Mamdani opposes $10,000 bonus for paraprofessional school aides

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New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani is opposing a $10,000 bonus for paraprofessional educational support staff in the city's public schools, reversing his campaign pledge to support the measure. This sets the stage for a potentially explosive confrontation between 200,000 educators and staff in the United Federation of Teachers (UFT), one of the most powerful sections of the working class in New York, and the self-described "socialist" mayor, a member of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA).

Mamdani's election last November reflected a profound and broad shift in the political outlook of workers and young people to the left. It expressed growing disgust with the existing economic and political system and increasing interest in a socialist alternative. That process of social radicalization continues, as demonstrated in recent electoral victories by DSA and DSA-backed candidates in Democratic primaries in New York, Washington D.C., Denver and other cities.

What is already being revealed in New York, however, is that the DSA, a faction of the Democratic Party, is not a vehicle for serious social reform, let alone socialism. It is, rather, an instrument for containing the mass opposition to war, inequality, dictatorship and poverty and blocking an independent movement of the working class by binding the growing opposition to the Democratic Party.

Public school paraprofessionals are among the lowest paid and most exploited sections of the working class in New York. According to the UFT, their starting pay in 2026 is $33,222, and their top pay, after 15 years, is $56,726. These are poverty wages do not cover basic expenses in the city, one of the most expensive in the country. In a July 18 interview with the *New York Times*, Mamdani acknowledged that "one in four are living in poverty" in New York, and added, "Right now in our city, to afford child care for a two-year-old, as a family you need to make $334,000."

Many paraprofessionals—classroom aides who work with special education students—take on multiple jobs to survive, and some report severe housing insecurity, including eviction risk and homelessness-related hardship. There are roughly 1,600 vacancies system-wide, a number that keeps growing because workers cannot afford to stay. The shortage of paraprofessionals has grown to its current figure from about 1,000 in February of 2025—a growth of 600 in just a year and a half.

"The $10,000 supplement for paraprofessionals is critically important," Mamdani said during his election campaign in October of last year, at the time that the legislation was being drafted. "I've supported it in the primary and I continue to support it today … we have an increasing number of vacancies of paraprofessional positions within New York City. … This is because we are paying people a wage they cannot afford to live in this city anymore."

But in the run-up and immediate aftermath of the City Council vote on the bill authorizing the bonus, Wall Street watchdog groups and the corporate media weighed in publicly to oppose the bonus and demand that Mamdani intervene against it.

On July 16, the City Council unanimously approved legislation providing the one-time $10,000 bonus, with an option to renew it if paraprofessional positions remained vacant. The bonus would not affect pay rates or pensions and would be taxable—a wholly inadequate response to the scourge of poverty wages.

Nevertheless, the financial oligarchy, which maintains a stranglehold on the city through its credit rating agencies and bond markets, waxed indignant. The Manhattan Institute, a free market think tank, denounced the bill in May as part of a pattern of "unfunded legislation" that has added "$6 billion in expenses to the city budget in the past five years" with "no new revenue."

City & State New York, widely read in government and business circles and published by Republican Tom Allon, whose son served as press agent to the previous mayor, Eric Adams, called it "yet another expensive recurring cost," estimating it at $244 million annually.

The Citizens Budget Commission, a watchdog group funded by the city's largest corporations and financial institutions, issued a formal statement on July 15 urging the City Council to reject the bill and called on the mayor to veto it if it passed. Legislating compensation outside the collective bargaining process, it warned, would "set a dangerous precedent with significant fiscal consequences."

The *New York Daily News* on July 17 published an editorial titled, "Council paraprofessionals bill breaks N.Y. law." The newspaper wrote: "To us (and likely to a fair judge) [the bonus]… is flat illegal… Mamdani will have to stand up for the law."

On July 16, the same day the Council passed the bonus bill, Mamdani issued a statement praising the paraprofessionals and then declaring his opposition because "the Council's passage of this legislation is in direct violation of the Taylor Law." This was supposedly because it violated the Taylor Law's collective bargaining provisions.

The unanimous City Council vote indicates that even if Mamdani vetoes the bonus bill, the Council will override his veto. It is therefore all but certain that the bill will be challenged in court, with Mandani's open or tacit support for the legal challenge.

Mamdani's invocation of the Taylor Law to justify blocking the bonus is particularly provocative. This vicious anti-labor law was enacted in 1967, following the powerful 1966 New York transit workers' strike. It bans public sector strikes and imposes savage penalties not only on unions that violate its no-strike provisions, but also on rank-and-file workers, including the docking of two days' pay for every day on strike. It was first used against the UFT and striking teachers, just months after its passage, including the jailing of then-UFT President Albert Shanker.

UFT President Michael Mulgrew said that if Mamdani blocked the bonus bill, it would be "all-out war." This, no doubt, has more the character of a warning than a threat. Mulgrew is a hardened bureaucrat who has repeatedly sold out the teachers.

In 2023, he collaborated with the Eric Adams administration to ram through a five-year below-inflation UFT contract that kept paraprofessionals on poverty wages. He then attempted to force 250,000 retirees onto a privatized Medicare Advantage plan—a scheme abandoned only after years of protests and lawsuits. Months later, in 2025, without a membership vote, he approved a sweeping reorganization of workers' health insurance into a United Healthcare-administered network, saving the city over $1 billion at the workers' expense.

According to his 2025 LM-2 disclosure filing with the Labor Department, his total compensation last year as UFT president was $388,994, nearly seven times the salary of the highest paid paraprofessionals.

But Mulgrew is well aware of the explosive anger in the rank and file and dreads an eruption of struggle that he will be hard pressed to contain.

Mamdani's opposition to the paraprofessionals' bonus is only the latest, though perhaps the most flagrant, in a growing list of accommodations to the corporate oligarchy at the expense of the working class since he assumed the mayoralty in January. Faced with a $5.4 billion budget deficit, he has systematically implemented austerity measures to satisfy the demands of Wall Street and the bond markets.

Virtually all of Mamdani's reform proposals—free bus service, universal child care, a tax increase on millionaires, disbanding the police department's Strategic Response Group—have been dropped. Meanwhile, Mamdani has met twice with the fascist Trump and given a friendly interview to the *New York Times*, the de facto organ of the Democratic Party establishment, in which he defends the "right" of the banks and corporations to make a profit and praises their supposed loyalty to New York.

The issue here is not the hypocrisy of a supposed "socialist" politician but a fundamental conflict of class interests. The entire program and perspective of Mamdani and the DSA, based on the false conception that socialism is capitalism with the addition of a few social reforms, and that the Democratic Party—a party of Wall Street and imperialist war—can be turned into a "progressive" party that represents working people, is refuted by the reality of capitalist rule and its instrument, the capitalist state. The DSA's program reflects the interests not of the working class but of affluent layers of the middle class that seek a more favorable distribution of the wealth extracted from the labor of the workers.

The intensifying crisis of capitalism—expressed with explosive force in the world center of finance capital, where billionaires live in their gilded towers on the one side and a powerful working class fights to survive on the other—is rapidly exposing the "socialist" pretensions of the pseudo-left promoters of the Democratic Party and leading to a massive eruption of the class struggle. This process must take the form of an independent and conscious struggle for working class power and the expropriation of the capitalists—the only means of defending workers' democratic and social rights.