

Where is passion for Cadbury?



Doesn't anyone care anymore? Kraft, a US multinational best known for cheese spread (cheese spread, for heaven's sake) is bidding for Cadbury, one of the last remaining truly iconic British names, and we have not heard a peep of protest.

When Citigate mounted the defence of Rowntree against Jacob Suchard, the Swiss chocolatier, way back in 1988, we created a national protest movement. Questions were asked in Parliament, 'Save Rowntree' stickers appeared throughout the City, newspapers ran KitKat and Smarties campaigns, people focused on the good works of the Joseph Rowntree trusts and clever analysts found new ways of placing a financial value on brands. KitKat sales went through the roof.

“ Now Cadbury is just another multinational, run by an American and substantially owned by US investors ”

Management, staff, unions, politicians, the great British public and even the media were united. No way was Johnny Foreigner going to roll Rowntree over!

Today the issues are much the same: a bid that clearly undervalues Cadbury from a company with problems of its own; a threat to a famous business with a Quaker history steeped in good works; and the likelihood that manufacturing jobs will go as production is rationalised.

Ultimately, of course, Rowntree accepted a counter offer from Nestlé, which rode in as a white(-ish) knight with a much higher offer. But it was a great deal for shareholders; many very senior Rowntree people stayed; the trusts have gone from strength to strength; and, by and large, Nestlé has kept its promises on jobs and production. KitKat remains the most famous chocolate wafer of them all.

Cadbury, though, lost its way, merged with Schweppes and acquired Dr Pepper, only to be dismantled again by a de-merger forced through by an activist shareholder, Nelson Peltz, leaving it vulnerable to a bid. Now it is just another multinational, run by an American and substantially owned by US investors. In due course, Kraft will either be forced to raise its offer or someone else will come in. The sad reason there is so little passion about Cadbury is that it has become just another company to be bought or sold, a brand without a soul: all that is left is nostalgia.