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Harry's Last Stand: How The World My Generation Built Is Falling Down, And What We Can Do To Save It



Synopsis

Ninety-one-year old Harry Leslie Smith became an internet sensation in late 2013 when his article for the Guardian website "This year, I will wear a poppy for the last time" was shared almost sixty thousand times on Facebook, attracting a huge amount of media attention. Born in 1923 in the north of England and a longtime resident of Toronto, Ontario, Leslie Smith witnessed firsthand the horrors of the 1930s depression and the rebuilding of the world out of the rubble of the Second World War. He now fears that history is repeating, and with a voice as angry as it is lyrical, Harry shows us younger generations what the world looks like to him and why we shouldn't take it lying down. Harry Leslie Smith is a second world war RAF veteran and, at ninety-one, an activist for the poor and for the preservation of social democracy. He lives outside Toronto, Ontario.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

'A kind of epic poem, one that moves in circular fashion from passionate denunciation to intense autobiographical reflection ... should be required reading for every MP, peer, councillor, civil servant and commentator. The fury and sense of powerlessness that so many people feel at government policy beam out of every page.' * Melissa Benn, Guardian * 'Smith's unwavering will to turn things around makes for inspirational reading.' * Big Issue North * '[With] sheer emotional power ... Harry Leslie Smith reminds us what society without good public services actually looks and feels like.' -- Melissa Benn * New Statesman * 'Mr Smith's is a rousing, earthy writing that's part Tony Harrison, part Dennis Skinner' * NudgeMeNow.com * 'This hymn of wrath against the toxic nexus of money

and power in austerity UK from a Bradford pauper's son, excommunicated from the Catholic church for marrying an "enemy" woman in post-war Germany, is a compelling life-verdict.' * Paul Routledge, The Tablet * 'Harry's Last Stand is fast becoming a well-deserved publishing phenomenon. It is a breathtaking argument, brilliantly delivered, who said only the new generation have the capacity to make a difference?' -- Mark Perryman * Left Futures * 'A moving first-person account from 91-year-old Harry Leslie Smith of growing up before the creation of the welfare state and NHS. Making a simple, emotive case for progressive politics, Smith was the star turn at this year's Labour party conference.' * Guardian [Best Political Books of 2014] * 'Harry Leslie Smith is absolutely one of my heroes. Everyone should read this and be humbled.' -- Annie Lennox 'It is not enough to read Harry's record of the struggles and hopes of a generation - we have to re-assert his principles of common ownership and the welfare state. If Harry can do it, we should too!' -- Ken Loach 'I read Harry's Last Stand in a single sitting. Labour should read to get fire in bellies. Tories should read in shame.' -- Alastair Campbell 'Seek this one out. If it doesn't make you angry there's something wrong with you. It's inspirational stuff.' -- Rick O'Shea Shortlisted for 'Polemic of the Year' - Paddy Power Political Book Awards 2015

Harry Leslie Smith is a survivor of the Great Depression, a second world war RAF veteran and, at 91, an activist for the poor and for the preservation of social democracy. His Guardian articles have been shared over 80,000 times on Facebook and have attracted huge comment and debate. He has authored numerous books about Britain during the Great Depression, the second world war and postwar austerity. He lives outside Toronto, Canada and in Yorkshire.

Harry's Last Stand is Mr. Smith's opus on social justice. He lived through the Depression, fought in WWII, and survived the hunger and want of his childhood. In this work, he speaks out against inequality and the need for our government to bolster the social safety net in both England and the U.S. He rails against the corporations that shelter or dodge their share of taxes and how lower and middle income citizens are buffeted by the 10% who control the wealth (and the politicians in our respective governments). A must read!

This should be compulsory reading in schools!

