



Alan Jones

November 1998

WHAT A GLITTERING OCCASION. THE string quartet. The dining room filled with flowers. The young choir singing carols as each of the 50 guests arrives. This is truly a Christmas-cheer gathering of illustrious names—politicians, editors, leading lights of industry, business, sport, entertainment.

Much later in the night, after the magicians have departed with their party tricks and the music has died down, the host appears, microphone in hand, moving through the crowd to deliver a running commentary on each and every person gathered before him.

There he is beside Bob Carr, offering a potted history of the NSW Premier's career. Now he's next to John Alexander, at this time editor-in-chief of *The Sydney Morning Herald*. Over he goes to David Campese, one of the doyens of Australian Rugby . . . 'Outstanding individual,' he says of one man. 'Wonderful human being,' he enthuses of another. It's a stellar performance. Who else could pull it off? For more than an hour the room is in hushed fascination. Men more accustomed to throwing their weight around Cabinet and boardrooms are now hanging on every word. Who is this commanding presence? This Caesar without the toga?

To describe Alan Jones merely as the host of a radio talk program is to call the Hope diamond a bauble. For all his protestations that he's simply the humble voice of Struggle Street, the mouthpiece for the fears and concerns of ordinary Australians, Jones is arguably one of the most influential—and thus feared—figures in Australia. Five days a week on Sydney radio station 2UE, his top-rating demagogic breakfast program has the ears of as many as 600,000 Australians—many of them politicians, bank chiefs

The Whites of their Eyes

and bureaucrats, terrified that it will be their turn to be tongue-lashed or called to account. And it doesn't stop there: those three-and-a-half hours often shape the headlines for the rest of the day.

There is no-one quite like him. He is a river of words, as comfortable talking about the last race at Caulfield as he is discoursing on the Bard. ('His brain is a fucking industry,' says his manager and adviser, Harry M. Miller.) He is unstoppable, dominating, mesmerising, possessed of an almost frightening energy. The Emperor. The Parrot. The Mouth. Nothing and no-one, it seems, fazes him. Earlier this year he was of a mind to lecture the prime minister for half an hour on the subjects of law and order, protectionism and the Asian economies. It was at a private dinner in a Sydney waterfront apartment and John Howard, along with the four other guests, just sat there and listened.

Jones is a man with more than a few friends in high places. In April, he called Kerry Packer to help fly the then very sick Canberra footballer Ricky Stuart to Sydney for specialist treatment. 'Kerry,' he said after he'd interrupted the 'Big Fella' at a meeting, 'what's your aeroplane doing today?' Within an hour the Packer plane was on standby at Sydney airport.

As host of the country's top breakfast show, Jones is richly rewarded. His contract with 2UE brings him between \$15 million and \$20 million over five years. Companies seem to like to be associated with him—he has had free travel around Australia with Ansett four years running and now Qantas is apparently picking up the tab for thousands of dollars worth of trips a year. Mercedes-Benz reportedly not only provides him with a complimentary car but also offered to send someone to his home to wash it for him.

At his best, Alan Jones is a fascinating, electrifying presence, capable of almost limitless generosity. At his worst, he is given to outbursts of rage and petulance that baffle even those closest to him.

Having him as your ally can be a huge advantage. Getting on his wrong side can be the mistake of a lifetime. Such is the nature of the man that, of the nearly 100 people spoken to for this article, only a handful were prepared to be named. Some people expressed fear of commercial or political retribution. 'He could destroy my company,' said one. 'If I want to be employed again in Sydney I have to be really careful,' said another. 'You could end up losing your job or being sued,' says a third. 'He has a ridiculous amount of power.'

And yet for someone who prides himself on fearless appraisal of public figures, he's extremely sensitive when it comes to scrutiny of himself. On more than one occasion, he has upbraided journalists for having the gall to ask him the kind of questions he would think nothing of asking others.

Alan Jones

He also likes to be protected. That's where Harry Miller comes in. Jones says that if you've got to have a dog at the door, make sure it's an alsatian. Harry Miller is the alsatian.

As this article got under way, it is understood that Miller contacted a number of individuals and organisations who have had dealings with Jones and him to ask them not to co-operate with me. Jones also made approaches to John Fairfax (publishers of this article) threatening defamation action in advance of publication.

Like all Grand Inquisitors, it seems, Jones prefers to be the one asking the questions.

AN AUDIENCE WITH ALAN JONES is a theatrical experience. Even without the sudden shifts in tone, the mood swings, the dramatic turns of phrase, the skidding from long and animated monologue to quiet, smouldering equivocation, the body language is enough to keep you mesmerised.

