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The Newark Revolution

The rout of the old order in Newark is complete. Beginning July 1, the state's largest city will have not only a new mayor but a Municipal Council devoid of allies of the departing mayor, Sharpe James.

Mr. James's allies, including his son, did not survive a runoff election two weeks ago, meaning that all nine seats in the new Council will be held by supporters of Mayor-elect Cory Booker. They include Ronald Rice Jr., the son and namesake of the man Mr. Booker beat in May's general election.

Throughout his campaign, Mr. Booker said his victory alone would not guarantee drastic change in Newark. If he were confronted with a hostile Council, life on Broad Street would be a hard and perhaps impossible slog.

Assisted mightily by a \$6 million campaign war chest, the Booker team won three seats outright in the general election, and six more in the runoff. So Mr. Booker has the Council he wanted -- a group of two incumbents and seven newcomers.

This outcome would seem to augur well for Newark, a city in desperate need of change and reform. But it is important to remember that the Municipal Council will serve Newark best when it acts as an independent branch of government, not as a rubber-stamp for the new mayor.

During the James era, the Council was not especially independent, with unsurprising results: the mayor pretty much had a free hand to do as he pleased.

It is clear that Mayor-elect Booker has no shortage of ideas and initiatives. That's good. But they should be subjected to the scrutiny and professional skepticism of an engaged and energetic Council.

The Booker team was elected to bring about change. One of those changes ought to be a revived Council, ready to take its place as counterweight to the mayor. Even if he happens to be a friend.

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