



THE MAMDANI PHENOMENON



Perhaps Zohran Mamdani's election to the office of Mayor of New York City tells us more about his constituencies than about the man himself.

An article on 5 November states that "Mamdani created a coalition of minorities – led by pro-Palestinian Muslims, haters of the Zionist bloody monster that also included African-Americans, Latin Americans, and angry young people . . . who support reforms for the benefit of the masses."

According to the article, the two main planks which secured for Mamdani his victory were the gap in the standard of living between rich and poor, and, secondly, the genocide being perpetrated by Israel in Gaza. New York is home to some 2 million Jews, the largest Jewish population of any metropolitan area in the world other than Tel Aviv.

Mamdani had "unreservedly identified with the BDS movement, defined the war in Gaza as genocide and declared that he would lead to Netanyahu's arrest upon landing in New York. In his view, Israel does not have a legitimate right to exist as the state of the Jewish people." With 38% of voters declaring that the candidates' attitude toward Israel was a central issue in their choice, it could be argued that his victory was more a defeat for Zionism!

Mamdani has identified himself as a "democratic socialist." However, his platform was not an anti-capitalist platform. It was about securing reforms for the improvement of peoples' day-to-

day living standards – within the structures of capitalism in one of the bastions of world capitalism. How likely is he to succeed?

A number of commentators have written him off as just the latest version of Bernie Sanders – at best a voice in the wilderness, at worst a fraud designed to give the Democratic Party a veneer of progressiveness, one who says all the right things but who has neither the power nor the actual will to engage in the kind of struggle necessary to bring about and defend the reforms he touts.

There is also the view that reforms are temporary – i.e. reversible – unless backed up by "people's power."

Late socialist thinker, Ellen Meiksins Wood, distinguished between transformational and non-transformational forms of struggle.

Non-transformational struggle in her view includes the (defensive) struggle "for social provision." She says

Capitalism will always and necessarily, have socially destructive effects, and people will always have to struggle to find ways of limiting or compensating for them. The scope of those protective struggles also has to encompass resistance to a very wide range of oppressions apart from class exploitation—racial, sexual, national oppressions, and so on—which intersect with and are reinforced by capitalist exploitation,

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and, of course, the ecological destruction inevitably caused by this accumulation-driven system must also come within their reach. In fact, as capitalism becomes truly global, as it draws the whole world, all human practices and the natural environment, into the orbit of its systemic contradictions, as it reproduces on a global scale its original logic of dispossession and polarization, the need for struggles of this protective kind is increasing all the time.

A second form of non-transformational struggle she identifies is that of “class struggle over the terms and conditions of work—indispensable under capitalism in all its forms.”

These forms of struggle, she concludes, “makes sense within the constraints of capitalism.”

Thus, if one positions Mamdani within Meiksins Wood’s framework, then one will accept the “legitimacy” of his non-revolutionary approach.

Perhaps what is really at issue is not so much that he will be engaging in non-transformational struggle (chiefly, Meiksins Wood’s “defensive” form) but the likelihood of his success – particularly if it means “taking on” the capitalists, rather than appeasing them to try to win concessions from them.

At the outset, one has to concede that he faces a formidable task, given the entrenched, structural nature of capitalism in America and New York. How far can the power of his office take him in realising his list of reforms before he comes up against the (inevitable) resistance of the capitalist power structure? At what point might it become necessary for mass action to intervene in his support?

We are reminded of Vivek Chibber’s sage insight:

... success at the ballot box will not be sufficient to ensure the rulers adopt a worker-friendly agenda “... unless the electoral successes (achieved by the working class) are used to deepen and expand the base in workplaces and neighbourhoods, state by state, region by region. Without the organizational strength of the labour movement, electoral success will not yield the success the Left seeks.”