Over four-and-a-half hours, in the firelit den of his three-storey inner-city warehouse, Jones goes through the full repertoire of expressions. One minute hunched forward scowling, the next sitting back all smiles, hands clasped behind the head. Then he's gesticulating wildly, rubbing his nose, clasping his chin, standing up, walking around, sitting down, screwing up his face, laughing uproariously, staring past you, glaring at you. It's a sound and light show. Part dodgem ride, part Dostoevskian voyage into complex psychological waters.

It begins gently enough with a discussion of family life and growing up on a dairy farm with his brother, Robert, and sister, Colleen, in Acland, Queensland. 'It wasn't flash,' he says. 'We were a long way from anywhere that was, by today's standards, civilised. We never holidayed together as a family . . . but I never thought we were being deprived of anything.'

Nonetheless, it was a life of toil. Up before sunrise to bring the cows in, chop the wood, feed the pigs, cart the water, get changed for school, ride to Sugarloaf siding, catch the train to Oakey, return home, plough the fields, milk the cows, come in for dinner, help with the washing-up, finish homework, collapse into bed.

'I was always proud as a little kid,' says Jones, 'that my father could rely on me. I'd be there. I'd go the distance . . . I think I always felt there were things to be done . . . and I suppose I was never satisfied with what I had done.'

Jones's father, Charlie, was an uneducated but intelligent man given to bush homilies and proclaiming the virtues of loyalty. He fought the land

The Whites of their Eyes

and the droughts and the inland tornadoes and, of course, the banks. He went to work eventually down a coalmine, digging knee-deep in water and becoming permanently arthritic. 'I saw my father on the kitchen table writhing in pain,' Jones says quietly.

His mother, Elizabeth, was the well-read one, the family protector, the beauty whom Jones quite obviously adored. Every Sunday evening for half an hour, as she read to him or they listened to opera on the radio, young Alan would brush her long, titian hair. It was their cherished weekly ritual.

Elizabeth Jones rarely if ever ventured beyond the farm gate, but she imbued her children with a culture of winning. 'For every week that she was alive,' Jones says now, 'from the time I left to go to boarding school, she would have written me a letter. They were [sort of exhortations]. I remember her saying to me that when people ask you to do something, always say yes and ask what it is later.'

From the earliest, it seems, young Alan Jones was a perfectionist. He'd correct the way his father spoke. He'd challenge him on best farming practices. He'd insist on the best variety of fence posts. He'd use language to try to get his way. 'I used to drive him nuts,' Jones says. 'I used to drive myself a bit nuts, too, because I couldn't cope with something being less than I thought it should be.'

These qualities—the eloquence, the drive for perfection, the stubborn self-assertion and restless ambition—were to account for Alan Jones's extraordinary career trajectory and for the spellbinding effect he would have on people.

IT WASN'T UNTIL 1985 THAT Jones became a broadcaster. It's only one chapter in a life bristling with achievement. Junior Davis Cup player. English and French master at Brisbane Grammar at the age of 19. Head of English at The Kings School, Parramatta, at 26. Speech writer for Malcolm Fraser. Executive director of the NSW Employers' Federation. All-conquering Wallabies coach. Motivational speaker extraordinaire.

No-one who has witnessed him in full flight has ever doubted his capacity to electrify a room. 'I hadn't heard Alan Jones speak before,' says former dual international Russell Fairfax, who attended a testimonial dinner addressed by Jones in the late 1980s. 'I was totally captivated. I felt like I wanted to get up and play football again and I was eight years past it. I had never heard a room so still, and I'm talking *still*.'

Yes, indeed, the man can hypnotise. But he can also divide, and it's

Alan Jones

this capacity to polarise people that has long characterised Jones's life and career.

He arrived as a teacher at Brisbane Grammar School in 1963 like a flaming meteor. Far younger than any other teacher and possessed of a pulsating intelligence and that freakish energy, he quickly established himself as an educator and sports master without peer. He taught the school how to compete.

He coached swimming. He took rugby out of the doldrums. He assembled a team of athletes that was to break every Greater Public Schools record for the 800 metres and he began a tennis dynasty which was to run for 17 years.

'Jones had qualities I had very rarely found in anyone,' says Max Howell, principal of the school from 1965 to 1989. 'It was the capacity to get people to do things they might not have otherwise done. It was an incredible motivational factor which I think he discovered teaching.'

The only trouble, according to some, was that Jones played favourites and this, combined with a tendency to bully and hector those who opposed him, made him hugely unpopular in some quarters.

At Brisbane Grammar he had some spectacular collisions with certain teachers, parents and students. 'He was a bit persona non grata when I arrived,' says Howell. 'He assumed certain things about his position which he wasn't entitled to assume.' Jones himself concedes he may have been difficult to cope with. 'I was a hundred miles an hour basically and the whole education system seemed rooted in low gear.'

