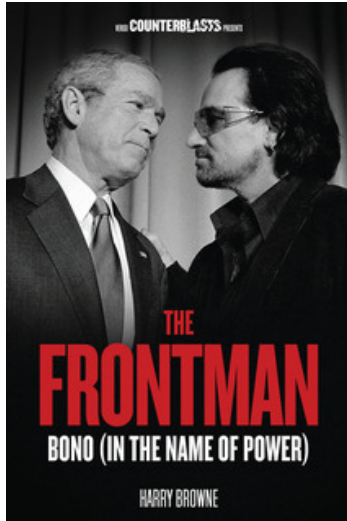


Review: Harry Browne, *The Frontman: Bono (In The Name of Power)*

James O'Toole



Harry Browne, *The Frontman: Bono (In The Name of Power)* Verso, 2013 £9.99

Bono is a good liar - a very good liar. I suppose to some extent the ability to suspend reality and create myths is something all musicians engage in, creating their own 'legend', but Bono's myth has gone from a pitch made to Hot Press magazine in the early days to being a 'working class' origin story told for the benefit of American audiences; a myth that went on to set up countless businesses and sell millions of records. The problem is that Bono's 'talent' for creating myths took a much more sinister turn when he became the 'humanitarian' cover for imperial conquerors and a PR man for the 1%.

Harry Browne's book covers Bono's rise from his early days in Christian prayer groups to the growth of his myriad of companies. As Browne himself says of the book: 'The Frontman considers Bono as a political operator,' not as a musician. The music business is a realm of venture capitalists, cut throat competition and lies lies lies - whatever it takes to sell units. From the beginning Bono presented himself as being from Ballymun in Dublin when in fact he was from a nice middle class

home. He even used the fact that his parents were one Catholic and one Protestant to insinuate that the conflict in the North was somehow raging in this middle class house. As if the sedate parochial concerns of a middle class Dublin upbringing were somehow equivalent to the Falls Road in Belfast.

Meeting manager Paul McGuinness meant that U2 had a strong businessman at the helm of their money making operations who could be tough so that they didn't have to appear as businessmen. But in case things weren't working out for them they were courting friends in high places. McGuinness was a supporter of Fianna Fail getting himself a place on the Arts Council, and access to funds, and Bono himself was a big fan of Fine Gael's Garrett Fitzgerald. The Fine Gael line on the North, that the IRA were the problem not decades of discrimination and British Imperialism, sat comfortably with Bono. He even wrote a song about it.

The 'Self Aid' concert Bono organised in the 80s was a Thatcherite call to the unemployed to pull themselves up by their own individual bootstraps. A consistent concern for Bono has been not to implicate the system in any of the problems we face in the world. The solution to all the world's problems is to throw an arm around the powerful and appeal to their better natures. The book reads like a who's who of the rich and powerful, from the Kennedy clan in the US to World Bank directors and British Prime Ministers.

Promoter Jim Aiken, burning a few bridges, said that "U2 are arch capitalists; they don't seem like it but they are." And like a lot of other arch capitalists avoiding paying any tax was a key aim of U2 incorporated. Up until 2006 they enjoyed Ireland's tax exemption status for artists and as soon as that stopped they upped and left for Amsterdam. Bono was in full accord with the tax perspectives of Fianna Fail who were intent on turn-

ing Ireland into the light touch de-regulated tax haven that it has now become:

There are some very clever people in Government and in the revenue who created a financial architecture that prospered the entire nation

So the orgy of property speculation and tax get out of jail free cards issued by Fianna Fail which came crashing down in 2008 was to Bono's liking. Well, he was making money wasn't he? When tax protesters started to make some noise about the fact that Bono was playing the tax avoidance game he was able to use his charity ONE to put pressure on NGOs to shut up. It pays to be a big player in the charity game. Through the company "Not Us Ltd" Bono was able to create a money web which led to the threat of striking them off the company register for not filing returns. Not Us Ltd at one point owed €4.7 million to U2. Google could learn a thing or two about setting up holding companies and shell firms.

Not content with making lots of cash and hiding it Bono also has a messiah complex. World debt really angers him apparently. Not the massive debts that were accruing as capitalists like Bono moved cash to tax havens and gambled on stocks and shares but the debts of African nations. Bono didn't want a challenge to the system he wanted to liberate

Africa from debt to get their economies going so the West would benefit from the business. So Bono made friends with Jeffrey Sachs, the man responsible for the ultra monetarist policies imposed on the Eastern Bloc when the wall fell. The whole of Bono's debt 'campaigning' involved convincing people that Bush, Blair and co were doing the best they could and could be 'reasoned with'.

Next up for Bono was his 'Red' label. Save the world by buying a designer bag, a pair of expensive shoes or an iPad with U2's latest album on it (on special offer of course!). Sell your way to utopia; enlist corporate sponsors for 'protest' concerts. Bono's happy, the corporations are happy, those in power are happy. So why aren't you happy for them? Says Bono:

I truly believe when the history books will be written our age will be remembered for three things: the war on terror, the digital revolution and what we did or did not do to put the fire out in Africa

Harry Browne's book is well worth a read for activists. You probably already dislike Bono and know that he's a pompous self aggrandising tax avoiding capitalist git but what the book shows is that there's a seriously sinister role he plays covering this brutal system with grand lies that veil the true role of the system and those in power.