(Vivek Chibber: *Confronting Capital: How the World Works and How to Change it*)

And so, Mamdani will be reliant on his “coalition of minorities” to stand firmly behind him, and to join him in struggle, rather than to passively “sit back” and leave it all to him. Not only is there a strong likelihood of failure, but also of back-tracking. Already, at this early stage, he has shown disturbing signs of regression, for example, as was observed in an article in by Yossi Schwartz on 5 November:

There are already clear signs that he will turn his back on the reforms he promises. A few days ago, he said that there is no place for millionaires in a democratic society, but since then he has met with representatives of large companies and before the elections he said that there is room for everyone in the city. He chose advisers who reflected the position of the Democratic Party’s establishment.

Besides, it needs saying that he certainly does not enjoy sig-

nificant support within the Democratic party at large and one is struck by the deafening silence from within the ranks of the Bernie Sanders supporters which suggests that they find him to be too radical!

Is his “coalition of minorities” sufficiently organised and motivated to “keep him honest?” Are they even organised? Are they even a “movement?” Most would say, “Probably not.”

Should he be courting the Right-wing to secure their neutrality/cooperation as he seeks to implement his programme? Or should he be building his coalition of minorities, instead?

Less than three weeks after Democratic Socialists of America member Zohran Mamdani won the New York City mayoral election, garnering over 1 million votes, the mayor-elect is quickly revealing himself to be nothing more than a standard capitalist politician. In the last 72 hours, it has been revealed that Mamdani reached out to Trump for a meeting; publicly pleaded for and accepted as his police commissioner current police chief Jessica Tisch (who comes from the 43rd richest family in the United States); and lobbied against a “socialist” challenge to New York Representative Hakeem Jeffries.

(WSWS, 20 November 2025)

His meeting with Trump took place on Friday 21 November. At a press conference following the meeting, Mamdani declared that he and Trump would be “in a partnership,” and had pledged to work together. Trump congratulated Mamdani, and added that he was going to be helping Mamdani “to make everybody’s dream come true.” This is the same Trump whose administration

is carrying out an unrelenting assault on the working class, slashing food stamps, threatening Social Security and Medicare, destroying public education, waging a war on public health and orchestrating the largest transfer of wealth from the working class to the oligarchy in American history.

(WSWS 22 November 2025)

The WSWS is totally unambiguous in their rejection of Mamdani:

Mamdani will bow to the demands of the financial and political establishment. Whatever he claims, the ultimate purpose of his campaign is to pre-empt and contain the growing movement of the working class.

The way forward for workers in New York and throughout the country lies not in pressuring the Democratic Party or placing hopes in Mamdani’s administration but in the independent mobilization of the working class in struggle.

Enough said?



APPENDIX

MAMDANI'S MANIFESTO

- Freeze rent
 - Build Affordable Housing
 - Crackdown on bad landlords
 - End Deed Theft
 - Create the Department of Community Safety to prevent violence before it happens by prioritizing solutions which have been consistently shown to improve safety.
 - City-owned grocery stores - Nearly 9 in 10 New Yorkers say the cost of groceries is rising faster than their income.
 - Fast, Free busses
 - End Corporate exploitation
 - No-cost childcare
 - Baby baskets for new-borns
 - Ensure public schools are fully funded with equally distributed resources, strong after-school programs, mental health counsellors and nurses, compliant and effective class sizes, and integrated student bodies.
- Raise the corporate tax rate to match New Jersey's 11.5%, bringing in \$5 billion. Tax the wealthiest 1% of New Yorkers—those earning above \$1 million annually—a flat 2% tax (right now city income tax rates are essentially the same whether you make \$50,000 or \$50 million).

Statement: Austerity and a Narrowed Inflation Target: A Recipe for disaster.

Posted on 2025-11-13 by AIDC

The Alternative Information and Development Centre (AIDC) condemns the 2025 medium-term budget policy statement announced by the Minister of Finance, which continues to prioritise profits over meeting people's needs. Non-interest expenditure as a percentage of GDP is decreasing over the medium term, representing a shrinking role of the state. The decision to narrow South Africa's inflation target to 3%, coupled with continued austerity and the liberalisation and privatisation of key sectors of the economy, represents an entrenchment of neoliberal dogma that will worsen the country's social crisis and perpetuate economic stagnation. The obsessive fixation on the primary budget surplus indicates a mismatch in priorities – thousands of children die of hunger and malnutrition each year, while the primary budget surplus is projected to increase from R68.5 billion to R224 billion in 2027/28.