At the prestigious Kings School where he taught in the early '70s, it was his junior athletics team that won the premiership and his 1974 First XV rugby team that went undefeated for three years. It was also under Jones that music and drama flourished. Boys came to expect more from themselves. In 1972, 32,000 NSW students sat for the English Higher School Certificate exam. Three of the top 10 places in the State were filled from Jones's class.

He was a powerhouse personality, prone to wearing white or pink sports coats and given to bouts of singing, oratory or invective. Giving up his own time meant nothing to him if it resulted in a better performance from his charges.

Often he would give students individual tuition, although this was not the way things usually operated at the school. Eventually, however, it seemed, allegiance to the old boarding-house system was being challenged by a new fidelity—the kind you were prepared to show Alan Jones. He rejects this but on the basis of numerous interviews with former students and teachers, it is apparent you were either inside Jones's tent or outside. You were either 100 per cent loyal or you weren't, and

The Whites of their Eyes

if you weren't you could be belittled or ostracised. When Alan Jones turned, he turned.

Eventually, he was to become the source of deep disunity within the school. Teachers and students expended enormous amounts of energy either attacking or defending him. There appeared no alternative but to ask him to leave, a claim Jones denies. However, Canon Stanley Kurrle, the school's principal from 1965 to 1982 and the man who appointed Jones, describes Jones's departure in terms that Jones does not dispute: 'It reached the stage where first-rate staff and first-rate boys were finding it very hard to work with him. We talked it over three or four times [because] he wasn't helping himself.

'He was getting more and more into trouble. People were complaining to me. It was his own reputation as much as anything else I was trying to protect. He was becoming more and more worked up and [he would] more easily fly off the handle, both with boys and colleagues. [In the end] I said to him, "With this build-up of opposition, I think you'd better go," and he agreed.' Jones was gone within weeks.

IF THE PUBLIC LIFE OF Alan Jones often appears to be a running battle—ratings wars, defamation suits, contempt proceedings, on- and off-air feuds—his private life is no less full of drama and intrigue. Jones is far from comfortable entering this territory and during the course of our interview frequently cites the 'nuclear weapons' policy to ward off further discussion. 'I think one's private life is a bit like nuclear warships,' he says. 'I mean you don't sort of tell people, do you, whether they're loaded with nuclear weapons or not.'

Part of it is modesty about his frequent generosity towards friends. In the early '70s, for instance, he was at the centre of a dramatic operation to retrieve the child of a woman he had been close to in Queensland and had once almost married. The child had been abducted by his Austrian father and taken to Europe. With the child's mother, Jones hatched a daring mission. According to well-placed sources, he tracked down the village where the child was being kept, flew there and within five or six days had reclaimed the boy, slipped across the border into Switzerland and returned to Sydney.

Pressed on the matter now, Jones says, 'I just don't want to talk about that. Because you see [my friend] is still around and she's got her own feelings about this . . . and the boy is a man now . . . It's very difficult.' Eventually he admits, 'It was murderous. [The operation] went for months

Alan Jones

and months and months. And [my friend] went through hell . . . All I did was assist.'

This is typical of Jones. Lives are changed because of his derring-do, generosity or patronage and he all but refuses to discuss it. The amount of assistance he has provided, for example, to a legion of young—and sometimes troubled—athletes is impressive. Whether these men needed help with loans, unsolicited gifts, cars to be fixed, assistance with sick family members, a night out on his TAB card, help with 'scholarships' to Oxford, a ringing and public endorsement or a place to stay, Jones has always been there.

Such constancy of generosity has been the cause of much scuttlebutt and whisperings over the years. Some say that his loyalty has, on occasions, blinded him. In the case of one footballer, Jones's admiration for the man was evidenced by the photos he kept of him on his wall and the player's selection in Jones's teams, sometimes at the expense of others widely considered more competent.

'There is no doubt that during his period as coach of the Wallabies he played favourites with some players,' says Greg Growden, *The Sydney Morning Herald's* rugby writer. 'Obviously that irked other players within the squad who justifiably thought that they were better.'

This perception of a deep emotional attachment to some of his players has led to rumours about Jones's sexuality. 'I've never confirmed or denied anything,' he says calmly, as if he knew the question were coming. 'And I don't believe people should be asked to in relation to their private lives.'

But Alan Jones's sexuality became a very public issue after his arrest in a London toilet 10 years ago on charges of indecency. The charges were later dropped and costs awarded to Jones.

'I've never said this before,' Jones says, '. . . I often think about it . . . and of course it's fair to say it created significant anguish at times . . . but I spent most of my life being the victor. And that was one period in my life when I was the victim. I think it's influenced a lot of my attitudes towards a lot of people. I see things from a different standpoint. It's a silly thing to say but I think in many ways I'm most probably, I hope, a better person. I think I'm more tolerant, less judgmental.' (It's a mark of Jones's popularity that the incident had no effect on his ratings—in fact, they went through the roof.)

