhattan alongside Jessica Tisch, Mamdani stepped back from his campaign pledge to disband the Criminal Group Database, better known as the Gang Database, which contains thousands of names, including minors, of people the NYPD merely suspects of gang affiliation. Mamdani cited the record low murder and shooting statistics from the first quarter of 2026 as proof that the NYPD’s current policing strategies, including reliance on the database, were working.

His collaboration with the NYPD has become so blatant that the *New York Times* published an interview with him on Thursday largely to allow him to make excuses for not disbanding the SRG, for keeping the Gang Database, and to show that he was in command, allowing him to declare: “I hold the final decision.”

The fact that a so-called “socialist” mayor feels compelled to say this about the largest police force in the country only demonstrates that, after 100 days, his administration has only one response to the relentless pressure and power of the capitalist state—whether in the form of Trump, the NYPD or their Wall Street masters. The DSA in power in New York City is a regime of surrender to these forces.



To contact the WSW and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact