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Subject: Heartbreaking
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To: Jon Lansman

Jon,

91 year old Harry Leslie Smith gave one of the most moving speeches I've ever heard at conference last week.

His story about his sister is just heartbreaking. This is something everyone should hear.

You can read his words below or watch his full speech here:

<http://action.labour.org.uk/Harrys-story>

"I came into this world in the rough and ready year of 1923. I am from Barnsley and I can tell you that my childhood, like so many others from that era, was not an episode from Downton Abbey.

Instead, it was a barbarous time. It was a bleak time. It was an uncivilized time because public healthcare didn't exist.

Back then hospitals, doctors and medicine were for the privileged few because they were run for profit rather than as a vital state service that keeps a nation's citizens fit and healthy.

My memories stretch back almost a hundred years, and if I close my eyes, I can smell the poverty that oozed from the dusky tenement streets of my boyhood.

I can taste on my lips the bread and drippings I was served for my tea. I can remember extreme hunger, and my parent's undying love for me. I can still feel my mum and dad's desperation as they tried to keep our family safe and healthy in the slum we called home.

Poor mum and dad. No matter how hard they tried to protect me and my sisters, the cards were stacked against them because common diseases trolled our neighbourhoods and snuffed out life like a cold breath on a warm candle flame.

I still remember hearing while I played as a child on my street the anguished cries that floated from a window on my boyhood street. They were the screams from a woman dying from cancer who couldn't afford morphine to ease her passage from this life.

No one in our community was safe from poor health, sickness and disease. In our home, TB came for my oldest sister, Marion, who was the apple of my dad's eye. Her sickness and his inability to pay for medicine broke his heart.

Tuberculosis tortured my sister and left her an invalid that had to be restrained with ropes tied to her bed. My parents did everything in their power to keep Marion alive and comfortable but they just didn't have the dosh to get her to the best clinics, doctors or medicines.

Instead she wasted away before our eyes until my mother could no longer

handle her care and she was dispatched to our workhouse infirmary where she died 87 years ago. Mum and dad couldn't afford to bury their darling daughter. So like the rest of our country's indigent, she was dumped nameless into a pauper's pit.

My family's story isn't unique. Rampant poverty and no health care were the norm for the Britain of my youth. That injustice galvanized my generation to become, after the Second World War, the tide that raised all boats.

In 1945, at the age of 22, still in the RAF after a long hard Great Depression and a savage and brutal war, I voted for the first time.

Election Day 1945 was one of the proudest days in my life. I felt that I was finally getting a chance to grab destiny by the shirt collar and that is why I voted for Labour and for the creation of the NHS.



Today my heart is with all of those people from my generation who didn't make it past childhood, didn't get an education, didn't grow as individuals, didn't marry, didn't raise a family and didn't enjoy the fruits of retirement. They died needlessly and too early. But my heart is also with the people of the present, who are struggling once more to make ends meet, and whose futures I fear for.

Today, we must be vigilant. We must be vocal. We must demand that the NHS will always remain an institution for the people and by the people.

We must never ever let the NHS free from our grasp because if we do your future will be my past. So I want to say loudly and clearly: Mr Cameron, keep your mitts off my NHS."



Harry Leslie Smith

As Harry says, we must ensure that his past never becomes our future. Help us make sure the NHS is protected for you, your family and generations to come — [donate now to help us win the next election](#).

Thank you. Let's make sure that Harry's history never becomes our future.

Andy

Andy Burnham
Shadow Secretary of State for Health

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