

## **Beyond I, Daniel Blake.**

The film “*I, Daniel Blake*” portrays the progressive destruction of people’s lives as they move through a chain of progressive sanctions and compulsions within a “benefits” system nominally designed to force people back into the, often deeply destructive and senseless, work of which modern society is composed, or, in other terms, to reinforce hierarchy in society. Yet viewers could well believe that the process depicted is more or less an isolated occurrence within an otherwise desirable process designed to prevent “benefits scroungers” living off the work of others. The amazing paper by David Webster reproduced below, peppered as it is with unimaginable statistics, gives the lie to that view.

These statistics and concerns are further reinforced by the work of Butler (2015)<sup>1</sup> whose further probing into Department of Work and Pensions statistics revealed that, in the first 11 months of 2011, 1300 people deemed fit for work had died along with a further 7,100 who had been allocated to support groups. And between December 2011 and February 2014 another 2380 died after having their claims for support rejected because they had been deemed fit to work. Many more had been driven to suicide because they were simultaneously deemed fit to work by one set of officials and denied job seekers allowance because they were unfit to work by another. The government has blocked access to later statistics.

John Raven

## **INQUIRY INTO BENEFIT SANCTIONS POLICY BEYOND THE OAKLEY REVIEW**

Evidence submitted by

Dr David Webster

Honorary Senior Research Fellow, Urban Studies, University of Glasgow

12 December 2014

### **SUMMARY**

This submission follows earlier submissions on JSA sanctions by the author to the Committee’s *Inquiry into the Role of Jobcentre Plus in the reformed welfare system*. It updates the main facts and figures about JSA and ESA sanctions; corrects misrepresentations about sanctions by Ministers and officials; points out that many of the Oakley review’s recommendations are not being acted upon; exposes the weaknesses in the justifications which the DWP and its predecessors have put forward for their sanctions regime; and argues that the system of sanctions imposed by officials should be scrapped. Sanctions are not an evidence-based system

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<sup>1</sup> Butler, P. (2015). Thousands have died after being found fit for work, DWP figures show. *The Guardian* (August 27). Retrieved June 6, 2015 from <http://www.theguardian.com/society/2015/aug/27/thousands-died-after-fit-for-work-assessment-dwp-figures>

designed to promote the employment, wellbeing and development of the labour force. This is a chaotic system, based on ideology and characterised by cruelty, incompetence, inefficiency, malpractice and dishonesty, which is doing immense damage to the least privileged in our society, and working against many other public and voluntary programmes aimed at addressing social ills. A combination of 'silo' thinking by officials in the DWP and its predecessors, and ideological gestures by politicians, has led to the growth of what is a huge secret penal system, rivalling in its severity the mainstream judicial system but without the latter's safeguards. Sanctions should simply be abolished. Entitlement conditions would have to remain, but they should be based on respect for the claimant and accompanied by an effective safety net for those who do not meet them. 'Active labour market policies' which have something to offer the claimant would carry on and indeed be enhanced by the removal of threat and compulsion.

Full paper available at <http://www.cpag.org.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/CPAG-HofC-Wk-Pens-Sanctions-DW-evidence-Dec-2014.pdf>