

THE WIND THAT SHAKES THE BARLEY

UK/IRL/GER/IT/SP/ 127 mins
SW 2006 Cert 15

Crew and Cast

Director Ken Loach
Screenplay Paul Laverty
Cinematography Barry Ackroyd

Damien Cillian Murphy
Dan Liam Cunningham
Teddy Pádraic Delaney

Synopsis

Ireland, 1920. Irish volunteers fight a guerrilla campaign against the Black & Tans, troops sent from Britain to block Irish independence. Damien, a young doctor with socialist ideals, is about to leave for London but decides to join his brother Teddy in a war against the British after he witnesses the Black & Tans' brutality. When his fellow volunteer Chris, a young stable lad, is pressed by his employer, Sir John Hamilton, into betraying their location, Damien and Teddy are arrested. In prison, Teddy is tortured and Damien meets fellow socialist, Dan. A sympathetic private breaks them out. Damien takes Sir John and Chris hostage in a doomed bid to save some other prisoners from execution; he shoots dead the two men. Later, he begins a romance with local girl Sinead. The volunteers escalate their campaign against the British, who declare a truce. Sinn Fein signs a treaty with Downing Street giving Ireland partial independence. Damien and other volunteers argue to continue fighting. Teddy supports the treaty and the formation of the new Irish Free State. Hostilities break out between pro- and anti-treaty advocates. When Damien and Dan are caught by Teddy's men (now incorporated within the Free-State's army) while raiding their former comrades' weapons, shooting breaks out. Dan is killed; Damien is executed.



Reviews

An unfortunate side-effect of Ken Loach's reputation as a polemicist is the fact that his films are judged primarily as political tracts rather than as works of art. Allow me to start, therefore, by stating that *The Wind That Shakes the Barley*, a tale of brother-against-brother rebellion in 1920s Ireland, is beautifully shot by Loach's longtime cinematographer Barry Ackroyd. The green fields, earth-brown interiors and darkening grey skies provide a striking counterpoint to the black and blue horrors of the war-torn narrative. Favouring natural light, and drawing our eye constantly toward the environment from which this tortured conflict is drawn, the visual imagery reminds us that, like Loach's terrific investigation of the Spanish Civil War, this is a tale of both land and freedom

The Observer. June 2006

Loach's standpoint will be applauded by some as flinty integrity, but it also plays as a grouchy fundamentalism in which all but the most stalwart defenders of Connolly's ideals are demonised. Towards the end of the film he cuts from the defeated Black and Tans marching out of town to a column of uniformed, self-important Free Staters led by Teddy. The implication is that the former freedom fighters have become what they once resisted. But is this fair?

Teddy's pro-treaty beliefs make him a tragic hero in the truest sense: few crimes are as unforgivingly Sophoclean as fratricide. But there is nothing in the film to suggest that he and his men are capable of the calculated butchery of the Black and Tans. Loach has said that he wants the film to



help us to understand the ongoing problems in Northern Ireland. But is his implication that any deviation from Damien's principles is perfidy and his distaste for the very idea of compromise appropriate in these post-Good Friday Agreement times?

Sight & Sound July 2006