We are especially outraged by the Minister of Finance's decision to narrow the inflation target to 3 percent. This is part of the government's plan to do everything to attract foreign investment and remove all remaining restrictions on capital flight.

Inflation in South Africa is not driven by excess demand but by cost-push factors. These are external shocks such as oil price increases and the rising cost of basic services imposed by municipalities desperate for revenue. Yet the South African Reserve Bank (SARB) continues to rely on blunt monetary tightening, keeping interest rates among the highest in the world, purportedly to suppress inflation. The Treasury's faith that lower inflation "expectations" will somehow deliver lower inflation ignores the material causes of price increases.

They are unable to answer how the lowering of the inflation target will mean lower interest rates. That is because it is clear, even to them, that South Africa's high interest rates will remain. The result will be persistently high borrowing costs, further contraction in household spending, and intensified

hardship for the working class. Already, households spend nearly 9% of their income servicing debt, and total household debt stands at over 60% of disposable income. High interest rates not only squeeze consumers but also deter investment in labour-intensive sectors, reinforcing a speculative and financialised growth path that destroys jobs rather than creates them. While the banks and investors celebrate the new inflation target, the indebted majority will plunge deeper into poverty.

Structural Reforms for Profit, Not for People

The Medium-Term Budget Policy Statement (MTBPS) doubles down on so-called "structural reforms" under Operation Vulindlela, designed to mobilise private finance through the Credit Guarantee Vehicle (CGV), blended finance, and public-private partnerships (PPPs). These schemes amount to socialising risk and privatising profit—the state absorbs losses while the private sector reaps guaranteed returns.

This agenda, including the unbundling of state-owned enterprises and the push for "cost-reflective tariffs" and prepaid meters, deepens the commodification of essential services. Such reforms will raise costs for poor households and exclude millions from access to electricity, water, and transport. Far from spurring productive investment, Operation Vulindlela has coincided with declining fixed investment and continued deindustrialisation. The state's investment plan is not aimed at meeting people's needs. Instead, it entrenches an export-oriented, profit-driven model that sacrifices social welfare and economic sovereignty. Such policies are completely out of sync with the new global trade regime.

Real Alternatives Exist: Redistribute Wealth, Mobilise Public Investment

The Treasury's ideological blinkers prevent it from seeing real alternatives. South Africa is not short of resources—it is short of political will.

Tax the wealthy: The top 1% hold 55% of national wealth. A modest wealth tax could raise R192 billion annually, more than double the policing budget.

End tax evasion: SARS estimates R600 billion is lost to tax evasion each year. This is enough to double both the education and health budgets.

Tax idle capital: Roughly R1.8 trillion in capital lies idle in South Africa. A tax on unproductive capital would both discourage hoarding and generate funds for job creation and skills development.

Mobilise domestic finance: The Government Employees Pension Fund (GEPF)—with assets of R2.38 trillion—could play a transformative role. Redirecting its mandate toward government bonds would secure returns for pensioners while providing the state with affordable capital to fund public sector jobs, infrastructure, and green industrialisation. There is no reason to borrow from the IMF or World Bank when alternative financing options exist.

South Africa's economic crisis is not inevitable. It is the result of political choices. The MTBPS once again chooses markets over people, private profits over public welfare. What is required is a decisive break from austerity and a bold programme of redistributive public investment aimed at full employment, reindustrialisation, and ecological transition.

This demands mass pressure from trade unions, social movements, and communities. Only through such collective action can we shift from austerity and privatisation to an economy that serves the people, not profits.



Enoch Godongwana—Minister of Finance

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Address all correspondence to the secretariat

Michael Steenveld

071 645 1590

mikesteenveld2020@gmail.com