

Unignorable thesis

By Louise Lucas

Published: February 12 2010 02:00 | Last updated: February 12 2010 02:00

What to make of the "peaceful corporate revolution" being urged on Royal Dutch Shell, where nameless, ostensible employees are taking it to task over activities in Nigeria?

Big companies, particularly those dredging the heavily geopolitical waters of oil, inevitably come under attack. When you produce something that generates big money, often in countries where poverty is rife and human rights abuses abound, there is plenty of scope for criticism. There is also plenty of scope for confusion as to what an oil giant can and cannot do: insisting that a government's oil revenues are funnelled into hospitals and schools is laudable, but presidents of countries are free to think otherwise.

EDITOR'S CHOICE

[Shell staff details leaked to campaign groups](#) - Feb-12

[Total and Statoil struggle to grow](#) - Feb-11

[Energy sector shows M&A surge in 2009](#) - Feb-11

[Shell to cut jobs and refining as profits fall](#) - Feb-04

[Shell in \\$12bn Brazilian ethanol partnership](#) - Feb-01

[Shell makes good in biofuels promises](#) - Feb-01

In many ways, Shell has got off lightly. These are not a whistleblower's revelations - regardless of what the writers say, the grievances have all been rehearsed before. The self-styled dissidents, assuming they are genuine employees, are supposedly 100-odd strong, hardly enough to launch even a gentle rearguard action, and intent on protecting their anonymity.

Amateurism hangs over the campaign. The list of employees which has been leaked is, Shell says, six months out of date. Guesstimates made in the 36,000-word manifesto are as pointless as they are painful: "Almost all (99.5%) of common & low-level Shell employees" are unaware of Shell's behaviour in Nigeria as are "possibly all (100%) of Shell's institutional investors". It is sometimes repetitive and ungrammatical and occasionally more earnest than coherent - not dissimilar to an undergraduate thesis.

That said, big business can no more ignore the hippies, whether within its ranks or not, than it can shrug off Hollywood (for whom corporate malfeasance has provided a rich seam - from *Erin Brockovich* to *The Constant Gardner*). Slow-burning protests do sometimes assume a life of their own: in China, PetroChina's flotation was dogged by its activities in Sudan. That is why Shell cannot ignore the claims, however flaky they may appear.

louise.lucas@ft.com

andrew.hill@ft.com

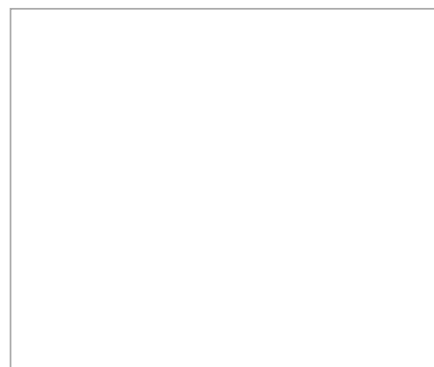
To comment, visit www.ft.com/lombard

Copyright The Financial Times Limited 2010. You may share using our article tools. Please don't cut articles from FT.com and redistribute by email or post to the web.

[Print article](#) [Email article](#) [Order reprints](#)

[Twitter](#) [Digg](#) [LinkedIn](#) [Yahoo! Buzz](#) [Delicious](#)

[reddit](#) [Mixx](#) [Facebook](#) [stumbleupon](#) [Viadeo](#)



LATEST HEADLINES FROM CNN

[Indonesia corruption woes rise](#)
[Canadians try to guess who will light Olympic flame](#)
[Judge yet to rule on Americans in Haiti](#)
[Bound, gagged women among bodies found in Afghanistan](#)
[Backyard inventions struggle to permeate India's markets](#)

[More](#)

[Jobs](#) [Business for sale](#) [Contracts & tenders](#)

SEARCH

[Head of Economic Policy Team](#)

[Office of Fair Trading](#)

[Head of Asset Management \(Electrification and Plant\) Network Rail](#)

[Business Development Director](#)

[Pera](#)

[Head Of Finance](#)

[Blue Chip Retailer](#)

RECRUITERS

FT.com can deliver talented individuals across all industries around the world

[Post a job now](#)

RELATED SERVICES

FT Lexicon	MBA-Direct.com
FT Bespoke Forums	FT Newspaper subscriptions
Annual reports	FT Diaries
Market research	FT Bookshop
Growth companies	FT Conferences
Corporate subscriptions	FT Syndication services
Luxury Travel brochures	The Non-Executive Director
Analyst Research	