

DSA intervenes to smother opposition as pro-Palestinian protesters denounce “traitor Mamdani”

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On Wednesday, hundreds of pro-Palestinian demonstrators disrupted New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani’s participation in a vigil on the third anniversary of October 7, 2023, when Israel launched its genocidal war on Gaza. The protesters denounced the mayor, a member of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), for his growing accommodation to Zionism.

The vigil was organized by the liberal Zionist group Israelis for Peace to mark the Hamas-led attack on Israel that was used by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu as the *casus belli* to carry out the ongoing campaign of mass murder that has killed close to 74,000 Palestinians, mostly civilians. The DSA mayor chose to attend the Zionist vigil rather than events called by pro-Palestinian groups.

Mamdani was met by counter-protesters who chanted “traitor” and branded him an “opportunist,” “coward” and “sellout.” Several pro-Palestinian youth groups organized the counter-protest, including the Young Democratic Socialists of America (YDSA). However, the YDSA’s parent organization quickly intervened to shut down its participation.

Wednesday’s political debacle for Mamdani is part of growing opposition among those who were attracted to the DSAer and voted for him due to his rhetoric in defense of Palestinians and, more broadly, his posture as an opponent of Trump and the Democratic Party establishment. Since taking office last January amid growing social anger and political radicalization, Mamdani has continually reassured the ruling class and the political establishment that he will protect their core interests.

This process accelerated in recent weeks, during which Mamdani backtracked on a promise to arrest indicted war criminal Netanyahu while he was in New York City and instead allowed the New York Police Department

(NYPD) to arrest scores of anti-Netanyahu protesters; held a meeting and press conference with Donald Trump at Gracie Mansion; and announced a strategy against antisemitism that funnels millions in public funds to Zionists groups.

Mamdani’s rightward shift is accompanied by an intensifying effort on the part of the New York City DSA to suppress dissent, including within its own organization. When the New York City YDSA and four student chapters (Hunter College, Lehman College, the City College of New York, and The New School) posted notices on social media endorsing the planned anti-Mamdani protest on October 7, the parent body responded swiftly.

A statement of the NYC-YDSA Steering Committee explained:

[T]he NYC-DSA Steering Committee requested that the post [promoting the protest] be removed and the endorsement revoked, even though NYC-YDSA Steering had voted unanimously to sign on. Along with objecting to a protest critical of Mayor Mamdani, a chapter elected official, the NYC-DSA Steering Committee took issue with the use of an inverted red triangle and Arabic text in the post, which they described as “pro-Hamas dog whistles.” YDSA Steering members were told explicitly that chapter leadership was considering removing funding from NYC-YDSA or stripping our organization of representation on NYC-DSA Steering as repercussions.

The YDSA Steering Committee capitulated and agreed

to take down the social media posts promoting the protest. Three of the four student chapters also submitted, with the New School being the only exception. However, Youth Steering Committee members continued to promote the protest individually, prompting further attempts by the NYC-DSA leadership to shut them down and shield the Democratic Party mayor from criticism. Such, apparently, is the “democracy” practiced by the Democratic Socialists of America.

The turmoil in the NYC-DSA reflects an increasingly impossible political task that Mamdani and the DSA face: managing the capitalist state on behalf of a ruling class in deepening crisis while simultaneously trying to placate the aspirations of radicalizing workers and youth. This tenuous balancing act was on display on October 7, and not only during the vigil. Earlier in the day, Mamdani issued a statement condemning what he called “horrific war crimes of October 7” by Hamas while simultaneously denouncing “the Israeli government’s devastating, ongoing genocide.”

Mamdani, along with the NYC-DSA and its “pro-Hamas dog whistle” charge, thoroughly accepts the narrative that equates the violence of the oppressor with the violence of the oppressed. It is a presentation that omits the conditions of life that exist for millions of Palestinians, including the open-air prison of Gaza, to say nothing of the 80-year history of Zionist dispossession and oppression.

Leon Trotsky took up this class outlook in *Their Morals and Ours*, writing:

A slave-owner who through cunning and violence shackles a slave in chains, and a slave who through cunning or violence breaks the chains—let not the contemptible eunuchs tell us that they are equals before a court of morality!

Unconditional defense of the right of the Palestinian people to defend themselves against Zionist and imperialist oppression does not imply political support for the bourgeois nationalist perspective of Hamas. Securing the national rights of the Palestinian masses requires the unification of the working class throughout the Middle East in the struggle to overthrow imperialism and establish the United Socialist States of the Middle East.

Yet even a moral equal sign is too much for the modern-day political establishment, which has denounced

Mamdani’s October 7 statement in hysterical terms. Democratic Representative from New York Dan Goldman termed it “reprehensible.” Fellow Democrat from Florida, Debbie Wasserman Schultz, who apparently didn’t bother to read the statement, absurdly accused Mamdani of “refusing to even condemn Hamas.” The *New York Times* let arch-Zionist columnist Bret Stephens vent his spleen, calling Mamdani’s references to Gaza genocide a “moral obscenity.”

The Democratic Party, of which Mamdani and the DSA constitute a faction, is directly complicit in the genocide, which was initiated by Israel with the full support of Joe Biden. In New York, the Democratic Party played a central role in attacking and victimizing pro-Palestinian protesters. Some of those who led the repression at Columbia and other campuses, including Police Commissioner Jessica Tisch and NYPD intelligence chief Rebecca Weiner, retain positions in the Mamdani administration.

New York City DSA’s suppression of criticism of Mamdani poses the need for a political reckoning. As Joseph Kishore explained in his report to the Ninth Congress of the Socialist Equality Party, the DSA descends from Max Shachtman, who broke with Trotskyism in 1940 over the defense of the Soviet Union. The logic of that capitulation to imperialism led to outright anti-communism, support for American imperialism in Korea and Vietnam, and integration into the right-wing apparatus of the AFL-CIO. Shachtman’s protégé Michael Harrington continued this anti-communist tradition by founding the DSA’s predecessor, whose program of “realignment” confined “socialists” to working within the Democratic Party as “the left wing of the possible.”

The DSA, Kishore wrote, is “the organizational fusion of... the Shachtmanite renunciation of the defense of the workers state and its adaptation to imperialism, and the New Left renunciation of the working class itself.”

The DSA is not a working class organization, but a Democratic Party faction resting on the affluent professional middle class. This is the politics Mamdani now embodies in office. His capitulations are not betrayals of the DSA’s program, but its fulfillment.



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