Friends rushed to help at the time. 'Send lawyers, guns and money!' said two of his close confidants. Others flew straight to London.

But what about the rumours that emerged following the incident, the main one being that Jones's friend, the author Lord Jeffrey Archer, used his political contacts to talk to the authorities, with a view to having

The Whites of their Eyes

the charges withdrawn? Jones: 'Oh my God, that's almost laughable, yeah, go on.'

I put to him an even more extraordinary rumour, which he denies vehemently. 'That's just *unbelievable*,' he says. 'It's worse than unbelievable. It's out of all realms of believability.'

Could it be this is the first time in 10 years this has been put to him? Jones: 'I've never heard either of them and perhaps the reason I haven't is because they so lack any kind of credibility that no-one would have been game enough to say them to me. It's absurd. Absolutely absurd. AM I LOOKING YOU IN THE FACE WHEN I SAY THIS? Absolutely absurd.'

ALAN JONES MIGHT HAVE BECOME a politician had he not been thwarted at every turn. In the mid-1970s, he joined the Country Party (now the National Party), worked as speech writer and adviser for its then Federal leader Doug Anthony, and stood for preselection for the Federal seat of Eden-Monaro. He lost.

In 1978, he stood as the Liberal Party candidate for the NSW seat of Earlwood. He lost again. The next year, he stood for Liberal preselection for the Federal seat of North Sydney but lost a third time.

He then joined Malcolm Fraser's staff as the prime minister's speech writer. Seven years later, he was poised to have another go—this time for the safe Federal seat of Wentworth—but pulled out at the last minute. By then he was working as an announcer for 2UE, then owned by Kerry Packer.

As Jones explained in 1990: 'Mr Packer summoned me and said, without being too sort of vulgar about it, "You're employed here and this is what I'm going to offer you."' The offer was a 'very attractive proposition'. Money. 'I said to Mr Packer, "You must understand it'll take me all of five seconds to consider this proposal," and I took the money. And I don't apologise for that. Later the Liberal Party poured their fury on me and one senior official said to me, "You'll pay for this."'

Not surprisingly, he never did. He was already on his way to becoming the emperor of the airwaves, more powerful than most politicians.

True, he has backed some losers for The Lodge—Bronwyn Bishop, Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen, John Elliott—but he's also credited with having delivered marginal seats in NSW to the Liberals at the recent Federal election and with having helped NSW Premier Bob Carr across the line.

Jones has been able to turn a poorly rating breakfast show into the most listened-to radio program in Australia, with nearly 20 per cent of the

Alan Jones

audience share. (As of the time of writing, he had won an unprecedented 52 surveys in a row for 2UE.)

His technique is to blend an unpredictable mix of right-wing authoritarianism with populist outrage against predictable targets such as government bureaucracy, big banks, environmentalists, welfare recipients, ABC listeners, Aboriginal activists, the judicial system and selected politicians. Nor is he averse to airing his own personal prejudices.

Jones on Zheng Haixia, the tall Chinese female basketballer: 'Oh, it's the most *grotesque* thing I've ever seen in sport . . . Was she a *woman*? . . . This great big beast . . . Oh, a *heifer*. Six feet nine. And . . . they call it sport.'

On a man charged with theft of a mobile phone from Grace Bros: 'The name was [Jones names an Asian man] . . . He's been bailed. Is he *Australian*? If not, send him home.'

In defence of Pauline Hanson: 'She's been elected democratically. Why should we be listening to people [her critics] who represent minority viewpoints?'

Depending on the mood and the moment, he is inspiring or intimidating, civil or aggressive, an intellectual tyrant or Mr Compassion himself. He is able to apportion blame, galvanise enthusiasm; create controversy and division.

Despite the fact that nearly 60 per cent of his audience is aged over 55, Jones has managed to translate his relationship with so-called mainstream Australia into unrivalled political influence. As one source said, 'You can't take him on because you'll only cop another bucket the next morning.'

Jones's program thrives on strong opinions, yet during our interview he insists there is no bias on air. This despite his own admission in 1996 that he had abandoned any pretence of impartiality in favour of his unqualified support for John Howard's election as prime minister. 'The interests of the nation are more important than the objectivity of Alan Jones,' he wrote.

Even Liberal Party powerbroker Michael Kroger observed recently that Jones had played a pivotal role in delivering the Coalition's message to voters in marginal seats in the Federal election. 'Alan Jones seeks to exercise his influence far more than [John] Laws or any other figure,' Kroger said.

And only a few weeks ago, Laws himself—Jones's stablemate at 2UE—launched an extraordinary attack on Jones, accusing him of unacceptable bias during the recent election campaign. 'We used to have a code,' Laws said. 'You give people equal time, the right of reply, and all of that is going.'

The Whites of their Eyes

Some of Jones's friends and almost all of his enemies believe categorically that Jones plays favourites and that he never forgives.

