Out of Hours Cinema

THE SPIRIT OF '45

Directed by Ken Loach

Produced by Sixteen Films and Fly Film
2013

Loach's *Spirit of '45* is a brilliant, if one-sided, introduction to the political economies of state-run organisations, in particular the NHS.

Archived footage is blended alongside contemporary interviews to portray a nostalgic historical story. One from a time when society and industry flourished under Labour's industrial nationalisation, and the implementation of a 'free' health service. Unsurprisingly for Loach, he celebrates the foundations of socialism and 'gift economies' that modern day politics seem to be ever abolishing.

Beginning with footage from 1945, postwar celebrations are contrasted against scenes of ruin and wreckage, powerfully illustrating the community spirit within a society shaped by war. Loach captivatingly portrays how this unity was maintained and directed into rebuilding a country free of the poverty and unemployment seen in the 1930s.

The film is structured as a timeline enriched with personal stories (the great Julian Tudor Hart one such contributor),

and opinions from enthusiastic academics. Stories recall social benefits that nationalisation had on the working class; job opportunities, housing benefits, a health service free at the point of need, and redistribution of wealth away from the elite. The personal narrative generates resounding evidence to support the integrity of Loach's message.

Loach's timeline however leaps from the implementation of state nationalisation to 1979, Thatcher's election. He overlooks the period during which the true nature of state control and lack of business competition became apparent; over manning, bureaucracy, inefficiency, and huge financial deficits. Instead, with cunning use of editing he cleverly, and comically, implies that state control was continuously successful and demonises Thatcher with the sole responsibility for the rise of greed-centred capitalism.

Loach explores the devastating effects of our current capitalist society; increased unemployment, poverty, and exploitation from powerful minorities. He particularly focuses on the NHS, the one remaining victory of the postwar unity. Whereas once the health service was hugely appreciated and respected, newer generations seem to have a sense of self-righteous

entitlement to care. Huge staff numbers, financial deficits, and no limit to people's expectations and demands, sees a loss of staff morale and lack of respect for professionals. The discipline of the 'market place' seems to be what lies ahead for future health management.

Regardless of political stance, Ken Loach has done an excellent job in eliciting a saddening but strong fighting concluding message. Loach persuades us to fight to re-establish unity and to regain responsibility for wellbeing, citizenship, and the economy.

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VE Day Celebrations London 1945 from Spirit of '45 (www.thespiritof45.com).