

Two Days, One Night (2014)

(French with English subtitles)

Rated PG-13. Running time: 1 hour 35 min.

Our content ratings (1-10): Violence 2; Language 1; Sex/Nudity 1.

Our star rating (1-5): 5

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.

Philippians 2:3-4

After watching so many bombastic tales in which a superhero struggles to save the world or the galaxy, it is refreshing to discover this story of a woman and her supportive husband struggling to save her job in the French-speaking section of Belgium. The stakes might be less cosmic than in a superhero epic, but the director/brothers Jean-Pierre Dardenne and Luc Dardenne create just as much suspense in regard to the outcome as you will find in any Marvel Comics movie.

If you enjoyed their delightful 2011 film about the friendship between an abandoned boy and a hairdresser, [The Kid With a Bike](#), you will love this story exploring ethics and relationships among a group of blue collar workers.

Academy Award winner Marion Cotillard (who won for playing Edit Piaf in *La Vie en Rose*) eschews all signs of movie glamor as the working class Sandra Bya, victim of downsizing by Solwal, the small solar panel factory where she is employed. Because she had been off work for some time due to an illness, on a Friday she receives a phone call from her best friend Juliette (Catherine Salee) giving her the bad news about a

vote in which co-workers voted 13 to 3 to terminate her. The factory foreman Jean-Marc has taken a dislike to her. When their company faces a severe budget crunch, he turns the other workers against her and urges them to vote her out.

Sandra rushes to the plant to convince the plant manager M. Dumont (Baptiste Sornin) to hold another vote on the basis that Jean-Marc had stacked the deck against her. He agrees, and so Sandra has until Monday morning to turn the tide. It is a daunting task, working against the clock to reach her scattered workmates. It is also a necessary one, because she and her husband and their two daughters have just moved off the dole and out of public housing into a comfortable apartment, and even own a car. Without her income, they will fall back into poverty.

Sandra is torn inwardly as she shyly approaches each of the workers, mostly face to face, and in a couple of cases, by phone. She apologizes for her intrusion into their private time, obviously not liking the prospect of their having to give up their substantial bonuses so that she can work. She offers no sob story about her little girls. And she never judges, never criticizes a "No" decision. She just asks that they put themselves in her shoes. She walks away with as much of her dignity as her troubled mind can retain, even when the answer is negative.

The workers' reactions and reasons (if given—not all do) are as varied as the people. By the time that Sandra shows up on Monday morning, the tension and suspense are as great as in *High Noon* when we watched the minute hand of the clock approach vertical at "12." The resolution turns out differently than expected, but in a way that lifts up characters and viewers alike. The film has great relevance for working class people in America, as well as in Belgium.

Do not let the prospect of reading subtitles keep you or your film group from this wonderful film. The Dardennes in their

films exhibit such great respect for ordinary people forced by circumstances to cope with problems not of their own making. Sandra is not an earth shaker or reformer like Norma Rae or Joe Kenehan in *Norma Rae* or *Matewan*. She is just a wife and a mother trying to prevent her family from slipping back into poverty.

Most of the other workers also are shown wrestling with the moral dilemma of self-interest versus concern for others. Some of them are apparently like the American workers in a small facility who reportedly agreed to work part-time so that the beleaguered company would not have to lay anyone off. At the very end when Sandra must make a decision about a final offer, she shows what an ethical person she is. In an interview somewhere I read that the Dardennes have said that worker solidarity, as well as job security, was one of their themes in the film. They believe that we do not exist alone, but in relationship with others. Sandra and her good friend Juliette (as well as the faithful Manu) not only realize this, but also live it.

This review with a set of discussion questions will be in the March 2015 issue of Visual Parables.