

# Stockbridge Community Cinema

## Programme Notes 15 February 2017

### I, DANIEL BLAKE (15)

2016 1hr 40mins

**Director:** Ken Loach

**Script:** Paul Laverty

**Cast:**

Dave Johns - Daniel Blake

Hayley Squires - Katie Morgan

Dylan McKiernan - Dylan Morgan

Briana Shann - Daisy Morgan

Mick Laffey - Welfare Benefits Advisor

Harriet Ghost - Appeal Receptionist

Helen Dixon - Police Officer

Bryn Jones - Police Officer

Laura Jane Barnes-Martin - Call Centre Advisor

Kema Sikazwe - China

Steven Richens - Piper

Gavin Webster - Joe



Ken Loach's often funny yet intensely moving tale of the friendship between an out-of-work carpenter and a young single mother, forced to navigate the vagaries of the British welfare system, arrives on a wave of critical acclaim which saw its director win the Palme d'Or at this year's Cannes and the BAFTA for the Outstanding British Film of 2016

The eponymous Daniel Blake (comedian, Dave Johns) is an affable, 59-year-old carpenter in Newcastle, fighting to collect his Employment and Support Allowance in the wake of recovering from a recent heart attack. But Government illogic stipulates that his benefits will be taken away unless he looks for work, despite doctor's orders preventing him from working a job should he actually manage to find one. It's whilst waiting to sign on at the local Jobcentre that Daniel befriends Katie (Hayley Squires), a young single mother who herself is being shoved around by the system, having just been relocated with her two kids from a London homeless shelter to an affordable council flat up north. Where at first, Daniel is able to criticise and even laugh at the system that's crushing him, soon his own and Katie's struggles lead to a sense of humiliation, degradation and ultimately despair - despite their attempts to preserve a sense of dignity and make ends meet. So develops an unlikely but mutually beneficial alliance, and the formation of a makeshift extended family as between them they attempt to offer support in the vital areas in life that the welfare state seemingly cannot (or will not?) provide.

With this work of quiet outrage and beauty Loach and his regular screenwriter Paul Laverty deliver a tale of righteous anger that will leave everyone moved. It's a political drama that touches the soul.

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*This interview by Malcolm Lewis with Ken Loach originally appeared on newint.org*

**For more than 50 years you've made political films. Films about working class people. One of your first, 1966's Cathy Come Home, was about a homeless family and the then welfare system. It had a massive impact. The latest I, Daniel Blake is again about the welfare system, and housing policy. It gets over the personal experiences of people at the sharp end forcefully, and poignantly. How did it come about?**

First of all, we started hearing stories about what was going on. The assessments, sanctions, food banks. I went with Paul Laverty, who wrote the script, to half-a-dozen towns and cities where we kept hearing the same sort of thing. Few people are aware of what's going on, and the scale of it, affecting hundreds of thousands of people, many of them feeling ashamed. People here are probably more aware of it happening elsewhere, for example in Greece, but not here in the UK. I hate the word, but for want of a better word, the 'media' has a common interest with government in not disclosing it. Occasionally they do an exposé, but they

present poverty as the fault of the poor. They don't have the right CV to get the job, they're inadequate, that's the line. We have the television programmes about benefits, 'benefits cheats'. They show people who have huge problems – with their health, addiction – and they're presented as undeserving and typical. Almost all the press and certainly the broadcasters have a middle class view of the world and they don't know life as many people experience it.

**How would people find out? At one time there was the Daily Herald, and a Daily Mirror that had people like Paul Foot, John Pilger, writing for it. A publication with more readers than any other, and with strong oppositional voices. Your first films were in the Wednesday Play slot on the BBC, with a huge audience, when there were only three TV channels.**

I think the Thatcherite counter revolution, maybe that's too strong a term, but that development of aggressive capitalism, has affected everyone. It imbued a consciousness that's still prevalent. That entrepreneurs – like Alan Sugar, Sir Phillip Green and the rest of the shoddy bunch – are the way of the world and always will be. There's a huge battle for understanding that there can be change.

**Before I saw the film, I didn't much like the title. But when Daniel Blake writes it, and where he writes it, it's his statement. It's his refusal to be ground down by them. And it strikes a chord, in the film. In the real world, how much impact can a political film have?**

Oh God knows! People in other European countries have recognised what I, Daniel Blake is about. The details change but the principles don't – it's about part of the state that's punishing people. It depends what happens when people leave the cinema, doesn't it!

**In the UK you're put to one side in a political bag – Loach, lefty, Corbynista or whatever. Is it different in wider Europe?**

They have a different idea of cinema. Cinema can be engaged, not narrow. Here you get a label – left, Marxist, provincial – you're one of those and you're dismissed.

**How wide a release will I, Daniel Blake get?**

Quite wide. eOne have been very supportive. It's on for a week in the usual cinemas, then, depending on the audience, more widely. They're also keen to show it outside cinemas. Lots of people do not go to art house cinemas! So eOne will make it available for community centres, trade unions, rooms above pubs. Food banks too! If they want to show it. As a fund raiser, for discussion, whatever use it might have.

**The film is deeply moving, painful at times. I don't think I've ever been so affected by a scene about someone who never appears – or rather, only appears in a little photograph. The scene where Daniel talks about his wife is so touching. All through the film there's this sense that things should be different.**

Well, it's in the writing. Dave plays it very gently, truthfully. It's about him containing his emotion. But in terms of plot we needed someone who was isolated, didn't have a family, or that would have changed the relationship with Katie. It's a beautifully written scene.

**It's not just the writing though, or the acting. Where did you get the photograph? Who was the person?**

Well, we cast an actor. A photographer, who I know well and I've worked with for a long time, went out with her for a day and took pictures in different parts of Newcastle. And it was important that Dan had a memory of his wife, so they had to spend time together. It's the result of a huge collective effort.

**So far you've made more than 50 films. If you had to recommend three of those for people to see, which would they be? Which are you most pleased with.**

I don't know what to say. Not at all. You know, they're all your children.