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USA

# **Mamdani's Victory: what way forward to build the US socialist movement?**

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**Zohran Mamdani's victory in the New York city mayoral elections has energized the left, enraged Trump (who seems to be trying to coopt him after denouncing him as a "communist" and threatening to cut off federal funding to New York), and stimulated debate on the left regarding independent political action and the use of the Democratic party ballot line.**

Mamdani won on a program of radical reforms with an anticapitalist dynamic that spoke directly to issues of affordable housing, transportation, and childcare, and openly identified as a Democratic Socialist, Muslim, pro-Palestinian immigrant. He also defends immigrants at a time of ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) terror raids and declining public support for Trump. There was tremendous enthusiasm in working class and immigrant neighborhoods for the campaign. Some 104,000 volunteers mobilized to campaign door-to-door. This includes 11,000 members of New York City Democratic Socialists of America (NYC-DSA) which endorsed his candidacy. The mass grassroots character of the campaign and its pro-immigrant character made it part of the broad anti-Trump movement that has seen three huge nationwide anti-Trump mobilizations over the last few months. The latest demonstration on October 18 brought out seven million people.

Mamdani ran as the Democratic party candidate after having defeated two discredited politicians in the DP primary. Former governor Andrew Cuomo, who was forced out of office following revelations of sexual harassment, ran as an independent in the general election. Current mayor Eric Adams who faced corruption charges, was finally politically bailed out by Trump. In the general election he faced Cuomo and Republican Curtis Sliwa, the well-known vigilante who ran on a platform of hiring 7,000 more cops. Mamdani's victory was part of a wave of Democratic victories throughout the country, including several DSA members at a time when Trump is sagging in the polls.

While some have presented Mamdani's victory as an upset, he was favored by all pre-election polls. The upset occurred when he won the DP primary. While Mamdani faced opposition from many Democratic party power holders (Democratic Senate leader Chuck Schumer and former president Barack Obama did not support him), he also benefitted from endorsements from some Democrats including centrist New York governor Kathy Hochul.

Mamdani's campaign, victory, and prospects for implementing his program face a fundamental contradiction. He won the election on the basis of his progressive program. Having been elected on the DP ticket with DP resources and some endorsements, he will face huge pressure from within the DP to temper his program. Governor Kathy Hochul has already indicated that she would oppose the sharp increases in taxes for the super-rich that Mamdani correctly argues would be necessary to implement his program.

The considerable opposition that will come from the DP establishment, real estate interests, and the billionaires who Mamdani intends to tax to fund his program, points to the necessity of a mass movement to push for implementation of that program, and the grassroots dimension of the campaign points to the potential to build such a mass movement. Mamdani, however, has surrounded himself with advisors from nongovernment organizations (NGOs) and seems to be building a top-down organization, rather than a democratically controlled movement to realize his program.

# **Independent political action for the working class and its allies**

Mamdani's election will invigorate the debate in DSA and throughout the US left on the efficacy of using the DP ballot line to win office, the so-called "dirty break" as opposed to the "clean break" of running independent socialist campaigns outside of the Democratic party.

Proponents of the clean break argue that the Democratic party is a party of the 1% that is controlled by billionaires and cannot be transformed into a vehicle for socialism. They oppose running or endorsing candidates as Democrats and call for independent socialist campaigns where possible. Most supporters of the dirty break agree that the DP is unreformable and consider use of the Democratic ballot line as a tactic. While DSA and other socialist candidates have won elections like Mamdani has, it is difficult to see how an independent socialist organization can be built with such an orientation.

The political situation in the US today including the growing anti-Trump resistance seen in at least three massive "No Kings!" demonstrations since April 5, polls showing Trump's loss of support among his own base, and successful campaigns like Mamdani's, point to the real possibility of building an independent mass socialist movement in the US. But the energy will be absorbed and wasted if socialists run as Democrats.

There is evidence that independent socialist campaigns rooted in the mass movement can win elections today. Last April Alex Brower, co-chair of Milwaukee DSA, won a by-election for a city council seat with endorsements from DSA, the Green Party, and the revolutionary socialist organization Solidarity. He ran an energetic campaign as an open socialist on a radical program including municipalizing the local power company, and support from a small army of DSA and other volunteers to decisively beat a liberal, progressive Democrat. Although this was a non-partisan election, Brower's victory as an open socialist and the mass democratic character of his campaign indicate that successful mass socialist campaigns can be waged and won. Brower also founded and leads a mass organization called Power to the People that is based in DSA that aims to municipalize the local power company. Although Milwaukee is not New York, and a city council seat is not the mayoralty the combination of mass and electoral anti-capitalist socialist politics seen in the Brower campaign represents the way forward for US socialism.

In their own ways, the Mamdani and Brower campaigns and the growing anti-Trump, anti-ICE movements point to the potential for socialists to attract enthusiastic working class and oppressed community support to contest and win elections and build a vigorous mass socialist movement that can chart a socialist alternative to Trump's neo-fascism and the Democrat's neo-liberalism.

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