Mamdani goes to court to block $10,000 bonus for NYC paraprofessional school aides

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On Wednesday, August 19, New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani filed a lawsuit to block the implementation of a bill passed last month by the City Council that authorizes a $10,000 bonus for paraprofessional school aides. Mamdani, a Democrat and member of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), filed the suit the same day the bill became law.

Under the law's provisions, the bonus is to be paid to paraprofessionals in disbursements over the course of the next year, beginning in January 2027. The one-time bonus will not be rolled into the workers' salary or go toward their pensions, and it will be taxable. Inadequate as this is, the bonus would nevertheless provide a measure of relief to some of the most poorly paid and highly exploited workers in the city.

Paraprofessionals play a critical role in the public school system. Their duties include assisting high-needs special education students.

Paraprofessionals' starting annual wage is $33,200, topping out at a mere $56,726 after a minimum of 15 years of service. In a city whose median monthly rent is $3,707—or $44,484 annually—their pay does not cover even the most basic living costs. The vast majority of these workers take on second jobs to survive and most live with relatives and/or roommates. They often face severe housing instability, including the risk of eviction. Some have reported relying on the city's homeless shelters. They typically live and work in the most economically depressed areas of the city.

As of February 2025 there were 2,500 paraprofessionals employed by the New York City Department of Education. There were 1,044 vacancies. According to a report from the United Federation of Teachers, as of July the number of vacancies had risen to 1,600, as workers left in search of other work.

The miserable wages paid to paraprofessionals epitomize the explosive social polarization in the center of US and global finance. In a July 18 interview with the *New York Times*, Mamdani acknowledged that "one in four are living in poverty" in New York. This is in a metropolis with 146 billionaires, the highest number of any city in the world.

In moving to block the paraprofessionals' bonus, Mamdani is siding with Wall Street and the billionaires who control the city's finances. Last month, Mamdani announced his opposition to the measure, passed unanimously by the City Council on July 16. This marked a complete reversal of the stance he took during his election campaign, when he pledged his support for the proposed bonus.

But on the eve of the City Council vote, several corporate watchdog groups and think tanks, including the Citizen's Budget Commission (CBC) and the Manhattan Institute, condemned the proposal, calling it fiscally irresponsible. The CBC argued that the law set "a dangerous precedent" of interfering with employee compensation outside the "collective bargaining" process and in violation of the state Taylor Law. That law professes to protect collective bargaining while banning public employee strikes.

The Taylor Law is a vicious anti-labor statute that was used to break strikes and jail union leaders in the 1960s. It was enacted in 1967 following the 1966 transit workers' strike and first used against a 1967 strike by teachers in the United Federation of Teachers (UFT). Under the provisions of the law, then-UFT President Albert Shanker was jailed and teachers were docked two days' pay for every day on strike.

The law has since been used to suppress the class struggle and fully integrate the trade union bureaucracy into the state apparatus and the corporate elite. The so-called "collective bargaining" it promotes is a euphemism for imposing one contract betrayal after another on the

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basis of “pattern bargaining,” by which the real wages of city workers have been lowered, their benefits slashed and working conditions gutted.

In line with the spokesmen for Wall Street, Mamdani has invoked the Taylor Law to declare the bonus for paraprofessionals illegal. With unlimited cynicism, he has sought to portray his opposition to the paraprofessionals’ bonus and defense of the Taylor Law as a defense of the workers’ interests.

On Wednesday, a Mamdani spokesperson published a statement on the lawsuit against the bonus that turned reality on its head. It declared:

> Working people and the labor movement are under attack across the country, and the Mamdani Administration will not stand by while New Yorkers lose the rights they fought for generations to win. Collective bargaining is how working people make their voices heard and win the wages, benefits and protections they deserve...
>
> The City is filing a lawsuit to protect the right of every union to negotiate on behalf of its members, to fight for the workplace they deserve and ensure that workers—not politicians—determine their own futures.

Writing the same day in support of Mamdani’s law suit, the *New York Times* revealed the real concerns that motivated it. It noted that “state and city labor laws had been put in place to stop the chaos that typified collective bargaining in the 1960s, when there were strikes by teachers, social service workers and sanitation workers.”

The *Times* cited the warnings of Robert W. Linn, former commissioner of the New York City Office of Labor Relations and an advisor to the Mamdani administration:

> There are almost 150 bargaining units in New York City... If you don’t have a rigorous collective bargaining approach, then parties are going to be running to the City Council, to the State Legislature, they’re going to be engaging in work stoppages. I think there is the potential to return to that chaos.

Mamdani’s lawsuit foreshadows a massive conflict between his supposedly “democratic socialist” administration and the powerful New York City working class, which includes hundreds of thousands of public school educators. Last month, UFT President Michael Mulgrew said an attempt by the mayor to block the bonus would mean “all out war.”

The last thing Mulgrew intends is war against the mayor and Wall Street. He has imposed one sellout contract after another, and, with an annual compensation of $388,994, he pulls in nearly seven times the salary of the highest paid paraprofessionals. But he is well aware of the explosive anger building up in the rank and file and fears an eruption that he will not be able to control.

Mamdani’s intervention against the paraprofessionals is the latest in a series of austerity measures aimed at closing a budget deficit of $5.4 billion on the backs of the working class. In collaboration with Mulgrew and the New York State legislature, Mamdani intervened to delay for two years the implementation of a state-mandated reduction in school class sizes. This allowed the city to leave open some 5,000 teacher vacancies and save $508 million, the biggest single line item in its budget-balancing program.

Mamdani’s election reflected a broad political radicalization of workers, young people and sections of the middle class who have been hammered by inflation, social cuts and the impact of escalating war abroad. Repulsed by the genocide in Gaza, Trump’s savage attacks on immigrants and democratic rights, and the cowardice and complicity of the Democratic Party, these layers are increasingly looking for a socialist alternative to capitalism.

While the DSA and its candidates are the initial beneficiaries of this shift to the left, the DSA is not a socialist party. It is a faction of the Democratic Party, one of the two parties of the American financial oligarchy. As the trajectory of Mamdani’s administration has already revealed just seven months into his mayoralty, the DSA is not a vehicle for serious social reform, let alone socialism. It is an instrument for channeling the mass opposition to war, inequality, dictatorship and poverty behind the Democratic Party and blocking an independent movement of the working class for socialism.

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