

Michael Moore plays the “Big One” on Nike’s turf

## Just View It!

by Maya Muir

Most of us first heard about Michael Moore when “Roger and Me,” his scathingly funny movie about the effect of GM layoffs on his hometown of Flint, Michigan, hit the theaters. By then Moore was an old hand at critiquing the system. While still in high school, Moore ran for a seat on his local school board, and won. At 22 he founded the Flint Voice, an alternative newspaper. And since “Roger and Me,” Moore has kept busy, first producing “TV Nation” a satiric news show, and writing “Downsize This: Random Threats from an Unarmed American.”



Moore offers Nike CEO Phil Knight a ticket to Indonesia to review the working conditions in his factories.

**You say you are hopeful about the future. What do you base your hope on?**

The younger generation will lead the way. They’re growing up and finding the American dream isn’t available to them. Most are working at \$6 an hour jobs. The only good jobs are in computers, for the rest, if you haven’t been to college what can you do? Work at McDonalds, join the army, or sell drugs! Young people won’t have what their parents had, and they’re pissed.

**What political change would you like to see?**

I’m hoping the Democrats and Republicans will merge, and there’ll be room for a real second party. Now 99 percent of us have none. In 200 years, anthropologists will dig us up and laugh at us for calling ourselves a democracy.

Really what I’d like? An economic system that’s fair and just. I only have a high school education, so don’t look to me for answers,

While touring to promote his book, Moore found himself the hero of everyone who’d ever been downsized, and they all wanted to tell him their stories. He began filming in the same guerilla style he used for his first movie, adding a search for a CEO to explain the situation. The result: “The Big One,” a new movie which was shown at a sold-out pre-release benefit for Western States Center, Jobs With Justice, and KBOO radio station in Portland in March. In “The Big One,” Moore visits the Pay Day candy factory in Centralia, Illinois the day massive layoffs are announced, meets with unionizing bookstore employees in a parking lot after dark, sings along with Cheap Trick’s Rick Nielsen — and caps it off with an encounter with Nike CEO Phil Knight.

What follows are Moore’s comments at a press conference preceding the benefit.

but I hope someone else can come up with a system that combines the best of capitalism and socialism into something new that respects the individual, allows creativity, and makes sure no one does without. A system in which wealth is distributed to those who create it.

**What do people think of you in your hometown of Flint, Michigan (the subject of “Roger and Me”)?**

General Motors and the Chamber of Commerce say I’m the worst thing to happen to Flint in 100 years. But the people who lost their jobs are happy I got their story out. You should understand, in Flint I’m considered moderate by most people. Remember, this is the home town of the world’s largest corporation. What’s that going to do to you? This is the town that had the first Black mayor in the nation, and that voted 9 to 1 for Jesse Jackson over Dukakis.

**What are your comments on the recent Newsweek article that took a swipe at you for abandoning the working class to live in a classy apartment on Central Park West in New York?**

The people who write for Newsweek live on Central Park West, and they get nervous when they see you moving into the neighborhood — but, by the way, I don't live anywhere near there.

But there's nothing noble about poverty. When you're in the working class, you want to get out of it. It's only liberals with lots of money that want us to stay where we are.

They talked about me sitting in first class on an airplane flight. Well, sure I'll sit there when the studio is paying. You think if you offer a first class ticket to someone sitting there like a sardine in coach, they'll say, 'no, I'm staying here because it's noble.' No, working class people are all saying, "Way to go, Mike!" This is class structure we're talking about.

**Why isn't the Left's message getting out to the public?**

Activists who weren't raised in the working class, need to get off their high horse and learn the language — if that's who they want to reach — and talk about issues people care about. I meet activists all the time who tell me they don't have TVs. Well, if you don't have a TV, you're not in touch with popular culture.

**What are your plans now?**

We're going to do more "TV Nation." Channel 4 in London will produce 17 new episodes that will run over two years.

I've written a pilot for a sit-com called "Better Days," starring Jim Belushi. It's about a town where no one has a job, and the guys have to scam a way to survive.

**What does the foundation you started, The Center for Alternative Media, support?**

We've given grants worth \$525,000 to 70 different social action groups like ACT UP, the Black Filmmakers' Foundation, soup kitchens, homeless shelters, and environmental groups. And we give to independent film makers— like we just gave money to someone doing a

documentary on Ollie North.

And Miramax (producer of The Big One) will be giving 50 % of all its profits on the movie to groups in Flint, which is really good.

**Has there been any reaction by companies who are in "The Big One" to the movie or your tour (of pre-opening benefit shows)?**

Nike somehow got a bootleg copy of the movie, and they called me and asked me to cut two of those scenes at the end with Phil Knight. I thought, what are they going to offer me? Shoes for life? They sent out a guy to meet with me, and I told him that if Nike built a shoe factory in Flint, I'd take those scenes back. The guy said he'd get back to me, but he never did.

Since then, they've been faxing groups I'm doing benefits for, trying to discourage them. It's pretty lame. GM did the same thing over *Roger and Me*

In the movie, several corporate representatives justify downsizing on the basis that companies have to maintain their profits... Profit, profit — where is that word in the Constitution? I've read it. I didn't see it anywhere. I see "the people" in the Constitution...If it's all about profit, why doesn't GM just sell crack?

**What's success like? Has it changed you?**

Success, what's that? No. I don't have a yacht yet. I still shop at KMart.

**Anything else?**

Yes. If you're not working with Jobs with Justice or Western States Center, you should be



*"If it's all about profit, why doesn't GM just sell crack?"*

— Michael Moore

