

## *Heterodox Economics Newsletter*

THE YES MEN FIX THE WORLD, A film written and directed by Andy Bichlbaum and Mike Bonanno, Shadow Distribution, 2009.

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On November 29, 2004. Jude Finisterra, spokesman for the Dow Chemical Company, appears on BBC World Television and announces that Dow will take full responsibility for the 1984 Bhopal disaster and will spend \$12 billion to compensate victims and clean up the former Union Carbide plant (Dow purchased Union Carbide in 2001) in Bhopal, India where a gas leak killed thousands and has sickened hundreds of thousands. Was that the beginning of a new era of corporate responsibility?

Not so much. It turns out that Jude Finisterra is not a Dow spokesman; he is not even a real person. He is a character played by Andy Bichlbaum, one of the *Yes Men*. The hoax is shown in the opening scene of *The Yes Men Fix The World*, the second documentary film by Bichlbaum and Mike Bonanno. In it, Andy and Mike set out to fix the world, dressed in thrift-store suits and armed with video cameras.

The basic strategy of *the Yes Men* is pretty simple. In fact, they reveal their tactics to encourage copy-cats. They make a fake website for the target company and use it to get speaking invitations at conferences and media outlets. Posing as company representatives they pitch a ridiculous new idea such as a biofuel made from human flesh in an attempt to wake up their corporate audience. This type of action does not always get the intended response, so the alternate strategy is simply to announce that the organization is going to do what *the Yes Men* think they should.

What are they fixing in the world? *The Yes Men* believe that contemporary capitalism has given large corporations too much power over the direction of our society and produced a system that prevents companies from doing the right thing. They connect a series of industrial and environmental disasters, from Bhopal to Hurricane Katrina and the destruction of public housing in New Orleans to the ideology of what they label as the “free-market cult.” The background research section is made up of surprisingly funny interviews with a number of free market think-tanks. From there it traces their antics impersonating representatives of Exxon-Mobil, Haliburton and even the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

Besides being funnier than most political documentaries, the film also is timely. December 2009 marked the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Bhopal disaster, while the financial crisis and recession have stirred basic questions about the functioning of our economic system. In the film’s most moving scene, Andy and Mike actually go to Bhopal and meet with those who are still suffering from the catastrophe, showing that despite the humor, they take their subject matter very seriously.

The film might be entertaining to someone who does not agree with their political views, but that person is definitely not the intended audience. The movie is more of a call to action for those who already agree with the basic premise. In this, the title is deliciously ironic. It pokes fun at their obviously inadequate efforts, while at the same time imagining that fixing the world is actually possible. The movie is inspiring in its creativity and because it is just a few guys doing

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what they can. Although they do not ultimately succeed, they do make some waves. For those who would point out their shortcomings, there's an implicit challenge of "what are *you* doing to fix the world."

The film is showing in limited engagements across the United States. For information about screenings see: <http://theyesmenfixtheworld.com/screenings.htm>