In 1991 and early 1992, when John Hannaford was the NSW Minister for Health, Jones was vocal in his support for Hannaford's bid to reform Federal-State funding arrangements. By Christmas of '92, Hannaford had become the State's Attorney-General. He invited Jones to lunch with him to thank him for his support. Suddenly, in the middle of the meal, Jones turned on Hannaford and said, 'You are the one who destroyed my political career.'

'What are you talking about?' Hannaford asked.

'You stopped me getting preselection,' Jones continued angrily.

Hannaford was stunned. 'I don't know what you're talking about,' he said. 'I never voted against you at a preselection.'

'Don't lie to me,' Jones said, and proceeded to remind Hannaford of how, at the 1979 preselection for the seat of North Sydney, Hannaford had voted against him. Hannaford remembered then that he'd been called in at the last minute as an alternate delegate to preselection. 'I remember that now,' he told Jones, 'but I don't remember you as a candidate.' Jones froze. The lunch came to an abrupt end. Hannaford realised later he'd committed a sin worse than having voted against Jones. He'd forgotten who Jones was.

'JESUS! THIS IS COMEDY HOUR!' Jones exclaims when this is put to him. 'I find this amusing . . . I can't remember ever having lunch with John Hannaford and John Hannaford most probably did stop me from being preselected, but it's got nothing to do with the way I go about things now. He probably did me a favour.'

Throughout 1994, Jones was running hot on the issue of law and order. Despite the fact that Hannaford was in charge of the State's prisons and juvenile detention centres, he was never invited to appear on the program.

Many in the NSW Cabinet were convinced that Jones was still obsessed with the North Sydney preselection. Privately, he referred to Hannaford as 'that double-crossing miserable bastard'.

THE GENIUS OF ALAN JONES is that he can be all things to all people. To sit with him now like this—the fire burning in his den, the black manservant offering an afternoon tea of scones and jam and roast beef sandwiches, the photos of famous people, the Grand Inquisitor himself, laughing and grimacing and talking, always talking—is truly to be in rare company.

Alan Jones

I had been warned that I might be shown the door if I asked questions of which he didn't approve. But in this gentlemen's club atmosphere he was, for the most part, affable, engaging and compelling, even though there were times when it seemed he might explode from the sheer pressure of keeping his cool for an entire afternoon.

At one stage he even said: 'I think it's good to go through the kind of inquisitorial that [I] subject other people to . . . You're doing all right.'

At another stage I asked him whether it was true that Ansett had once threatened to ban him from flying with the airline because he had been so rude to an employee.

'I don't know where all this stuff comes from but it's all part of the mythology,' he says.

Did it bemuse him? '*Utterly*. Good word. Excellent word. It *bemuses* me.' The room is suddenly filled with bemusement.

During the hours we spend together, Jones ducks and weaves as deftly as one of his rugby league halfbacks in the Balmain or South Sydney teams he also coached. There are, however, some constants. Loyalty is one of them. In fact, Jones has a name for those who join his inner circle: The Pick and Stick Club. It's a tribe of mates who choose each other and stick together. They include some of his footballer friends, as well as people such as Kerry and James Packer, Michael Kroger, Rene Rivkin and, of course, the alsatian at the door, Harry Miller. Jones's is a world of credits and debits, a world of payback. You get credits for gratitude and loyalty, and debits for what he perceives to be an absence of same.

Journalist Roland Fishman once wrote about a friend of his who played football in one of Jones's Old Boys Kings teams. Jones and the footballer were very close, going out to dinner at least once a week. During the semi-final, the player hurt his neck and was advised by a specialist to miss the grand final to avoid the chance of serious injury. He rang Jones to tell him of his decision.

'Don't listen to those people,' said Jones. 'They don't know what they're talking about. I've got a physio who will fix you up . . .'

'But Alan,' said the boy, 'I could end up in a wheelchair if I play.'

'Don't be ridiculous,' Jones said, '... I'll get my physio to have a look ...'

'Alan, I'm not playing.'

'Look, I'll put you on the wing. You won't have to tackle.' Jones hung up. The youth didn't play. He didn't see Jones for a year.

(Interestingly, when Fishman wrote a book some years later, Jones urged his audience not to buy it.)

As coach of the Australian Rugby Union team between 1984 and 1987,

The Whites of their Eyes

Jones proved himself possibly the most successful coach ever. He master-minded the Wallabies' famous 1984 Grand Slam victory in Europe and the 1986 Bledisloe Cup win against New Zealand. In the end, however, he was voted out of his job. He was no longer getting the results. The team was divided. 'He was trying to own them body and soul,' says a senior rugby union official who declines to be named.

