

A message of resistance

Published: January 12, 2026, 10:12 pm

The following is from the Independent but other papers have covered the story:

Take a book of just 13 pages, written by a relatively obscure 93-year-old man, which contains no sex, no jokes, no fine writing and no startlingly original message. A publishing disaster? No, a publishing phenomenon.

Indignez vous! (Cry out!), a slim pamphlet by a wartime French resistance hero, Stéphane Hessel, is smashing all publishing records in France. The book urges the French, and everyone else, to recapture the wartime spirit of resistance to the Nazis by rejecting the "insolent, selfish" power of money and markets and by defending the social "values of modern democracy".

The book, which costs £3, has sold 600,000 copies in three months and another 200,000 have just been printed. Its original print run was 8,000. In the run-up to Christmas, Mr Hessel's call for a "peaceful insurrection" not only topped the French bestsellers list, it sold eight times more copies than the second most popular book, a Goncourt prize-winning novel by Michel Houellebecq.

As the Independent notes

As a political tract, the book contains no especially original analysis of the world's problems.

"They dare to tell us that the State can no longer afford policies to support its citizens," Mr Hessel says. "But how can money be lacking ... when the production of wealth has enormously increased since the Liberation (of France), at a time when Europe was ruined? The only explanation is that the power of money ... has never been so great or so insolent or so selfish and that its servants are placed in the highest reaches of the State."

The originality of the book is the suggestion that an organised "Resistance" is now called for, just like in 1940. "We, veterans of the resistance ... call on young people to revive and pass on the heritage and ideals of the Resistance," the book says.

But:

How people should resist the power of money and the markets — by peaceful means, the book insists — is not made entirely clear.

The Independent selected the following key messages from the text:

** "I would like everyone — everyone of us — to find his or her own reason to cry out. That is a precious gift. When something makes you want to cry out, as I cried out against Nazism, you become a militant, tough and committed. You become part of the great stream of history ... and this stream leads us towards more justice and more freedom but not the uncontrolled freedom of the fox in the hen-house."*

** "It's true that reasons to cry out can seem less obvious today. The world appears too complex. But in this world, there are things we should not tolerate... I say to the young, look around you a little and you will find them. The worst of all attitudes is indifference..."*

** "The productivist obsession of the West has plunged the world into a crisis which can only be resolved by a radical shift away from the 'ever more', in the world of finance but also in science and technology. It is high time that ethics, justice and a sustainable balance prevailed..."*

So what's this all about? You could dismiss it as romanticism, but that would be wrong, I am sure. This is about the fact that a person has had the courage to say "It is high time that ethics, justice and a sustainable balance prevailed..." and a great many agree.

Très bon, I say. Because the message is right.

But I would reiterate that opposition must be by peaceful means.