



# I, DANIEL BLAKE

**Director:** Ken Loach  
**Writers:** Paul Laverty  
**Stars:** Natalie Ann Jamieson, Colin Coombs, Dave Johns  
**Runtime:** 100 minutes

**PLOT:** A middle aged carpenter who requires state welfare after injuring himself, is joined by a single mother in a similar scenario.

**REVIEW:** Ken Loach's latest feature (unveiled in competition in Cannes) is a story of an eminently decent man being ground down by an uncaring British welfare state. Scripted by Loach's regular collaborator Paul Laverty, it is a melodramatic and sometimes very didactic film but also an intensely moving one.

Daniel Blake (Dave Johns) is a Newcastle joiner who has had a heart attack. Warned by the doctor that he is not fit to return to work, he is obliged to sign on for welfare. He is dignified, self-reliant and full of compassion for others. To have to rely on benefits is deeply humiliating to him.

Early on, the film is perceptive and funny in its account of Daniel's quest to receive the allowance he needs to live. We see characters queuing for a small eternity to use food banks. Many of the people working in the job centre are casually cruel to applicants, seemingly oblivious to their desperation. When Daniel sees a young mother (Hayley Squires) being

denied basic support for herself and her two young kids because she is a few minutes late for her appointment, he intervenes on her behalf.

Loach makes some trenchant points about how little contemporary British society values the wisdom and experience of men like Daniel. He doesn't know how to use a computer or navigate his way around the internet. However, he is both a very proficient craftsman and someone with extraordinary gifts of empathy and kindness. He is someone who has always looked out for others and yet, at his time of need, society has no time for him whatsoever.

The film doesn't avoid mawkishness. At

times, with its references to prostitution, illness and homelessness, it has the air of a Victorian morality fable. Dave Johns gives a wonderful performance as Daniel, showing us the character's humour, mischief and resilience as well his determination never to feel sorry for himself or to provoke pity in others. Loach ends the movie a little awkwardly with a set-piece speech that feels contrived. At 80, though, the director has not lost his knack for telling stories about marginalised characters with wit, anger and humanity, making it a deserving candidate for this year's Palme D'Or at the Festival de Cannes.

Source: Independent UK

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