
Lowell J. Satre, *Chocolate on Trial: Slavery, Politics and the Ethics of Business*, Athens, Ohio University Press, 2005. xii+337pp.

This is the story of how Quaker-owned Cadbury Brothers (English chocolate manufacturers), British humanitarian societies and the British Foreign Office dealt with the issue of slave-produced cocoa. The author has chosen to write a meticulously referenced work that may excite the professional historian but will leave the lay reader drowning in detail and searching for current relevance. The issues raised include labour conditions in developing countries, world trade in food, economic concentration of the food industry, ethical versus commercial considerations. These are as important today as in the early 1900s; the present situation is described only in a short chapter at the end of the book.

In 1901 William Cadbury heard that the cocoa from the Portuguese colonies of Sao Tome and Principe was possibly produced by slave labour. The recruiting practices were claimed to be horrendous and extremely high death rates the norm.

In 1904, American journalist Henry Nevinson visited Angola, the source of the labour, and the Islands. His *exposé* raised awareness and concern about this modern slavery. Pressure was brought to bear on the Foreign office to induce Portugal to live up to its anti-slavery treaty obligations. The Foreign Office was reluctant to press its ally and Britain was herself tolerating harsh labour practices in South Africa, and little changed.

William Cadbury, after satisfying himself that *de facto* if

not *de jure* slavery was taking place, mounted efforts over several years to convince Portuguese authorities and planters to abandon forced recruitment and to repatriate workers at the end of their contracts. After minimal progress, humanitarian organizations such as The Anti-Slavery Society unsuccessfully put pressure on Cadbury to stop purchasing slave-produced cocoa. A charge of hypocrisy was leveled at Cadbury in a Newspaper editorial in 1908 and led to a famous court case where Cadbury Bros. won a libel suit but the jury awarded derisory damages of one farthing.

Why is this story important? In July 2005 The International Labor Rights Fund took the current industry giants to court to stop the purchase of cocoa produced by West African child slaves. Industry response has been quick and positive. The book could have benefited from a larger comparison of the two cases, separated by almost exactly a century.

It is also the case that other issues might have been better treated, for the lay reader, if they were situated in a broader context. Perhaps foremost is the effectiveness of product boycotts. Cadbury resists this tactic for reasons that are heard today whenever boycotts are suggested. Were Cadbury Bros. to stop buying Portuguese cocoa, Cadbury argued, they would have no influence on the planters or the authorities. Further, other less scrupulous buyers would immediately replace them. When Cadbury with the other English firms did begin a boycott in 1909 this is exactly what happened. The author claims that nonetheless conditions did improve on the islands but the reader is left unclear as to the impact of the boycott on this improvement since numerous other changes were introduced. By this time, Cadbury had also arranged for other sources of cocoa, notably peasant produced cocoa from the Gold Coast. In this way, he was not forced to choose between his own workers and the slaves. The debate on ethics versus commerce deserved a more complete treatment.

Another issue rather poorly developed is the treatment and profitability of slaves. The relative profitability of slave production (versus peasant or sharecropped production) is not discussed. The text is somewhat confusing: the high cost of slave labour is frequently asserted but at the same time high levels of profitability are also claimed. In terms of treatment, there has always been a contentious argument that it was in the interests of slave owners to treat slaves well given their investment and most

contemporary commentators claimed that the Sao Tome slaves were not badly treated - nonetheless, there was a very high death rate.

Political historians will profit from the detailed account of the way the Foreign Office balanced competing demands from various stakeholders. However, the claim that the Foreign Office decided to do little to stop slavery is left to hang rather unconvincingly on the argument that it was because of the importance of a traditional Portuguese Alliance and England's reliance on the importation of labour for its South African mines from the Portuguese colony of Mozambique.

In conclusion, the author successfully captures the "feel" of the times and personalizes history but misses the opportunity to enter into larger issues that might attract a wider audience.

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