New York Times publishes friendly interview with Mamdani

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On July 18, the *New York Times* published a lengthy, sympathetic interview conducted by Lulu Garcia-Navarro with New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani. The interview reflected the Democratic Party establishment's grappling with electoral victories by candidates backed by the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) and its most prominent figure, Mamdani.

Mamdani's own election last November signaled a major shift to the left in the political orientation of broad masses of workers and young people as well as sections of the middle class. That shift has continued and deepened, as expressed in election victories by DSA- and Mamdani-backed candidates in New York and other cities across the country.

There is growing disgust with capitalism and both big business parties and increasing interest in a socialist alternative, seen in the fact that millions are voting for candidates who call themselves socialist. The role of the DSA, a faction of the Democratic Party, is to contain the political radicalization and channel it behind the Democrats in order to block the development of an independent movement of the working class.

The interview brought to the fore Mamdani's conciliatory attitude toward the ruling class and the Democratic Party establishment. He and the DSA claim that significant social reforms can be grafted onto the profit system. They call this "socialism," but it is actually a perspective of reforming capitalism, one that is completely unrealizable and can lead only to disaster.

In one of the most striking exchanges of the interview, Mamdani was pressed on his attitude to the big business interests that dominate New York City:

> Garcia-Navarro: I want to talk about New York's economy, because much of it is built around Wall Street, finance, real estate. How important is it for you to have a good relationship with those sectors? And how would you say your relationship is with those sectors?
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> Mamdani: I think it's important. And what I have in common with leaders of those sectors—even amid disagreements, because I believe that we can raise taxes a little bit more on the wealthiest New Yorkers—what brings us together is both a belief in the city and a commitment to its continued vitality.
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> The other day I went to the announcement of the new American Express headquarters at Two World Trade Center. And one thing that stood out to me was that these business leaders, they're not just making decisions on the basis of dollars and cents; they're also making decisions on the basis of investing in the city and in what the city represents.

Here Mamdani summed up his "disagreements" with Wall Street in his call for raising taxes "a little bit more" on the corporate-financial oligarchs who dominate the city. After the gutting of corporate taxes over decades, this does not even approach the restoration of tax rates for the rich that prevailed in the 1960s.

Garcia-Navarro commented that Mamdani sounded "like any other capitalist mayor," eliciting a laugh from the interviewee.

Mamdani added that he would "always celebrate continued investment in this city," while looking "to ensure that more and more New Yorkers can be a part of those benefits." This language, lauding big business and seeking to present its interests and those of workers as harmonious, is intended to reassure the capitalist class that its position will not be challenged under his administration.

Mamdani himself pointed to the social disaster facing millions of New Yorkers, inadvertently exposing the contradiction between his minimal reform proposals, including expanded child care and free bus service, and the vast resources required to provide a decent standard of living for New York workers. Mamdani noted that "one in four are living in poverty" in New York City. "Right now in our city," he said, "to afford child care for a two-year-old, as a family you need to make $334,000. That is an extraordinary amount of money."

Indeed. The median household income in New York is just over $80,000 a year. The gap between what is needed to live and the income at the disposal of the working class will not be overcome by a token increase in taxes on the rich, even were the multi-millionaires and billionaires to agree to it, which they will not.

Regarding housing, Mamdani added, "too many working people, if you ask them where they live, they won't tell you a neighborhood across the five boroughs. They'll tell you a neighboring *state*." He mentioned Jersey City as an example, which is only slightly less unaffordable than New York City, with 39 percent of households burdened by excessive rents. Mamdani's rent freeze on regulated apartments will not bring down housing costs to affordable levels.

The premise that underlies the perspective of Mamdani and the DSA is that there is no objective, irreconcilable conflict between the working class and the owners of capital—the banks, real estate interests, corporate boards and billionaire speculators, whose stratospheric fortunes are based ultimately on the surplus value produced by workers. This is in a city with the most billionaires in the world alongside mass poverty, homelessness, and a multi-millioned working class. Billionaires occupy gilded towers with views of

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Central Park while nearly one in seven public school children lacks a permanent home.

Mamdani implicitly denies the reality of the class struggle. But propelling this class struggle forward, whether Mamdani acknowledges it or not, is the decline in the world economic position of American capitalism and the insoluble crisis of American and world capitalism, what Trotsky called capitalism's "death agony."

Decades of deindustrialization, financialization, spiraling national debt, and the erosion of the dollar's world position have produced the consolidation of a tiny oligarchy controlling more wealth than any ruling class in previous world history. But this wealth is overwhelmingly derived not from the production of useful goods, but from speculation on previously existing wealth, i.e., fictitious capital. The US national debt of $40 trillion means that American capitalism is, from a fiscal standpoint, bankrupt.

For 35 years, since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the American ruling class has sought to overcome its economic decline through the use of military violence and plunder of the resources of the Middle East, South Asia and Africa. The war against Iran, alongside the escalating war against Russia in Ukraine, the Gaza genocide, the attack on Venezuela, the conflict with Cuba, and war preparations against China, marks a new stage in the crisis and the initial chapters of an unfolding world war. The cost of this war is being imposed on the working class through the destruction of all past social gains and programs.

The chasm between the oligarchy and the mass of working people is incompatible with the maintenance of democratic forms of rule. The political system is being brought into alignment with the underlying social relations. This means the erection of dictatorship, but it also means a massive intensification of the class struggle, with revolutionary implications.

There was no reference in the interview to the real character of the social and political crisis. Not a word was uttered about the wars in Iran and Ukraine. Trump's drive to preemptively nullify the results of the midterm elections and establish a presidential dictatorship was passed over in silence.

Much of the interview, however, focused on the fallout from the genocide in Gaza, which has played a major role in the radicalization of a new generation. Mamdani appeals to the widely felt moral outrage while remaining careful not to draw deeper political conclusions. In the interview, he called Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu "a war criminal who has been charged by the International Criminal Court" and "belongs in The Hague." Within days of the interview, however, he reneged on a campaign pledge to arrest Netanyahu when he visits New York in September for the UN General Assembly, announcing in a video statement that he lacked the legal authority to do so.

When Garcia-Navarro raised the silencing of pro-Palestinian voices at the 2024 Democratic convention, Mamdani replied, "I think what people wanted in that moment was to know that their voice, too, belonged in this party that we call home. What I'm thankful for is that now, today, that voice is being heard." In other words, there's room under the "big tent" for opponents of mass slaughter and war criminals alike.

What Mamdani expresses cannot be understood merely as a personal failure to follow through on principles he espouses. His conciliation with the defenders of genocide is inevitable precisely because he operates within and on behalf of the Democratic Party, one of the two political parties of US imperialism. Mamdani and the DSA are not opponents of US imperialism. They support it while criticizing some of its most brutal expressions.

Likewise, on the topics of immigration enforcement and policing, Mamdani articulated at most mild criticisms while underscoring his defense of the capitalist state.

On the president's assault on immigrants and the Democrats' border policies, Mamdani said, "I don't believe that 'secure' and 'humane' are at odds. I don't believe that the only way to provide immigration enforcement is through ICE. I think oftentimes we are forced into these false choices." He did not call for the abolition of the ICE Gestapo.

He made a point of upholding "secure borders," a catchphrase for oppressing immigrant workers seeking escape from grinding poverty and brutal repression in countries ravaged by US imperialism. He does not support the right of workers to live and work in the country of their choice, with full democratic and citizenship rights.

Mamdani also repeated his defense of New York Police Department Commissioner and billionaire Jessica Tisch against criticism from the sections of the DSA, calling her "very successful." He went out of his way to praise the police, saying "I am lucky in that I'm protected by the best of the best in our NYPD."

The eruption of US imperialism abroad, the turn to fascism and dictatorship, the explosive growth of social inequality—these developments share a common source. American capitalism, having exhausted the conditions that sustained postwar prosperity and the reforms built upon it, is carrying out war and authoritarianism at home as the means of resolving its contradictions.

There is no objective basis for realizing within the framework of the capitalist state even the modest reforms Mamdani promotes. The fascistic oligarchy is not interested in conciliation. It has no intention of giving up a dime. Power must be wrested from it in struggle by the only social force capable of doing so, the working class.

The more the class struggle develops and the working class moves as a class, the more the bourgeois and upper-middle class character of the politics of Mamdani and the DSA will be exposed. Already there have been major struggles by workers in New York this year, including the nurses' strike and the strike by Long Island Rail Road workers. In both cases Mamdani worked with the trade union bureaucracy to end the strikes on the basis of sellout contracts.

The crisis confronting the working class, in New York City, across the United States and internationally demands a political response of a fundamentally different character from that of Mamdani: the independent mobilization of workers on a socialist and internationalist program, in opposition to the parties of capital, directed not at renovating the existing political and economic order, but replacing it.

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