

RETURN OF THE ROBBER BARONS

I hope that Shell UK is thoroughly ashamed at the articles published in the January 1999 edition of Forecourt Trader concerning its relationship with Shell station operators.

We knew from our recent retailer survey of over 1500 Shell stations that all is not well. 55% of respondents said that Shell UK operates in an unethical manner. 50% said Shell's STATEMENT OF GENERAL BUSINESS PRINCIPLES is a sham.

Shell did not take up our public challenge to commission and publish the results of independent research asking the same questions and offering respondents GUARANTEED anonymity. We now know the reason why. They have good reason to avoid taking any action that would further confirm the disgust in which they are held by a growing number of Shell retailers.

Forecourt Trader reports that it has been contacted by a number of Shell retailers who have a list of serious grievances against Shell. All insisted on remaining anonymous apparently out of fear of reprisal by Shell. They complained that Shell's actions were rendering their businesses unprofitable. In other words, Shell's greed is sending them broke.

Forecourt Trader was so concerned that it conducted its own poll of Shell operators. It has published their comments, all of which strongly criticised Shell. Again, none wanted to be identified. According to the report, Shell actually has a quick-response team ready to take over sites where the operators have given up and handed back their keys. Apparently "the team is stretched to breaking point". That situation alone speaks volumes. Despite the overwhelming evidence to the contrary, Shell denies that there are problems.

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A number of Shell station operators have contacted us during the period of my families' problems with Shell. They have made very serious allegations, including for example, that Shell is evil and immoral. Such is the apparent degree of intimidation by Shell that most have insisted on remaining anonymous.

One has however been prepared to go on the record. Former Police Officer, Mr Patrick Bradshaw, from Hayes in Middlesex, had a long business relationship with Shell. He operated a number of Shell stations. He has written to Mr Mark Moody-Stuart, Chairman of the Royal Dutch Shell Group, alleging that Shell UK robbed him of his livelihood due to the underhand manner and deceit of Shell UK management. He also mentioned in his letter the "bully boy tactics" that we have become so familiar with during the tenure of Dr Fay, the "feudal baron" Chairman of Shell UK who has suddenly opted for "retirement".

As a result of the stress brought about by Shell's actions, Mr Bradshaw was left in a distressed state, both physically and financially. I note that the term "distressed", was used by Forecourt Trader in relation to the feelings of the operators still being exploited by this unsavoury oil giant.

Mr Bradshaw has given me permission to publish extracts from a letter that he has sent to Mr John McDonnell MP. In the letter, he says: "I feel that I have been treated totally unfair by a large multi-national company that has the power and the finance to push me aside. Management can falsify the truth without a moment's hesitation..." He mentions "Shell's ruthlessness and cheating practices" and also states that "Shell's bad reputation stems solely from the actions of its senior management".

It appears historians were wrong in believing that the "robber baron" age had ended. Oil baron Shell self-evidently operates oppressively and exploitatively, using the ancient tactics of fear and intimidation against the modern day equivalent of the peasant - small traders being forced to operate on the breadline. That is the unpalatable truth of the matter.

The HQ of Royal Dutch Petroleum, the effective owner of Shell UK (with a 60% shareholding in the Royal Dutch/Shell Group) is located in The Hague, a city renowned throughout the world as being a beacon of justice. It is therefore ironic that Royal Dutch Petroleum is continuing to allow the unscrupulous actions of the British owned (40%) of the Anglo-Dutch group to destroy the reputation of the Shell brand.

**Published by Alfred Donovan – Chairman, Shell Shareholders Org.
St Andrews Castle, Bury St Edmunds, IP33 3PH. Tel: 0411 526 769.
Fax: 01284 760529 Website: www.shell-shareholders.org**