

New York, New York, it's a socialist town

Mamdani is up, and the centrists are down

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My beat is national security and foreign policy, so I don't usually weigh in on municipal elections, but when the world's foremost capitalist city elects a socialist mayor, I make an exception. I'll return to the economic implications in a moment, but first let me suggest that, given what al Qaeda did on Sept. 11, 2001, you might expect New Yorkers (for at least a few generations) to choose leaders whose opposition to jihadism is unequivocal.

That description does not fit Mayor-elect Zohran Mamdani. His most heartfelt concern about the terrorist attack that killed more than 2,600 people in the World Trade Center appears to be for a relative who, thereafter, "did not feel safe" wearing her hijab on the subways.



New York City is also the most Jewish metropolis outside Israel. In 1984, during his run for the Democratic presidential nomination, Jesse Jackson referred to it as "Hymietown." He subsequently apologized, but, in retrospect, his use of that epithet seems quaint.

Mr. Mamdani claims he is not antisemitic, but he is anti-Zionist, which implies that he wants Israel disestablished. On Oct. 7, 2023, we saw how Hamas and other Jew haters intend to achieve that goal.

Mr. Mamdani won't even disavow "globalize the intifada" — a phrase that, according to no less an authority than Jonathan Greenblatt, head of the Anti-Defamation League — is "an explicit incitement to violence."

Approximately 250 members of the Democratic Socialists of America currently hold elected offices. Last week, member Katie Wilson was elected mayor of Seattle, having defeated incumbent Bruce Harrell, a moderate Democrat.

Ms. Wilson and Mr. Mamdani made "affordability" the centerpiece of their campaigns. That's rich — pun intended.

Over the past century, capitalism has democratized wealth more than at any other point in history. All sorts of goods and services — cars, washing machines, air

conditioners, microwave ovens, smartphones, air travel and ride-hailing services — became affordable to people of modest means because competitive markets forced innovation, expanded supply and drove down prices.

By contrast, policies that shift economic decision-making away from competitive markets and toward government control — whether through excessive regulation, price setting or restrictions on private enterprise — constrict the supply of goods and services, resulting in higher prices, persistent shortages or some form of rationing.

For example, rent control reduces the value of affordable housing stock, which discourages further investment in affordable housing supply, exacerbating the problem it purports to solve.

Permit me one anecdote. When I lived in New York City years ago, I knew a lovely couple who had a beautiful summer beach house on Fire Island. They could afford that because their gorgeous apartment in Manhattan was rent controlled. They viewed that as an entitlement. You might say they had a New York state of mind.

I saw their situation differently, perhaps because, on my first visit to the Soviet Union some years earlier, our socialist hosts boasted that tickets to the Bolshoi Theater were so inexpensive as to be affordable for the average worker.

It occurred to me: Large as the theater was, it couldn't hold all those who could afford to attend. So, how were tickets distributed?

The answer, I discovered: *po blatu*, the Russian term for having the right connections, i.e., powerful Communist Party members.

Most Russians were only too aware that socialism diminished productivity. They had a saying: “As long as they pretend, they're paying us, we'll pretend we're working.”

Returning to the Democratic Socialists of America: It evolved from a movement begun in 1901 and, as Eli Lake makes clear in an episode of his marvelous “Breaking History” podcast, it is today “more radical than ever — and winning.”

Among its claims: “The only thing that can stop fascism is socialism.” That will be credible only to those ignorant about fascism and socialism, which is likely the case for any Columbia University student who studied under Professor Mahmood Mamdani, father of the incoming mayor. Among the Indian-born scholar's deep thoughts: that Adolf Hitler was inspired by Abraham Lincoln.

Benito Mussolini, the Italian dictator who conceived the fascist ideology, began his career as a Marxist socialist and editor of *Avanti!* the Italian Socialist Party newspaper.

In a book he co-authored in 1932, fascism was defined as a variation of socialism, one that was not based on Marxism but was nonetheless collectivist, statist, anti-individualist, anti-liberal and “of the Left.”

While socialists demand that the state must own the means of production, fascists are content to leave factories and other businesses in private hands so long as the state has the power to tell those private hands what they can and cannot do.

My experiences in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics made me an anti-communist, but I didn’t become anti-socialist until I lived in Africa, where almost all the decolonized nations, advised by European intellectuals, had taken “the socialist path to development,” which turned out to be a dead end.

Similarly, ever since the Korean War was halted in a ceasefire in 1953, North Korea has been socialist while South Korea has taken the capitalist road. Are there any doubts about where workers are better off? Another case in point is Venezuela, which, not long ago, was free, wealthy and democratic. In 1998, however, Venezuelans elected socialist Hugo Chavez to the presidency. After his death in 2013, Nicolas Maduro came to power, evolving into a narco-dictator.

Venezuela today is unfree and aligned with American adversaries such as Tehran, Moscow, Beijing and Havana. More than 8 million Venezuelans have fled their homeland over recent years.

Venezuela is also dirt-poor despite having the largest proven oil reserves in the world.

If socialism can’t make it there, socialism can’t make it anywhere, including, I predict, in New York, New York.

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