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Sorry We Missed Life

Seda Saygılı · Friday, March 5th, 2021

Have you ever thanked the delivery person or asked them how they are doing? It is time to do so. More understanding and empathy for the hardships and struggles of working class people in Britain (and all over the world) are promoted in Ken Loach's new film *Sorry We Missed You*.

By Seda Saygılı

Ken Loach, one of the most outstanding political film directors of modern Britain, has spent 50 years documenting the lives of working class people. Now he is 84 and it seems like he is never going to stop telling their stories. In his latest film, *Sorry We Missed You*, Loach tells the story of a family struggling to make ends meet with both parents on zero-hour contracts. This minimalist film ends up being very powerful in meaning.

Parents Ricky and Abbie must work hard to stay afloat. The story follows the father, who used to be a blue-collar employee, but now buys his own van and becomes a contracted parcel delivery driver. This so-called self-employed job, however, includes working 14 hours six days a week, no holiday pay, no sick leave. Ricky cannot even go to the bathroom. Instead, he is given a bottle for that purpose by his boss. Abbie, on the other hand, is a home healthcare worker who looks after and spends time with patients much more than she is actually paid for. What is portrayed here are the everyday life and struggles of working-class people. It is upsetting for Ricky and Abbie but there is no time to have a break, they have to keep working very hard. According to Loach, in this modern world, bosses are crueler than ever, and time equals money. Social democracy with all its promises does not seem to exist.

»*Dare them to censor you.*«

The title *Sorry We Missed You* is meant ironically. The phrase is used by delivery people when there is no one to receive the parcel. However, it could also refer to the people who are left alone in this materialistic, capitalist world and get lost in a system in which companies and bosses do not really try to understand their employees. Ricky, for instance, goes door-to-door to deliver parcels without any break but whenever he asks for a day off, he cannot get an affirmative answer.

The Movie

Sorry We Missed You

UK/France/Belgium 2019

100 minutes

Director: Ken Loach

Cinematography: Robbie Ryan

Starring: Kris Hitchen, Debbie Honeywood, Rhys Stone, Katie Proctor, and others

In his previous film *I, Daniel Blake* (2016), which was the winner of the 2016 Cannes Film Festival Palme d'Or, Loach looks at the British government's welfare system and the dysfunction of food banks in the United Kingdom. It is obvious that Loach likes to address social problems in his films which confront these issues bravely. In an interview with *The Big Issue*, Ken Loach said, »it is a story that a lot of people know is happening but nobody is talking about.« He likes to show the things that are right in front of you; the things people are accustomed to; the things that individuals have become indifferent to. Loach is also a documentary director and a social realist. In the beginning of his career he actually did direct some documentaries. In another interview with *The Guardian* Loach expressed his admiration for authenticity, »what I've always tried to do is capture the truth of the moment.« He believes that films should be about ordinary people and everyday life. He himself is a political activist by making political and daring films. In 2017, in a phone call with Alissa Wilkinson from *Vox*, he said, »dare them to censor you.« He does not hesitate to share his opinions.

Ken Loach fights on behalf of the voiceless majority. This poses a question about watching films in general: Do directors shoot films to entertain people or to create awareness? Renowned film director David Fincher said in an interview featured in *David Fincher: Interviews*:

Entertainment has to come hand in hand with a little bit of medicine. Some people go to the movies to be reminded that everything's okay. I don't make those kinds of movies. That, to me, is a lie. Everything's not okay.

This is what Loach definitely does in each movie of his films - reflecting the harsh reality, the ugly truth.

A Modern Tragedy

»You load sixteen tons, what do you get? Another day older and deeper in debt.« The harder Abbie and Ricky work, the more they give of themselves. They are not looking to become rich, just secure enough to support themselves. As Charles Bukowski says in *Reach for the Sun*: »We don't even ask for happiness, just a little less pain.« This British family just demands a little less pain and nothing more. Despite every negative thing in their lives, Loach demonstrates that this family has a bond that has its own beauty. He is not completely pessimistic. There is hope, there should be to continue to

live.

Sorry We Missed You may remind its audience of *Two Days, One Night* (2014) by the Dardenne brothers. Marion Cotillard, portraying Sandra who is depressed and has recently been off work, wants to get her job back, but it is offered on the condition that she needs to persuade her 16 co-workers to vote in favor of her instead of taking a 1,000 Euro bonus. The stories are different regarding their plots but they work in a similar way. These are the lives of ordinary people who struggle in a greedy world.

In an interview with *Financial Times* Loach said, »the reality today is that employment doesn't guarantee a decent life, enough to feed your family«. Abbie and Ricky both have jobs but does that make any difference? They are absent from home and this creates instability for their children Seb and Liza Jane, too. Seb, their son, also questions the educational system and, looking at his parents, he cannot see a bright future for himself. Ken Loach seeks to highlight the crucible of stress which occurs within the family: they are submerged by performing low-income and highly demanding jobs without gaining any satisfaction. The result is an extremely humane film despite being full of the ills of modern society. This is a 21st century human tragedy, not only in Britain but in the whole world.

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