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SolSun #13– Looked at History -- and at Those Making It

Solidarity Sunday looked closely at a term we all use, wielded both as cudgel and support in political discussion. We explored the slippery nature of “liberal” and how this explains its variety of use. Traditionally, economic or “classical” liberal refers to an exponent of laissez-faire economics and minimum state intervention, while “social” liberal refers to a supporter of the welfare state and redistribution. Adding a layer of complexity, in the U.S. the term has been given the meaning of “left-winger” by conservatives - who are free-marketers, or economic liberals. Got that?

Much of the confusion comes about because liberalism is the dominant world-view in the West, and most political traditions are situated within it. Most of the 19th and 20th centuries were dominated by liberalism – welfare reforms and state intervention. This social consensus disintegrated as the post-war boom petered out in the early 1970’s: a revival of economic liberalism – neo-liberalism – was absorbed by the center-right wing of the Democratic party. The recent leftward move ushered in by Sanders is playing out in races around the country as first global trade and now technological advances challenged the laissez-faire economic model.

Next, the discussion turned to the rising stars of the Democratic party, focusing on those under 60 who are shaping the future of the party.

Emerging patterns shaping this cohort include the unprecedented number of new candidates in state and local races; an infrastructure recruiting, training and supporting them (like EMILY’s List and Run For Something); and hyper-local campaigns (It’s The Traffic, Stupid). Candidates are largely female, people of color, and mayors.

We reviewed new political actors making waves at the local, state and national levels. Among the standouts:

- Cook County state’s attorney Kim Foxx (first woman to lead the second-largest prosecutor’s office in the country)
- Mayor Vi Lyles of Charlotte, NC
- Two-term mayor of South Bend, IN, Pete Buttigieg (Rhodes scholar, navy vet, openly gay. Fills potholes himself)
- Ex-New Orleans, LA, mayor Mitch Landrieu (led the post-Katrina recovery and removed Confederate statues)
- Los Angeles, CA mayor Eric Garcetti (will his environmental and immigration leadership propel him to the White House?)
- Massachusetts Rep. Seth Moulton (Marine vet recruiting and fundraising for Democratic vet candidates – 19 so far)
- California’s junior senator, Kamala Harris (formerly San Francisco DA and AG of California; as senator a leading advocate for immigrants and criminal justice reform. White House 2020?)
- Former Missouri Secretary of State Jason Kander (Army National Guard vet). He lost his 2016 Senate bid but drew impressive numbers for a red-state Democrat. Founder of “Let America Vote”, the grassroots organization working to elect voting rights champions.

– Tanya Lolonis, Solidarity Sundays Co-Coordinator