

5 Protests That Shook the World (With Laughter)



1



Abbie Hoffman incites a money grab. In 1967, Abbie Hoffman and members of the Yippies, a radical activist group, threw 300 one-dollar bills from the New York Stock Exchange balcony onto the trading floor. According to Hoffman, as brokers grabbed for petty cash, trading ground to a halt. The famous stunt mocked the unregulated greed that still pervades Wall Street.

2



Let's kill dissent—just kidding. In 1702, in an era of religious persecution in England, Daniel Defoe published a fake pamphlet called "The Shortest Way with the Dissenters." It proposed that—rather than barring non-Anglicans from office—it would be faster and easier to exterminate them. Some people believed the pamphlet was real, which so humiliated Anglicans that they had Defoe briefly imprisoned—during which time he produced some wonderful writing.

Great moments in “laughtivism” from Yes Men Andy Bichlbaum and Mike Bonanno, the guys who **DUPED** the BBC, **EMBARRASSED** Dow Chemical, and **MOCKED** Halliburton

Some say that laughter helped bring down the Soviet Union, by making “Brezhnev” rhyme with “ridiculous.” At the Yes Lab, we help activists cook up funny antics and escapades to change public opinion—with laughter. We’ve used humor as a weapon to avenge corporate wrongdoing for more than a decade, ever since we started dressing up as phony PR men, comic strip heroes, and government officials.

That’s because we know humor is powerful: people have used jokes and hoaxes for centuries to humble the bad guys and inspire the good ones. Here are some of our favorite moments in “laughtivism.”

3



Daring satire tweaks Nazis. In November 1943, a fake issue of the Belgian newspaper *Le Soir* was published by the Front de l’Indépendance, a Belgian resistance organization. The paper looked like the real thing, but a close read revealed biting satire about the Nazi occupation. Some of the publishers were sent to concentration camps, but their brazen humor gave many Belgians the courage to resist the Nazis.

4



Phony bid stops drilling. In 2008, Tim DeChristopher, then a student at the University of Utah, went to protest a federal auction selling rights to drill for oil and gas in the Utah wilderness. He then performed what is surely the best prank of the century. DeChristopher intended to barge in and disrupt the proceedings, but a door attendant confronted him: “Are you a bidder?” Tim thought: “That’s funny. Bidder?” “Why yes,” he said out loud. “Yes, I am.” The attendant gave him a paddle, and Tim won 14 parcels of land. Finally the auctioneer caught on, put the auction on hold, and had Tim arrested. Months later, the Obama administration cancelled the sales. DeChristopher singlehandedly saved thousands of acres of wilderness and now looks forward to writing some wonderful things in prison, where he may be headed after sentencing.

5



Imposters “help” Dow do the right thing. Mike and Andy had already begun a habit of impersonating corporate hacks and hacking corporate websites, when in 2004, the BBC fell for a phony site (dowethics.com) the two had constructed to mimic Dow Chemical’s website. The site described why Dow and its subsidiary, Union Carbide, had never taken responsibility for the 1984 Bhopal disaster, when a pesticide plant leaked, causing thousands of deaths and leaving behind a toxic legacy. The BBC booked Jude Finisterra (a.k.a. Andy Bichlbaum) to comment on the anniversary of Bhopal. Finisterra announced on international television that Dow would spend billions of dollars to clean up Bhopal. Major news wires picked up the story, and within 23 minutes, Dow’s stock price fell by 4.2 percent, a \$2 billion loss. —*YES! editors*



But, but ... the humble Yes Men did not include one of their own stunts. But we, YES! Magazine editors, (no relation) decided to anyway.