'Your talent alone will not be enough to ensure your spot in the team,' former Wallaby and *The Sydney Morning Herald* journalist Peter FitzSimons once wrote. 'In a choice between flair and dogged obedience to the [Jones] game plan, Jones will pick dogged obedience every time.'

Politics, too, could be the perfect testing ground for commitment. In 1983, Jones helped organise the numbers for Nick Greiner in his bid to topple John Dowd as NSW Opposition leader. Greiner was successful and went on to become premier from 1988 to 1992. Post premiership, however, Greiner went into debit. According to well-placed sources who know both men, Greiner simply didn't show the requisite loyalty to Jones for his support. 'There are always emotional strings attached to Jones's generosity,' says one friend of Jones. 'If you don't respond in the way he expects then you become the most ungrateful person in the world and he will say things like, "What I did to get that man up as leader and this is the gratitude I get" or, "I have done everything for that boy and this is the thanks I get."'

In 1992, John Fahey replaced Greiner as Premier. Fahey was never in credit. According to those who know Jones well, but decline to be named, what turned Jones against the new premier was the government-appointed Casino Authority's decision to award the State casino licence to the Leighton/Showboat consortium ahead of Kerry Packer's Darling Casino Ltd.

Given the miserable history of gaming in NSW, the government had decided to adopt a completely hands-off approach to the decision-making process. Packer's bid fell short by \$70 million. Jones railed at the outcome, insisting the process was flawed and that the Packer bid was by far the better of the two. He also lashed out at the Fahey government, and although he never publicly connected the two, sources close to Jones have no doubt his friendship with Packer was the unspoken link, a claim Jones angrily rejects.

'Do you *actually* think people can give me my running orders?' he barks. 'I don't do anyone's bidding.' Probably not, although it's understood that James Packer was calling Jones regularly at the time.

In 1995, John Fahey narrowly lost the election and many in his Cabinet blamed Jones for the defeat. 'There is no doubt,' says one former minister, 'that Jones was responsible for Bob Carr winning.' By 1995, Peter Collins

Alan Jones

had become leader of the Opposition. He, too, was in debit and for two years could not get on Jones's show. Jones says the reason for this was simple: Collins had nothing interesting to say.

Liberal Party colleagues and friends of Jones put a different spin on it. His antipathy towards Collins reportedly went back to 1992 when Collins was Attorney-General. At that time he'd initiated contempt proceedings against Jones for describing a key Crown witness as 'an accomplished liar and heroin smuggler'. The case had been aborted and 2UE fined \$75,000 plus costs, and Jones, \$2,000 plus costs.

ALAN JONES MUST SURELY BE the most sued person in the Australian media. Last year 2UE was forced to pay \$50,000 plus costs to Sydney QC Bob Stitt after Jones had launched a furious attack on Stitt in his capacity as senior counsel assisting the Thoroughbred Racing Board.

The board had been hearing an application by racing identity Robbie Waterhouse to have an order warning him off racecourses lifted. Stitt was the man arguing against the lifting of the ban. Jones insists now his attacks on Stitt, who had also vigorously cross-examined him at a previous application at which he had given evidence for Robbie Waterhouse, had nothing to do with his friendship with Waterhouse or the fact that Waterhouse's wife, Gai, trains a number of Jones's horses. His defence of Waterhouse rested on his belief that Waterhouse had not orchestrated the notorious 1984 Fine Cotton ring-in.

Last year, the chief executive of the Australian Rugby Union (ARU), John O'Neill, issued defamation proceedings after Jones had publicly attacked him on 14 separate occasions, claiming, among other things, that he was a 'failed banker' ill-equipped to run rugby's national body.

O'Neill regarded his attacks not only as highly defamatory, but curious given that two years earlier, when he'd stepped down as chief executive of the State Bank, Jones had written him a letter praising him as a man who'd brought a 'breath of fresh air to banking'. Could it have been because, just before his radio broadsides, the ARU board had decided not to offer Jones another term as Wallabies coach?

'WHO TELLS YOU THESE THINGS?!' Jones explodes. '... That's the most unbelievable thing ...'

I attempt to put it to him that there was a perception that he had turned on O'Neill almost immediately after the press release had been issued announcing Rod Macqueen as the new Wallaby coach.

Jones twists about in his chair in a paroxysm of denial. 'NO, NO, NO,

The Whites of their Eyes

NO, NO, NO, NO, NO, NO, NO, NO, NO, NO, NO, NO, NO, NO, NO!

David Parker, a former director of the NRMA, has a 12-year-old defamation suit still running against Jones. Ian Ferrier, businessman and NSW Rugby Union chairman, is also suing Jones. As for Bob Inkster, acting superintendent with the NSW Crimes Agencies, well, he'd just like an apology. Inkster headed the investigation into the murder of Megan Kalajzich in 1986. Her husband, millionaire hotelier Andrew Kalajzich, was eventually found to have hired a hit man to murder her in her bed. Jones launched a personal crusade on Kalajzich's behalf, airing allegations by Kalajzich's lawyers that police had framed Kalajzich. His broadcasts resulted in a multi-million-dollar, 18-month inquiry, which, in fact, established an even stronger case against the convicted man.

