

I, DANIEL BLAKE– Film at CONCA VERDE on 16.01.17

Talk by Peter Anderson - From WIKIPEDIA

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The film

I, Daniel Blake is a 2016 British-French drama film directed by Ken Loach and written by Loach's frequent collaborator Paul Laverty. The film stars Dave Johns, Hayley Squires, Dylan McKiernan, and Briana Shann. It won the Palme d'Or at the 2016 Cannes Film Festival and the Prix du public at the 2016 Locarno International Film Festival.

Plot

Daniel Blake is a 59-year-old joiner living in Newcastle, a city in North East England. Daniel has had a heart attack at work. His recovery is incomplete and his cardiologist is concerned that Daniel's heart might begin to beat abnormally, putting him at risk of developing a life-threatening arrhythmia. She tells him that he is not ready to go back to work.

Daniel applies for the sickness benefit called 'Employment and Support Allowance'. He gets it at first, but when an eligibility test is carried out, his points tally is slightly below the threshold needed to keep receiving payments. As a result, he is deemed to be able to work. Daniel had assumed that the unspecified healthcare professional who carried out his Work Capability Assessment, a simplistic box-ticking exercise, had contacted his doctor for information on his condition, but she had not. Consequently, the test's criterion for people who are at risk – which would have qualified Daniel for sickness benefits by itself – is not applied by a government "decision-maker". The supervisor at the job centre says Daniel's only option is to claim Jobseekers Allowance. As a condition of receiving Jobseekers Allowance, he must actively look for work. Daniel launches a legal appeal against being found fit for work but he finds it difficult because he is not computer literate.

Daniel gets to know single mother Katie and her two children, Dylan and Daisy, who have left a homeless persons' hostel in London and, with no other affordable accommodation being available in the capital, have moved to Daniel's home town, a place unfamiliar to Katie and her children. On her first visit to the Job Centre Katie was "sanctioned" — her benefits were stopped because she briefly got lost on the way there — and she can no longer feed all her family nor heat their flat.

Widower Daniel, single-parent Katie and her children try to deal with the problems they face together. They visit a food bank and Katie is overcome by hunger. She is slowly drawn into the black economy, while Daniel seeks work on the local industrial estate and is offered a job working in a scrapyards. He reluctantly turns it down, with his doctor's advice in mind. Daniel's "work coach" feels he is not making enough effort to get a job. Daniel becomes disillusioned and sprays "I, Daniel Blake demand my appeal date before I starve" on the job centre's outside wall. The bystanders sympathize with him, but he's taken away by the police and given a formal warning. Daniel sells most of his belongings and becomes very withdrawn.

Finally, Daniel's appeal date arrives. He goes to the appeal court, with Katie to support him, where he meets his welfare rights adviser. The adviser has obtained copies of the medical records and he advises Daniel that his case looks sound. On glimpsing the judge and doctor who will decide on his appeal, Daniel becomes anxious. He goes to the washroom to cool down. Shortly afterwards, someone shouts for an ambulance. Daniel has collapsed. The tribunal doctor is called but finds that Daniel has no pulse. She begins CPR — unsuccessfully.

At his "pauper's funeral", Katie reads the eulogy.

The reviews

On review aggregator website Rotten Tomatoes, the film has an approval rating of 92%, based on 60 reviews, with an average rating of 7.8/10. The site's consensus reads: "I, Daniel Blake marks yet another well-told chapter in director Ken Loach's powerfully populist filmography." On Metacritic the film has a score of 78 out of 100 score, based on 12 critics, indicating "generally favourable reviews".

Box office

I, Daniel Blake became Ken Loach's biggest success at the UK box office, especially as the film sparked debate in the country.

Political response

There have been a wide variety of both praise and criticism of the film from politicians.

Former Work and Pensions Secretary Iain Duncan Smith referred to the film as unfair, aiming particular criticism at its portrayal of Jobcentre staff, saying: "This idea that everybody is out to crunch you, I think it has really hurt jobcentre staff who don't see themselves as that." Producer Rebecca O'Brien responded by stating that Duncan Smith "is living in cloud cuckoo land."

Similarly, on an episode of BBC's topical debate programme *Question Time* broadcast on 27 October 2016, which featured Ken Loach as a panellist, Business Secretary Greg Clark described the film as "a fictional film", saying "It's a difficult job

administering a benefits system... Department of Work and Pensions staff have to make incredibly difficult decisions and I think they should have our support in making those decisions." Loach responded to this by criticising the pressure that DWP staff are placed under.

Conversely, Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn offered glowing praise towards the film - he appeared at the film's London premiere with the director, then subsequently praised the film on his Facebook page. In a session of Prime Minister's Questions on 2 November 2016, he advised Prime Minister Theresa May to watch the film, as he criticised the fairness of the welfare system.

Poverty in the United Kingdom

The United Kingdom is a developed country with comparatively large income differences. As such, those at the lower end of the income distribution have a relatively low standard of living. Data released in 2014 by Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) show that the number of people living in the UK in relative poverty has risen in the period 2012 - 2014. As of 2013, there are 10.6 million people with income below 60% of the inflation-adjusted 2010/11 median (termed "absolute low income" by the DWP), up from 9.7 million in 2012. In 2015, a report by Institute for Fiscal Studies reported that 21.6% of Britons were now in relative poverty, a rate which has been broadly flat since 2004/5. Eurostat figures show that the numbers of Britons at risk of poverty has fallen to 15.9% in 2014, down from 17.1% in 2010 and 19% in 2005 (after social transfers were taken into account).

It has been found by the Poverty and Social Exclusion project at Bristol University in 2014, that the proportion of households lacking three items or activities deemed necessary for life in the UK at that time (as defined by a survey of the wider population) has increased from 14% in 1983 to 33% in 2012.

How poverty in the United Kingdom is defined and measured

Poverty as 60 percent of median income

The most common measure for poverty, as used in the Child Poverty Act 2010, is 'household income below 60 percent of median income'. The median is such an income that exactly a half of households earn more than that and the other half earns less.

Income distribution (Before Housing Costs) for the UK total population (2014/15). In 2014/5, the median income in the UK was £473 (€541) per week (£24,596 a year). Those earning 60% of this figure (£284/€324 a week / £14,758 a year) were considered to be in the low income bracket.

This is the definition that is used by the UK Government's Department of Work and Pensions in its yearly survey *Households below average income*. However, their reports expressly avoid using the word poverty, using low income instead. Reports from others agencies, such as the Institute of Fiscal Studies *Living Standards, Poverty and Inequality in the UK*, use the same methodology, but specifically use the word poverty.

The Consensual Method

As opposed to measuring income, the Consensual Method examines which necessities (eg food, clothing, access to healthcare, involvement in social and leisure activities) are thought by the general public to be essential for living in contemporary UK society. Those families or individual who lack a number of these necessities are considered as poor. In the 2012 Poverty and Social Exclusion (PSE) survey on Living Standards, the three necessities deemed as being most often essential to a good standard of living were the ability 'to warm living areas of the home', a 'damp-free home' and 'two meals a day.'

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The film show

This is the second film in English this year. The next film will be in French – the title being LA FILLE INCONNUE, followed by SNOWDEN in English. There will be a staggering 21 films altogether till summer – 18 in English, 1 in French, 1 in German and 1 in Spanish.

Enjoy the film!