Harry Smith has a lot to say, and thinks he might have little time to say it. He is in his 90s now, and has lived through the worst grinding poverty of the Depression. He saved himself by joining the

Royal Air Force in World War II, where he finally had a real bed to sleep in, real clothing, real food every day, and a purpose. And despite the discrimination of the class system, he did all right. For someone with precious little education, he is remarkably well versed in history, politics, sociology, pop culture and social media. He knows exactly what's going on and going down, and seems totally comfortable handling the issues of the day. The entire book is based on this premise: "After it was done and the war won, the politicians promised us that no one in this country would face that type of unemployment and helplessness ever again. So I really don't know why the Western world wants to go back to those bleak, unhappy times without a murmur of real dissent." He piles on the evidence of the shrinking of programs, the rise in living costs, the disappearance of opportunity and of hope. Expensive schools, expensive healthcare, and massive subsidies to business are the wrong way to build a country, except for the rich, who get richer from it. He is very clear that austerity is the wrong solution to a bad situation. Just as it was in the Depression. Smith writes with precision and clarity, dancing between the present and his own past with ease. It gives the book a needed lift and makes it a fast-paced read. His obviously left-leaning insights are not new, but his fears are different from the usual political dross. His views are not dimmed by age. Neither is his grasp of the issues. He sees things much more clearly than most of our elected officials. He has perspective from direct experience. And having lived most of his life in Yorkshire and Toronto, is frustratingly familiar with all our governments' failures. He would like to see more participatory democracy, more restrictions on the ultra rich and their corporations, more of the common man in government, and most of all, a welfare state (safety net in the USA) that made such a gigantic difference to life in the UK after the war. Margaret Thatcher disassembled much of it in the UK, as Ronald Reagan did in the USA. The result is corporations running the world, increasing debt everywhere but corporate bank accounts, and struggles reminiscent of the Depression. He has been witness to the greatest transfer of wealth in history, from tax dollars to corporate coffers. For him, we are coming full circle in just his lifetime, and that is nothing to be proud of. David Wineberg

A relative of Harry's said, "The world has changed a lot since you were a boy." Harry didn't want to disagree, but thought the problem is that it hasn't changed enough. He feels it is easy today, to ignore or misunderstand the lessons the past can teach us about today's world. Harry Leslie Smith is a ninety year old RAF WWII veteran, who lived through hell and wants to leave this earth sharing his ideas for a better world. Besides taking readers through his life's journey, he talks about politics, business, health care,

citizenship, and education of his home country of England; however, he includes the United States. Harry's three main points on education: "Performance based education will only encourage the flight of the best human capital to private institutions." "We have to make ensure that our education system is more than just a factory to turn out obedient workers." "We need a national service that obliges all young people during their gap year to travel the country and learn about their neighboring regions." His points on business: "If no one felt they were better than anyone else, and each person understood their efforts built a better company and a better life for themselves, then this would create an almost perfect system of work. Small businesses that may not be able to afford to implement the living wage should opt to make written contracts with their employees that allow for fair profit sharing." On health care: "Humanity cannot evolve when its rulers are only interested in the profit and loss of their most affluent constituents and ignore the rest of their citizens." On politics: "Defeat social inequality by establishing a social welfare state." On citizenship: "Being engaged and part of a vibrant democracy is one way to ensure that you matter, regardless of where you stand on society's ladder." "In other words, vote. In addition, Harry thinks the voting age should be seventeen years of age. There are more stories and opinions Harry Smith leaves his readers. To understand all his points of view, read Harry's Last Stand. He ends the book saying, "So, before we are no more, we should aspire to do something that makes us a better human being." "Thank you, Harry, for this book of wisdom and considerations for a better world."

Harry Leslie Smith talks to the reader as if he were standing directly in front of you, holding your shoulders and giving you a gentle but firm shake to wake you out of your slothful thinking and look at the reality around you. He writes with cogent authority about the long road of life he has travelled and the many paths he has traversed, but he has not wallowed in nostalgia -- his memories are gritty and clear-headed. He sees what extraordinary chances his country and most of the western world were given after WW2 to create social welfare systems that really did protect the citizens with a valuable safety net -- in work, education and health -- and how we have allowed our governments and their corporate masters to unravel the good that has been done so that now only the rich continue to prosper. But this is not a bitter book. Harry is a man with his feet firmly in the present and his voice level and encouraging -- he wants us to hear his ideas and work hard on our own solutions to change what we don't like and speak up for what we do. Every politician and stockbroker should read Harry's history lesson and take notes. A very good read .

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