Bob Inkster says Jones was 'wrong by a country mile. I am yet to hear him say, "I made a mistake."'

Jones says his campaign had nothing to do with the fact that his accountant and Kalajzich's accountant were one and the same or that the man whose research he'd relied upon had once worked with the Kalajzich support group. He just didn't believe Kalajzich was guilty. 'I always felt, and still do, that there was just something missing.'

ALAN JONES AND JOHN LAWS are the two rainmakers of Australian commercial radio. They perform the ceremonial rites of product endorsement and the result is a torrent of money for the station and for them.

Companies, not surprisingly, are keen to woo the tsars of talk. There are organisations that have spent enormous sums to try to stem the damage caused by Jones's on-air denunciations, whether it's through hiring public relations firms, buying advertising space elsewhere on 2UE to counter Jones's comments or even trying to get other programs including the John Laws program to promote their products.

It's not called commercial radio for nothing. Millions of dollars are at stake—which is why getting someone like Alan Jones or John Laws to endorse a product is, literally, worth its weight in gold. Either man, with a glowing word here or there, can prove the difference between a company having a good year or bad; of sales going through the roof or through the floor.

What is less clear are the boundaries between advertising and editorial, and how far, if at all, commercial considerations might influence a broadcaster's views. At present the industry's commercial radio codes of practice

Alan Jones

and guidelines say virtually nothing about this ethical minefield. They say advertisements should not be presented as 'news programs or other programs'. But what's an advertisement and what's a casual comment during a program? Take this example: 'I think that competition's good. I think we should give Optus a real kick along,' Jones told listeners in 1993, when Australians were voting in a quasi ballot to choose their long-distance phone carrier. Advertisement, advertorial or editorial comment? Perhaps it's just that genuinely held beliefs and commercial arrangements can sometimes converge. It's not a matter of favouritism but, as far as Jones is concerned, fact: Mercedes is the best car, Optus the best carrier, Impala the best kitchen, Colonial a fine financial institution, Kims a desirable holiday retreat.

Throughout 1995, the most mentioned issue on Alan Jones's program was the Super League debate, with Jones firmly on the side of the Packer-aligned Australian Rugby League/Optus consortium. For almost a year he directed one tirade after another at the Murdoch-backed Telstra/Foxtel consortium because of its controversial and unpopular attempts to change the face of rugby league.

Simultaneously, 2UE listeners would hear Optus enthusiastically supported through live advertisements, friendly editorials, soft interviews and outright endorsements. For years, Optus has had what it calls a 'commercial arrangement' with Jones, paying him a reported \$200,000 a year to read advertisements and act as its travelling spokesman. Jones claims that not only did he make it quite clear to his audience from the beginning that he was being paid by Optus, but that Telstra begged him to go on its payroll, too. He says he rejected the request because it didn't mesh with his commitment to competition in telecommunications, but points out that Telstra advertisements appear on his program.

He is adamant about one thing: money cannot influence Alan Jones. 'Mate ... if I was a money person, I could be retired now. I don't do things for money. And certainly no-one has ever offered me money, which is an interesting story about the level of corruption in society. No-one has ever offered me a quid, ever, to back off, and I think that's because they know they'd be wasting their time.'

Harry Miller is equally emphatic. 'Alan gets no side kicks. He doesn't get paid for live reads [of advertisements] or anything. He does the reads as long as they don't conflict with his beliefs. [There are] no deals with restaurants or truckloads of electronic equipment delivered to his house. He tells it like it is. That's why people listen to him.'

Simon Morgan, spokesman for Colonial Ltd (formerly Colonial Mutual), was happy to confirm that the company employed Jones to do live reads, give motivational speeches to staff and address regional meetings

The Whites of their Eyes

in NSW. Morgan insists, though, that the money—estimated to be about \$200,000 a year—was never designed to buy his favour.

‘He has been vocally critical of us on numerous occasions,’ Morgan says. And that’s *after* he was put on the payroll. Some might argue that these occasional criticisms have been overshadowed by the direct plugs Jones has given the company.

Richard Ackland, presenter of ABC’s *Media Watch*, says it is vital for commercial broadcasters to disclose the arrangements they have with a company and its products and that the disclosures be made, not once, but each time the company or its product is mentioned. ‘If you are jamming views down people’s throats, the very least you can do is to let them know where the views might be coming from or the subterranean financial arrangements that might colour them.’

THERE ARE LEADERS IN THIS world and there are followers. Alan Jones is a natural-born leader and for those who want to follow, even if it’s through a brick wall, he will take you there, and beyond.

