“It feels like a bait and switch”: New York City youth voice growing opposition to Mamdani’s broken promises

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Growing disillusionment with New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani among sections of young people is exposing the widening gulf between his campaign promises of “affordability” and social reform and his administration’s pro-corporate policies. Their criticisms raise broader questions about the Democratic Party and the political role of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), whose essential function is to channel young people’s radicalization back behind the Democratic Party.

Mamdani, a DSA member who campaigned as a socialist within the Democratic Party, was elected mayor of the city that is the center of American finance capital and home to one of the world’s greatest concentrations of billionaires. His election was hailed by the DSA and other pseudo-left organizations as a historic advance for socialism, while raising expectations among young people and workers confronting soaring living costs and deepening social inequality.

But Mamdani’s retention of billionaire heiress Jessica Tisch as NYPD commissioner, his walking back of key campaign pledges and political alliance with the Trump administration have exposed his socialist pretensions and the anti-working class character of his administration.

In interviews with the *World Socialist Web Site*, high school and college students expressed anger over these developments, with several drawing broader conclusions about Mamdani’s efforts to restore the Democratic Party’s credibility among young people.

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One student at The New School described the transportation costs impacting young people struggling to find employment. “One of the bigger reasons that I voted for Mamdani was on the fast and free bus policy,” he said. “I take a lot of public transit for job interviews and I feel like it shouldn’t cost me money to apply for jobs.”

Public transportation, he explained, is essential not only for employment but also for access to food pantries and other critical services. Requiring people to pay increasingly burdensome fares simply to participate in economic and social life was unreasonable.

The student contrasted Mamdani’s promises with the increasingly aggressive enforcement of transit fares. “If anything, MTA’s Eagle Team response is getting more brutal and more violent,” he said, pointing to the expansion of surveillance throughout the transit system.

A design and technology student, he also expressed concern about the collection of passengers’ travel data through the OMNY fare payment system, manufactured by Cubic Transportation Systems.

“They collect everywhere that you tap your card,” he explained. “So what does that say about privacy, when just people are trying to ride transit, now we’re losing like privacy rights over where we are, where we’re going?”

Like millions of young people, he faces an increasingly difficult labor market, mounting economic insecurity, and the impact of artificial intelligence on employment. “People want to work. Gen Z wants to work. Nobody wants to hire,” he said.

Asked what conclusions he had drawn from Mamdani’s record, the student responded, “It does not feel fair that, you know, he can make all of these promises and then not keep them. It feels like a bait-and-switch. You know, I’ve had the rug pulled out from under me.”

Another high school student expressed similar anger over the ongoing affordability crisis, starting with the immediate difficulty of buying lunch.

“We’re trying to buy lunch right now, and we can’t because the bourgeoisie is like, oh, I’m going to sell you lunch for $25,” she said. “I think the people who make the food, the people who are in the McDonald’s, the people who are in the Taco Bell, should control how much it costs. They should own the means of production.”

Turning to Mamdani, the student dismissed the suggestion that his election represented a fundamental change in the conditions facing working people. “He’s mayor [and] I still can’t afford lunch,” she remarked, pointing out that even the price of food from New York City’s halal carts remained beyond the reach of many young people.

The students’ criticisms extended to Mamdani’s retention of Police Commissioner Jessica Tisch and the administration’s announced reorganization of the NYPD’s Strategic Response Group (SRG), notorious for its repression of demonstrations.

Mamdani campaigned on a promise to disband the SRG, but the

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restructuring preserves its protest-policing functions under a new name, presented as a "free speech" cover. "It's not a disbanding, it's a rebranding," the college student said.

A law student discussed the enthusiasm Mamdani's campaign generated among young people and then drew similar conclusions.

"It seems to be a farce because it seems like he's rolling in these features of the SRG into another renamed program," the student said. "That's often what Democrats do. Democrats will just rename something and act like they've actually changed the material conditions."

She explained that Mamdani's campaign had initially attracted widespread support from young people disillusioned with establishment Democratic politicians. He "really invigorated the youth because after so many disappointments with Democratic politicians on the national level and the local level, they were finally brought out to campaign for him and knock on doors," the student said. "He's just ended up being like a pretty face that has elevated the Democratic brand without actually bringing any material benefits to New Yorkers yet."

The student remained uncertain whether Mamdani would ultimately fulfill his pledges on free buses and city-owned grocery stores or prove to be another politician whose populist rhetoric bore little relationship to his actions.

The high school student was more categorical, arguing that Mamdani's principal political function was to make the Democratic Party attractive to a younger generation.

"I don't think he's this revolutionary that everyone is making [him] out to be," the student said. Responding to Mamdani's accommodation to Trump, his retention of Tisch, and his administration's treatment of Haitian immigrant workers who lost their work authorization following changes to federal immigration policy, the student responded, "I don't think he actually [cares] about the working class. I think it's more to just make the Democrats seem more appealing to a younger generation."

The student connected this assessment to a broader rejection of the two-party system. "One may frame themselves as the more liberal and more towards the people as a party, but they're both funding Israel," the student said. "They're both funding this capitalist system. It just keeps going. It keeps going no matter who you vote for."

The law student also criticized the Democrats' role in supporting American imperialism, particularly their attacks on Trump for failing to win the war against Iran.

"Every single Democrat is coming out and saying that they need to bomb Iran more. They need to flatten the place. So they are criticizing Trump from the right," she said. "There is no Democrat coming out with a fully anti-imperialist, an anti-interventionist attitude."

The interviews also revealed growing awareness of the international character of the social crisis. Discussing protests by young people in Europe, the student pointed to declining living standards, cuts to health care, and the failure of governments to respond to the needs of the population.

"It's just like the gasps of people who have not been heard for decades," the law student said. The New School student who voted for Mamdani was optimistic about the prospects for collective struggle, emphasizing the economic pressures confronting his generation. Those who grew up in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis now face cuts to higher education and an increasingly precarious job market as corporations use artificial intelligence to slash employment.

"I think we, more than any other generation, are understanding the struggles of working in this country," he said. He called on young people to overcome the notion that protest and disruption belonged only to the past. "We need to get loud. We need to make noise. We need to disrupt things."

The high school student went further, explicitly supporting the development of a united working-class movement against capitalism. Asked about young people turning to transit, Amazon and UPS workers to build such a movement, she responded: "I'm with you. I think that's a really good idea. We need everyone to unite."

She rejected efforts to divide workers along racial, national and generational lines, identifying such divisions as a way to preserve capitalist rule. Asked whether class was the central issue, the student replied: "Yeah, it is. I think everything honestly just comes down to that at a certain point."

These interviews indicate the political tensions developing beneath the surface of Mamdani's administration. The young people who were promised relief from soaring living costs, economic insecurity and police repression are confronting the continuation of the very conditions that his campaign pledged to change.

Mamdani's capitulations are not a betrayal of the DSA's program but its fulfillment. The DSA is not a working class organization but a faction of the Democratic Party representing the interests of the affluent layer of the middle class, whose function is to provide a left cover for the operations of the capitalist state.

The DSA and the pseudo-left exist precisely to channel this opposition back into the Democratic Party. The task facing young people is to break with them, turn to the working class, and build an independent socialist party to fight capitalism and imperialist war.



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