

## War on Want land a blow on Alliance Boots

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War on Want started a new campaign against the tax affairs of Alliance Boots yesterday, and have at least three articles on the issue in the FT this morning. [One says](#) :

*Alliance Boots, which owns one of the UK's oldest and most trusted high street brands, has come under fresh pressure from campaigners over how much tax it pays.*

*The claims are the latest allegations aimed at reinforcing public anger that large companies can use complex arrangements to minimise their tax bills within the law.*

*Two organisations — War on Want and Change to Win — said the way Alliance Boots handled deals between the company and entities controlled by Stefano Pessina, its executive chairman, broke OECD guidelines.*

The essence of the claim is that not enough information has been disclosed on a complex debt deal to know who really profited from it, where, why and with what UK tax implication.

The appeal to the OECD is clever, and new: I welcome it. The UK government is forced to act as a result. But the win has already been secured in a very real sense. The Lombard column in the FT has this headline:

*Alliance Boots can dispel WoW factor with disclosure*

Precisely right: tax haven secrecy is key to the issue here.

The [same column adds](#):

*Alliance Boots has all the characteristics a tax campaigner could ask for in a target. It is a trusted healthcare retailer, founded, like Cadbury, by philanthropic Victorians. But in its modern incarnation it is a tax-savvy group, which was purchased for £12bn in 2007 by Kohlberg Kravis Roberts and entrepreneur Stefano Pessina.*

*War on Want is the latest righter of perceived wrongs attracted by the contrast. The charity alleges that “entities apparently controlled by Mr Pessina have achieved*

*exceptionally profitable results" from offshore transactions.*

*AB "categorically refutes" the claims, which it says are defamatory. Sadly for the group, Britons are now predisposed to believe the worst of businesses.*

Is anyone surprised by that?

Good work by WoW it seems to me, including their admission that this is not an open and shut case but about knowing what happened: accountability is key, as ever.