

Somebody, Please Stop Us

Issue #4



Thanks for picking up the fourth issue of “Somebody, Please Stop Us.” This is a zine devoted to exploring two or three issues, each edition, as opposed to soundbite journalism.

Avoiding Performative Liberalism

If the pendulum is going to swing next election, the Democrats will need to reinvent themselves and do some real soul-searching. One of the things standing in the way of progressive social change is performative liberalism, that is: lip-service but no real action (the media is involved in this as well), attending a No Kings rally then going home and that's the extent of it or endless "awareness raising." We are all keenly aware of the problems, but what action needs to be taken?

We hear stories of corruption, then the people are pardoned or they're immune or the corruption just continues. Perhaps, even, the courts weigh in and say the corruption is okay. Occasionally, when the press shines a spotlight on something, change does result. This is great when it happens, but all too rare. Often, we never even get the story. As in, there is war right now in Ethiopia, but hardly any reporting on it. Amy Goodman made the excellent point that even when we do get wartime reporting, the press is embedded with troops and so there is built-in bias. More often, foreign wars go uncovered. For instance, Israel doesn't allow reporters into the West Bank. The U.S. news has been covering Iran as essentially a story about gas prices, which puts human lives in a capitalist context.

So, what can we do? Here are some ideas: Door knocking before elections, get involved in a non-profit/community/charity group, talk to those you disagree with, don't get caught up in the lie that minorities are to blame (billionaires and the corporate class deflect attention that way), make personal lifestyle choices that move the needle, contact your legislators (schedule a meeting with your local rep), get involved in local government and support free speech at your local libraries. These are just some ideas to make our ideologies less performative and more real.

One big miss for Democrats last election was poor white people. I read a book recently about Appalachia to try and educate myself on this. It really illuminated rural poverty for me—their lives and perspective. I saw the wisdom of these people, not the ignorance or stereotypes; I understood the challenges they face. When a politician like Trump says they are going to bring back high paying blue-collar jobs or coal to Western PA, these people are listening. Did Trump do this? Of course not. But he told them what they wanted to hear. And he kept the attention away from the corporate class.

It's hard to live a life that embodies our highest ideals. I embrace most of the progressive agenda because it is an attempt at living in a world community: removing division, working towards peace, protecting the Earth and giving everyone a fair shot at reaching their potential. What we

see from Trump and his followers is the demonization of groups; a purely transactional approach to humans and foreign relations; an interest in the façade or appearance of things (gold plated statues); and, a view of the environment and health that denies facts and science.

So, we all have to speak out and take action. Professors who were content to slowly work on cultural change or simply inform us, now must become public intellectuals who spearhead projects in their communities and enact the solutions in their books and papers. Intellectuals, NGOs and small businesses can help us to reduce our impact on the Earth, change our lifestyles and offer sustainable solutions to poor countries seeking development. Reducing inequality here and abroad can have a profound effect on elections.

We must take back control of important decisions. There is great fatalism right now in AI because we are letting the tech companies and billionaires develop this to meet their needs (cheap labor, integration of AI into our war machines, manipulation of the public by creating one voice/one answer to questions, etc.) instead of ours. Questions have many answers. We should never accept the assumption, seemingly built into AI platforms, that they have the answer.

If the general public were to develop AI, we would have systems mowing our lawn, doing our dishes, cleaning our house, etc. Instead, we have a very warped version of

technology coming at us, that everyone acknowledges will cost jobs; and, by the way... Do you mind helping to train our AI before you are laid off? My wife, who works in healthcare, now essentially has her computer talk to the insurance company's computer (because AI generates the insurance refusal) and she then uses AI to resubmit. They exchange canned letters and whoever has the better AI wins. It's becoming a twisted spiral.

Perhaps most importantly, new technologies are often viewed through the lens of war: How can AI help us to conquer more lands, exploit more resources, kill more people? Look at the explosion of drone warfare. Look at how Trump's administration unapologetically sees itself as involved in the conquest of foreign lands for money, resources, cheap labor or as the dumping grounds for our consumerism. Can humanity be trusted with such a powerful tool?

How will we get our voices heard? I can limit my own individual use of technology, but this often leads to disadvantages. We now use technology for everything, it seems. This leads to a disconnection from nature and so, the poisoning of the Earth doesn't seem that problematic except for cancer rates (we continue to deny or downplay the role of chemicals in this) and drinking water (when our water becomes contaminated, suddenly we are interested in the environment!).

So, we have a lot of work to do. The press has to realize that 24/7 Trump bashing actually doesn't work in terms of the culture war that is going on now. Even if all of their points are valid, it's an approach that has now backfired twice. Information must be presented differently by the media. Academia has to realize that their work only has real impact by directly connecting with their communities, NGOs, businesses, etc. Everyday people, like you and me, have to educate ourselves about the rural poor, working class and those who need good jobs but will not pursue degrees. These groups are facing economic competition while trying to raise their families, and feel ignored by politicians. They are also more susceptible to messages regarding Who is taking their jobs, which can lead to divisiveness.

Whatever your talent may be, use it! We can all help to set the stage for the next election so that we can return to strong relations with our foreign allies; no war; good jobs for people rather than jobs for computers; an environment that is not destroyed with chemicals and consumerism; unity among all races and ethnicities and religions, seeing the value in difference; help for those who need it as opposed to subsidies and tax breaks for the rich; the marrying of idealism with action; moving technology away from war applications and towards exploration, science and solving problems.

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