



Who's Afraid of Social Democracy?

I've been following Zohran Mamdani's rise from relative obscurity to mayor of the largest city in America not just with interest, but with a kind of wild enthusiasm. And I suspect that some of you out there might be feeling the same.

That's because Mamdani ran on a list of pledges that haven't, with a few notable exceptions, been heard out of a civic politician's mouth in many a moon - the chief one being the promise of a just and helping hand for the millions of New Yorkers who are struggling.

And after years of conservative austerity economics and the current practice of price gouging, it's not only refreshing, but a huge relief, to hear a big city mayor talk about universal public childcare, free bus rides, rent controls and city owned grocery stores designed to force out-of-control food prices down.

Ditto Mamdani's pledge to almost double the minimum wage from \$16 or \$17 dollars to \$30 by 2030.

Add to that his support for Local Law 97, which mandates a limit on building emissions, combined with a policy that will retrofit schools with renewable energy and increase resiliency by creating more greenspace and you have the first steps in a green transition.

A transition in which the needs of ordinary working people are met within the environmental limits of the planet.

So what, you may ask, does a living wage or free bus rides have to do with a green transition?

Well, why take your car to work, when you can ride the bus for free and help reduce emissions? Why opt for oil or gas when you can heat your schools with solar panels or geothermal which will also save you money. And who's going to complain about spending tax dollars to create a spongier greener city, when everyone is earning a basic living wage?

And yes, New York does have a budget bigger than quite a few states, but there are other mayors who are also doing similar work with a whole lot less.

Just take Baltimore.



Brandon Scott, Mayor of Baltimore

In a city once reviled as one of America's most dangerous cities, 41 year old mayor, Brandon Scott has tackled crime, not by throwing more police at it, but by expanding the number of rec centers and extending their hours to 11 PM, increasing the number of neighbourhood parks and pools, initiating literacy programs and establishing 42 summer youth camps in city parks.

The results are falling crime rates, including a 71% reduction in juvenile homicide deaths.

And just to place a very large cherry on top on that cake, Scott has also signed a bill committing the city government to reach net zero by 2045.

And here's the thing - both of these leaders are what might be called social democrats. And no, they're not after their constituents' freedom or their large or small businesses or their human rights, including the so-called right to drive their cars and pick up coffee at Tim Horton's.

What they're aiming for are cities that put people and nature first and profit margins second, in the order in which, in my humble opinion, they should be prioritized.



One of dozens of new parks in Baltimore initiated by Mayor Brandon Scott

That kind of leader would never opt to build new roads, unless they had sufficient cash to ensure that their public transit system had enough buses to actually be efficient. Nor would they claim that more mental health resources could fix an understaffed, over-stressed fire department that's dealing with too many fires, started in too many abandoned buildings and homeless camps.

So why, if that's the case, do so many of us quake in our boots at the thought of a mayor who calls themselves a social democrat?

What, exactly, are we afraid of?

Beats me, especially when you look at the definition of the term “social democrat,” which simply means “a supporter of a liberal democracy which incorporates a commitment to social reform and social justice.”

Not much to ring your hands over there, unless you subscribe to the theory that ensuring social and economic justice for your fellow citizens somehow diminishes your wedge of the economic pie. To which I would respond – how, pray tell, do you figure that, when 1% of the world’s population currently controls more of that pie than the bottom 95% of us, combined?

So, in the face of that, here’s my question to all of you. Is there a smart social democrat out there who’s willing to step forward to become Winnipeg’s Mamdani-style mayor? If there is, I’m in. I’ll knock on doors for you, and I’ll bring a big crowd of my people-loving, tree-hugging friends with me.

And together we’ll re-write the script on what a civic government can achieve when its main goal is to build a just, safer and greener city for everyone.

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