Ken Loach slams ‘brutally callous’ government at 2017 Baftas – video

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Director Ken Loach accepts the Bafta award for Best British Film for his portrayal of life in the British welfare system in I, Daniel Blake. He uses his speech to criticise the government for its “callous brutality” and its attitude towards “the most vulnerable and the poorest people” in our society, and particularly notes that the “disgraceful” cruelty now “extends to keeping out refugee children”

- Ken Loach: Tory government ‘callous, brutal and disgraceful’ and ‘must be removed’

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Ken Loach

Ken Loach: Tory government 'callous, brutal and disgraceful' and 'must be removed'

Accepting the award for best British film at the Bafta awards in London, the veteran director says politicians speak for corporations – and film-makers must stand with the poor and vulnerable

Baftas 2017: Ken Loach slams ‘brutally callous’ government

Catherine Shoard

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Ken Loach has launched an uncompromising attack on the UK government at the 70th British Academy Film Awards.

Speaking as he picked up his award for outstanding British film for I, Daniel Blake, which is conceived as a critique of the current state of the benefits system, Loach touched on accusations by some that his film failed to reflect reality.

Loach thanked his cast and crew, the people of Newcastle and the academy for “endorsing the truth of what this film says, which is that hundreds of thousands of people – the vulnerable and the poorest people – are treated by the this government with a callousness and brutality that is disgraceful.”

Loach continued by making reference to the Tory government’s apparent U-turn on its promise to accept thousands of unaccompanied children fleeing danger in Syria and elsewhere.

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“It’s a brutality,” he said, “that extends to keeping out refugee children we promised to help.”

“In the real world,” added Loach, “it’s getting darker. And in the struggle that’s coming between the rich and the powerful, the corporations and the politicians that speak for them, and the rest of us on the other side, the film-makers know which side they’re on.”

Speaking at the press conference afterwards, Loach went further, saying that the government “have to be removed”. He hoped that voters would see his film, but there was little point politicians doing so as “the people actually implementing these decisions know what they’re doing. It’s conscious.”

Their welfare policies, he said, harked back to the Victorian workhouse ethos of telling people that poverty was their fault. “They know they’re doing. We have to change them; they have to be removed.”

His words were echoed by screenwriter Paul Laverty, who sought to draw attention to the UN's ruling on the UK's treatment of the disabled. "They found systematic and gross violations," he said, before saying the Tories had "denied, spun and tried to discredit" the findings.

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"They don't give a toss," said Laverty, that "scurvy and rickets" had returned to the country, or that "16,000 people were admitted to hospital last year with malnutrition. We have a moral obligation to do one thing, and that's get rid of them."

Meanwhile producer Rebecca O'Brien spoke up for those employees of the Ritzy cinema not being paid the living wage. "We think that's completely wrong in this day and age."

Dave Johns, who stars in the film, added he felt I, Daniel Blake "gives the working class a voice back. People haven't listened to them for 40 years."

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I, Daniel Blake First look review

I, Daniel Blake review: Ken Loach's welfare state polemic is blunt, dignified and brutally moving

There are shades of Dickens and Orwell in this emphatic drama about a disabled man strangled by the red tape of the benefits system

‘This film intervenes in the messy, ugly world of poverty with the secular intention of making us see that it really is happening, and in a prosperous nation, too’ … I, Daniel Blake

Peter Bradshaw in Cannes

Thursday 12 May 2016 20.03 BST

With this movie — maybe his last, and maybe not — Ken Loach establishes himself yet further as the John Bunyan of contemporary British cinema. Based on research and interviews by the screenwriter Paul Laverty, this movie tells the fictional story of Daniel Blake, a middle-aged widower in the North East who can’t work or get benefits after a near-fatal heart attack, and the story is told with stark and fierce plainness: unadorned, unapologetic, even unevolved. Loach’s movie offends against the tacitly accepted rules of sophisticated good taste: subtlety, irony and indirection. The film is not objective, and perhaps Loach and Laverty have signed up to Churchill’s maxim about refusing to be neutral between the fire brigade and the fire.

Ken Loach will insist on behaving as if there really is something urgently wrong, and that we shouldn’t or needn’t get used to food banks as a fact of life; he portrays it all as something which we might actually do something about in the real world, as opposed to invoking injustice as an aesthetic gesture, or a flavour-ingredient of modern social

realist fiction. Many are happy to concede the value of films like this set in the developing world, showing sympathetic people trying to retain their dignity while being hungry. But the same thing set in modern Britain gets dismissed with an embarrassed shrug as strident or hectoring, as if going hungry is impossible for British non-shirkers.

I, Daniel Blake is indeed flawed, I would concede. There are a couple of very big scenes, probably too big, and I saw the ending coming 20 minutes before the movie begins. It would be wrong to label his style austerity, of course. But it has passion and directness and idealism, and very good, unactorly performances from standup comic Dave Johns as Daniel Blake and Hayley Squires as Katie, the single mother from London who is relocated to a council flat in Newcastle, with its cheaper cost of living.

From the very first, Blake is in a perfect storm of bureaucratic misery. He has survived a cardiac arrest, and is told to rest up by his NHS consultant, and not to attempt any more piece-work as a carpenter. But catastrophically, he presents as being quite well; he does not have the wit or cunning to give officialdom the most pessimistic possible account of his infirmity, and in fact instinctively puts the best face on things. A box-ticking assessment from a functionary at the Department for Work and Pensions decides that he is not entitled to sickness benefit.

Meet the real Daniel Blakes

The ensuing Catch-22 concludes that his only income can be from jobseeker's allowance, which he can earn only from exhaustingly being seen to look for work, and attend CV workshops; this cheerfully open, unreflective man is naively candid about his intention to avoid work for his health – so is humiliatingly labelled as a scrounger. Everything has to be applied for online, but Blake has no computer, no smartphone, no internet, and is mortifyingly incompetent at using the terminals in his public library, which crash or freeze just as he is reaching the end of the form, so he must go back to the beginning.

His one friend is Katie, the quick-tempered single mother whom Daniel befriends, becoming a gentle, grandfatherly figure to her two kids Though he is as innocent as a child when it comes to the web, he shows he can fix up their dilapidated flat, and give them savvy tips on keeping it as warm as possible. He does actually like doing work.

The cold, hard grimness of the Jobcentre, with its flat lighting and painted chipboard-partitioned cubicles, puts a brutal glaze on many scenes. So also does the language. The officials have a chilling habit of defusing all complaint, whether face-to-face or on the phone, by insisting that they themselves are not making a ruling – it is all the responsibility of the "decision-maker", as if it is one single person: "decision-maker" is an almost laughably ungainly officialese, which also has something distinctly Orwellian about it.

And then there is the key scene: the mortifying moment in the food bank itself, and wretched, proud Katie endures an unspeakable humiliation, which is almost unbearably moving. The scene is a brutal, tactless evocation of what unthinkable things hunger might do. Dickens wrote in Bleak House that "what the poor are to the poor is little known, excepting to themselves and God". This film intervenes in the messy, ugly world of poverty with the secular intention of making us see that it really is happening, and in a prosperous nation, too. I, Daniel Blake is a movie with a fierce, simple dignity of its own.

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