He hasn’t arrived at this exalted place of almost unchallenged power without enormous intelligence, discipline and hard work. He is notorious for sleeping only three hours a night, for getting to work well before he needs to, for answering every letter, fax and phone call that comes his way, for addressing an endless parade of charities, funerals, fund-raisers or business lunches. According to one of his former personal assistants, he can’t bear to have an open space in his diary. It’s as if he’s running from himself.

This kind of pace, no doubt, puts an enormous pressure on him, and sometimes it shows, particularly with his staff. In the pursuit of excellence, his outbursts are legendary and completely at odds with his public utterances about courtesy and civility. Often they are over trifling matters—a full stop missing from a script, the milk on his Weetbix not tepid enough.

‘DON’T YOU KNOW WHO I AM?’ he could often be heard demanding. ‘I AM ALAN JONES.’

His producer of 10 years’ standing, Niamh Kenny, was so traumatised by his public attacks on her at the Atlanta Olympics that she walked out citing psychological and emotional abuse. Fellow staff have told me they had never seen anyone so badly treated or demoralised. Jones has never contacted her since.

Kenny is not alone. There is a long list of people who will never work for Jones again, producers, researcher/telephonists and personal assistants

Alan Jones

who quit their jobs rather than stomach his insults and rage any longer. 'I AM NOT SHOUTING,' he has been heard shouting.

One woman left because, after two years of seeing a doctor for stress, she could no longer take his angry reproaches. Her medical certificate stipulated she should never return to Jones's employ.

Another staff member tried to reason with him because he refused to stop yelling at her. 'Alan, please don't treat me like an idiot,' she said. 'GET OFF MY SHOW,' he railed. The woman was later seconded to another program and congratulated by John Laws' staff for having stood up to Jones.

Still another recounts the time he stood up and shouted at her: 'AREN'T YOU AWARE OF MY PROFILE? GET OUT, GET OUT.' She was made redundant within two hours.

Naturally, Jones has his loyalists but there are many at 2UE, both among staff and within management, who dislike him intensely. But without him, and despite the enormous national profile of John Laws, 2UE's ratings would plummet. Management and their legal advisers know this only too well.

'We have all worked very hard for him,' said one former staffer, 'and showed him the kind of loyalty he demands. But his loyalty to his staff can be very lacking.' Says another: 'Alan seems to have a problem with women. He treats us like we have no business being in the workforce. His language is gutter level.'

Jones, of course, expresses utter amazement at the notion that some of his staff could complain that he has treated them badly. 'You must be talking to people with an agenda about Alan Jones,' he says. '... I don't talk like that. I don't operate that way.'

But then how would he know, given that he never allows himself time for introspection? Time is too short to suffer the paralysis of analysis, he says. 'What I'm about is getting from A to B. I've got to talk to you. There's a mob out there waiting for me now. There's a mate of mine with cancer coming for dinner. I've got to do something to make him feel as though he's not going to be gone tomorrow, and when all that finishes I've got to put a program together for tomorrow morning.

'That'll see me through 'til about half-past-eleven. I'll go and grab a couple of hours' sleep, decide what tie I'll put on in the morning and I'm there, hey presto. I've got to do a Channel Nine thing and then, bang, I've got to write the Bradman speech [for his birthday]. I know what I'm about. I haven't got time to be saying, "Who am I?"'

He doesn't need to. He's Alan Jones.

The Whites of their Eyes

Postscript

In December 1998 Alan Jones was appointed to the board of the Australian Sports Commission. Three months later he was threatened with legal action by the management of the Melbourne Storm Rugby League team after he'd accused the players on radio of being drunk before a game. The players had been out for dinner but, according to team management, had not touched a drop of alcohol. Jones later apologised.

In March 1999 I bumped into Jones at Michael Kroger's wedding in Melbourne. It was the first time we'd seen each other since our interview and he seemed genuinely pleased to see me. We shook hands, and it was then that I realised he wasn't sure who I was. 'Do you remember me?' I asked. 'Yes, you're the gardening writer aren't you?' (I should have quit there and then.) 'No,' I said, 'I'm David Leser and I wrote a . . .'

'OH, DON'T REMIND ME,' he said, his voice turning to cold fury and his finger beginning to point in my direction. 'YOU LIED ABOUT ME . . .'

'Alan, I never . . .'

'DON'T YOU INTERRUPT ME. YOU TOLD LIES. I HAVE PEOPLE WHO WOULD HAVE TESTIFIED IN COURT ABOUT YOU . . . YOU LIED.'

For 15 seconds or so, Jones maintained this harangue—much to the incredulity of our fellow guests—and then turned on his heels. I never got the chance to respond—to tell him there had been no such lies—but, perhaps, that is as it should be. Everyone, radio demagogues included, deserves a right of reply.