

Mamdani and the Taylor Law: New York's DSA mayor embraces Wall Street anti-strike weapon

Sandy English, Barry Grey
25 October 2026

New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani, a member of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), is waging a legal campaign to block a one-time “workforce stabilization payment” of up to \$10,000 for the city’s 25,000 public school paraprofessionals. These educators, who work under exhausting conditions supporting students with disabilities, have starting salaries of just \$32,000 a year. The bonus is woefully inadequate, but it would provide a measure of relief to school workers who live under the shadow of homelessness.

The one-time payment was passed by the New York City Council in August after being promoted by United Federation of Teachers (UFT) President Michael Mulgrew, who hailed the check as a measure of “respect” after years of colluding with the city to suppress the wages of paraprofessionals and educators in general.

In his mayoral election campaign, Mamdani claimed to support a bonus for the paraprofessionals. But in the run-up to the City Council’s passage of the bonus bill, Wall Street organs such as the Manhattan Institute and the Citizens Budget Commission denounced it as a budget buster and demanded that Mamdani oppose it. The mayor responded by taking the City Council to court to prevent the money from being paid.

Mamdani’s opposition to a bonus for impoverished workers clearly exposes the class position of his administration—and that of the DSA. Even more significant is the basis on which he is justifying it. The DSA mayor claims the City Council bill authorizing the bonus for paras is illegal because it violates New York State’s Public Employees’ Fair Employment Act—better known as the Taylor Law. The Taylor Law, he argues, stipulates that public employee wage increases must be the result of contracts negotiated with the city unions.

In opposing the paras’ bonus, Mamdani has stepped forward as a champion of the Taylor Law, presenting it as a progressive measure that protects “collective bargaining.” In

fact, it is a vicious anti-strike statute that has been used repeatedly to break strikes and impose fines on striking workers.

Not too many years ago, any politician praising the Taylor Law as “pro-worker” would have been identified as a liar and enemy of the working class.

The law was enacted in 1967 in response to a transit strike that began on January 1, 1966, and paralyzed New York City for 12 days. Transport Workers Union International President Mike Quill was jailed for defying an anti-strike court injunction, suffered a heart attack while in prison and died two weeks after the end of the strike. The attack on the transit workers and subsequent passage of the Taylor Law were carried out under Governor Nelson Rockefeller and Mayor John Lindsay, both liberal Republicans.

The Taylor Law was forged as a weapon of capitalist rule. The statute established punitive sanctions: docking striking workers two days’ pay for every day on strike, imposing crippling fines on unions, revoking the automatic dues checkoff, and empowering judges to throw union leaders into prison. The state wielded the law to jail UFT President Albert Shanker during the teachers strikes of 1967 and 1968 and again in 1968 to jail sanitation union leaders who called a strike.

The law was designed to combine brutal state repression against strikes with inducements to the union officialdom, including the formal granting of exclusive union recognition and the automatic deduction of union dues from workers’ wages. Over the ensuing decades, this arrangement became the framework for transforming the unions into corporatist extensions of the capitalist state and big business.

A turning point was the near-bankruptcy of New York City in 1975. The municipal unions agreed to invest their pension funds in city bonds and backed the layoff of tens of thousands of city workers, the freezing of wages, an end to free tuition at the City University of New York, and cuts in city services. The union bureaucracy secured its bloated

salaries and institutional privileges by policing its membership and enforcing austerity. This established the framework of so-called “collective bargaining” under the Taylor Law that is promoted today by Mamdani.

In 1980, driven by rampant inflation, 33,000 New York City transit workers in TWU Local 100 struck for 11 days. New York Governor Hugh Carey and New York Mayor Ed Koch, both Democrats, applied the Taylor Law with full force, levying more than \$1 million in fines against the union and docking workers 22 days pay under the two-for-one penalty. Without strike pay or amnesty, the meager wage settlement failed to recoup docked earnings.

The only political tendency that waged an intransigent struggle against the union bureaucracy’s conspiracy against the rank-and-file was the Trotskyist movement. In the late 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, the Workers League—the predecessor of the Socialist Equality Party—fought against the Taylor Law and warned that the union bureaucracy was binding the working class hand and foot to the capitalist state.

Central in this fight was the role of Ed Winn, a New York City transit worker and Workers League member who ran socialist and internationalist campaigns for president of the United States in 1984 and 1988. Winn and the Workers League mobilized workers against the Taylor Law and the betrayals of the union bureaucrats, fighting for the political independence of the working class from the Democratic Party through the demand for a labor party based on the unions and pledged to socialist policies. The Workers League dropped the demand for a labor party in the early 1990s based on its determination that the unions had become transformed into corporatist extensions of the corporations and the capitalist state. The Workers League transformed itself into the Socialist Equality Party in 1995.

Winn, who had been elected to Local 100’s Executive Board in 1979, was the sole board member to vote against ending the 1980 walkout.

In 1982, the state legislature passed the Triborough Amendment to the Taylor Law. The amendment mandates that all terms of an expired public-sector contract remain in effect until a new agreement is reached. This provision enables union officials to stretch negotiations out for years, defusing rank-and-file pressure and blocking strike action.

There were no public worker strikes in New York City from 1980 until December 2005, when the TWU, under Local 100 President Roger Toussaint, struck for three days. The Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA), facing massive debt service obligations, demanded that the pension threshold for new-hires be raised from age 55 to 62.

Under Taylor Law provisions, the courts levied \$2.5 million in fines, stripped the automatic dues checkoff, and

jailed Toussaint. The union leadership ended the strike after 60 hours, before members could even review the contract terms. When workers initially voted down the agreement, it was imposed by means of binding Taylor Law arbitration.

In 2008, Toussaint signed a formal no-strike pledge with the MTA to regain dues collection privileges. No major public sector union in the city has violated the Taylor Law in the 21 years since.

The city was only faced with public-sector workers’ mass action—organized entirely separately from the unions—when K-12 school educators threatened a sick-out (illegal under the Taylor Law) over the spread of COVID in the schools in March 2020. Democratic Governor Andrew Cuomo and Democratic Mayor Bill de Blasio quickly shut down the entire school system to avoid the development of a mass working class movement against the government’s handling of the public health emergency.

Mamdani’s current legal offensive against the paraprofessionals and defense of the Taylor Law take place amid a broader crisis for New York City workers. Across the five boroughs, real wages are falling, the cost of living has become unsustainable, and tens of thousands of public employees—including New York City transit workers, who have been working for five months without a new contract—are facing declining living conditions. Rather than breaking the fiscal stranglehold of Wall Street, Mamdani is enforcing the capitalist state’s legal machinery against public workers.

Mamdani’s invocation of the Taylor Law against the paraprofessionals—along with his meetings with Trump, his support of Jessca Tisch as head of the New York Police Department (NYPD), the NYPD collaboration with ICE and its arrests of anti-ICE and anti-genocide protesters—gives the lie to the claim promoted by the DSA that the capitalist state can be “pressured” into defending workers. Mamdani is not a defender of the working class. He is an executive of the capitalist state carrying out the orders of finance capital.



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact