

Sorry We Missed You

Directed by Ken Loach

(101 minutes, 15)

Most FiBQ reviews are of books, but every now and again a film appears which is so work-centred that it demands to be reviewed as well. Such is the case with *Sorry We Missed You*. My wife and I recently saw this and it is definitely a film that will linger long in our memories.

The director is socialist Ken Loach, famous through films like *Kes* and *I, Daniel Blake* for his searing exposé of major social injustices. His target this time is the contemporary gig economy. The central character is Ricky, a middle-aged, debt-ridden husband and father-of-two who seeks a more lucrative existence through working as a franchised delivery driver. He rapidly

discovers that the first thing he needs to do is sell his wife's car in order to raise the deposit for the van he drives. He then embarks on a highly pressurised lifestyle dominated by demanding targets set by a decidedly unsympathetic boss and the electronic device which keeps constant track of his movements and reminds him whenever he is behind schedule. Along the way he gets into numerous foul-mouthed exchanges with unhelpful customers about everything from rival football allegiances (the film is set in Newcastle but Ricky comes from Manchester) to one customer's unwillingness to produce the required ID in exchange for a parcel.

The working conditions are gruelling enough, but what really makes the film gripping and sets Ricky on a downward spiral is the knock-on effect the work has on his family life. His wife Abby is also overstretched as an agency care-worker, the pressures now exacerbated because she has no car but relies on public transport. Their children become latch-key kids, parents arriving home hours after they do. Their 11-year-old daughter is remarkably delightful, and the brightest episode in the whole film is the day when she helps her dad deliver parcels (but Ricky then gets into trouble for having someone else in the van). The teenage son is another matter. He's not a bad

Recycling Plastic - With Walkers Crisps

In our last issue Peter Heslam alerted readers to some positive business initiatives to recycle plastic. We are pleased to report that Walkers Crisps are one company that are taking this responsibility seriously.

Walkers say: 'At the moment, the packaging we use is the best way to keep our crisps crunchy and delicious. However, we're aiming to make all our packaging 100% recyclable, compostable or biodegradable by 2025. In the meantime, we've partnered with recyclers TerraCycle to make it easier to recycle our crisp packets and reduce the impact we have on our environment.'

Thousands of people round the country have joined the Walkers scheme which entails saving and delivering used crisp packets to one of 1600 local collection points (Walkers claim 80% of UK households live within four miles of one).

Alternatively crisp packets can be returned to Walkers head office, 4 Leycroft Road, Leicester LE4 5ZY.

They're not just taking their own brand packets either. Walkers claim their packets are already being recycled into flooring and fence posts, which sounds intriguing.



Ricky in trouble again

Photo: Still from the film

lad at heart, but he starts missing school, spraying graffiti on buildings and stealing paint from shops. This prompts furious rows with his dad. The film finishes on an ominous note with Ricky insisting on driving to work even though he can barely see, having been beaten up by muggers the day before. The viewer is left fearing the worst for him and his family.


The question which this gripping drama poses is clear: is this an accurate depiction of the gig economy? It is difficult for an outsider to judge, but my guess is that it probably is a fair depiction of the gig economy at its worst. I do not believe all gig ‘employers’ are so bad as the ogre depicted here, and there is some evidence that under external pressure companies like Uber and Deliveroo are improving their act to some extent.

Many workers enjoy the flexibility of the Gig Economy. Some people do a little taxi or delivery work to supplement their main work elsewhere. They are self-employed contractors. They revel in the freedom and control it

gives them about how they spend their working time. I see no reason why as Christians we should not applaud this. For others it is their primary source of income. While they may be technically self-employed, their situation is much more akin to regular employment. If all their working time is spent serving one organisation, their relationship with the organisation closely resembles that of employer/employee. Characters like Ricky are in serious danger of exploitation in the gig economy, working long and uncertain hours for negligible pay, suffering from an absence of benefits, and having no scope to question or negotiate the terms laid down to them. In short, they are the victims of a serious imbalance of power. Christians should certainly be advocates for those who are victims of injustice.

In the Global South, however, it’s worth noting that organisations of a ‘gig’ character can be a significant improvement on what has gone before. I’ve become aware of this because I have recently taken on the role of PhD

supervisor for a young American student who has lived in Asia and become fascinated by conditions and working practices in the autorickshaw industry. He has come across two Uber-type organisations, one in Sri Lanka and one in Bangladesh, which are coordinating the activities of providers of transportation – not only tuk-tuk drivers but drivers of taxis, minibuses, and other types of vehicle. His research is only at an early stage, but first signs are that these organisations are genuinely raising standards, both among the way that drivers treat their customers and in providing training, insurance and health and safety provision for a business sector that has been disorganised and unregulated.

As Christians, we should always be alert to signs of bad practice, and raise alarm bells about them. Ken Loach’s film does this in a very powerful way. But we should also be alert to evidence of good practice, and publicise that as an encouragement to others. It’s a much less fashionable thing to do, but equally important. 



Richard Higginson was Director of Faith in Business at Ridley Hall from 1989 until his retirement in 2018. He is now Chair of Faith in Business. He is a founder-editor of FIBQ and the author of several books, including Faith, Hope & the Global Economy and (with Kina Robertshaw) A Voice to be Heard. He is an international speaker on business ethics and the theology of work.