THE AGE

Inside Racism HQ: How home-grown neo-Nazis are plotting a white revolution



Neo-Nazis from the National Socialist Network from their encrypted online sites.

By Nick McKenzie and Joel Tozer
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On an unseasonably warm autumn afternoon in Melbourne, a leader of Australia's neo-Nazi movement prepares an urgent encrypted message he believes can't be intercepted by ASIO or police.

As he types, heavily armed counter-terrorism officers are searching houses across Adelaide.

"Pretty much all the boys in South Australia were raided. I want everyone in Melbourne to completely square their shit away," writes Jacob Hersant, a tall, lean unemployed 22-year-old. "Get rid of anything that would not reflect well on our organisation should the police find it."

Hersant posts the message on an encrypted chatroom occupied by vetted members of Australia's largest white supremacist group, the National Socialist Network.

He is the network's chief propagandist but his role also includes "op-sec" or operational security. It's a job he takes seriously.

The people in this network know that a series of events – counter-terror operations in Australia, the Christchurch terror attack in 2019 and the Capitol riots in Washington DC in January – have increased the media, police and spy agency scrutiny on suspected white supremacist terrorists. The National Socialist Network has countered by embracing encrypted communications online and strict security protocols in person.

Hersant has already been "doxed" or exposed online by anti-fascist groups. But he fears anything that compromises the anonymity of other recruits or exposes their activities could prompt more police raids and imperil their jobs and social standing, eroding their commitment to the group's cause.

They could also put in danger the government-approved gun and security licences that some members hold.

What Hersant doesn't know is that his efforts at op-sec are for nought.

Hidden inside the National Socialist Network is a mole, a pretend neo-Nazi who has become so trusted that he's among those on the receiving end of Hersant's encrypted plea.

This insider has already managed something Hersant and the network have long feared: he has smuggled covert cameras and audio recording equipment into their headquarters and is weeks into an unprecedented information-gathering exercise to expose Australia's secretive and violent white supremacist movement.

The information he is gathering will reshape Australia's understanding of a national security threat that ASIO chief Mike Burgess has told **The Age**, **The Sydney Morning Herald** and **60 Minutes** is now preoccupying half the attention of his most important domestic counter-terror probes. What some neo-Nazis are prepared to do to realise their political ambitions "should be of grave concern to all Australians", he says.

The hours of undercover video and audio recordings show why Burgess is so worried. They reveal a cult-like breeding ground for extremists who are training in hope of bringing about societal collapse or a white revolution.

Neo-Nazi leaders are taped advising members to hang onto their guns and raise funds to buy up rural property to form the genesis of a new, racist state. They're also involved in prolific networking with other violent cells across Australia and overseas.

Some of this growing group of white men are still in their teens or are linked to outlaw bikie groups or skinhead jail gangs, while others are ex-military or work for governments or major companies. One is a children's piano teacher.

Despite the network's public claims to disavow violence, behind the scenes some in the group laud terrorist mass murderer Brenton Tarrant as an inspiration whose "unjust" jailing has put the group on a "timeline" to revolution.

The evidence painstakingly gathered shows many of these men believe their most important duty is to prepare for a looming race war. As one says on hidden camera: "It's coming dude. It's not a matter of if, it's when."

Going bush: January 2021

It's late afternoon when the phone rings and a confidential source passes on word of a sighting of a group of men, maybe two dozen or more, dressed in black T-shirts adorned with neo-Nazi logos. The black-clad group is trudging through the Grampians, the source says, a rugged mountainous national park three hours west of Melbourne.

It's cold and past midnight when we pull into a motel in Halls Gap, a small town at the base of the mountains. It feels even darker and colder when we wake a few hours later and drive towards the walking circuit where the men were last seen. A light rain falls in the dawn light.

Our rough aim is to catch up with the men, observe them, take some photos and, if it feels safe, introduce ourselves as reporters. The chance of finding them and observing a potential training exercise is a long shot worth taking.

With the help of sources in law enforcement and anti-fascist groups including the White Rose Society, we have been tracking the growth of the National Socialist Network, which launched in February 2020 with a social media campaign and an initial cohort of members drawn from a loose coalition of defunct extremist groups, including predecessors The Lads Society and the United Patriots Front.

It portrays itself as a group of outdoorsmen reviving the imagined traditions of a white Australia that have been economically and politically marginalised by immigration and multiculturalism. Its self-appointed leader Tom Sewell – initially the only member of the group whose identity was known – occasionally does media interviews claimin to oppose violence and terrorism.

But this group's real activities, aims and membership lists, like those of most neo-Nazi groups in Australia, are cloaked in secrecy. The trip to the Grampians is a strand of an investigation aimed at finding out what this group is doing, who is attracted to its aims and whether it poses a serious threat.

But it becomes clear we are hours behind the quarry. Instead of neo-Nazis, we find hikers who describe encounters with the group, ranging from the unsettling to the

terrifying. One of few prepared to go on the record is Nathan Hart, who heard the group before he saw them. They were singing **Waltzing Matilda** in a cave known as the cool chamber.

When Hart looked inside, he saw a chubby-faced teenager performing a Nazi salute. Propaganda vision of the National Socialist Network's Grampians camping trip.



Image from the National Socialist Network from the Grampians camping trip.

Two days later, the network and Sewell take to encrypted messaging app Telegram and release their propaganda of the Grampians event: pictures of masked men singing, saluting and posing on a mountain ridge in front of a burning cross.

Sewell is a short, fit, army dropout whose receding hairline makes him look older than his 28 years. He's spent the past five years moving up the ranks of neo-Nazi groups, starting as an underling in the United Patriots Front to leader Blair Cottrell and helping to found The Lads Society in 2017.

He publicly disavows violence but was charged after allegedly being captured on film punching to the ground a security guard at the Channel Nine building in Melbourne before it aired an **A Current Affair** program about neo-Nazis. He denies the assault and the case is before the courts.

He is also mentioned in the royal commission report into the Christchurch terror attacks, with investigators concluding that Australian terrorist mass murderer

Brenton Tarrant was an online follower and contributor to the United Patriots and that Sewell had later contacted Tarrant and invited him to join The Lads Society. Tarrant, an online member, declined Sewell's offer so he could pursue his New Zealand plot. There is no suggestion Sewell ever knew of Tarrant's murderous plans. But the report into his mosque attacks highlights how neo-Nazi groups can help provide the ideological inspiration for lone-wolf attackers with access to weapons and knowledge of how to use them.



Tom Sewell leading boxing training at Racism HQ.

Photos taken surreptitiously by Halls Gap locals capture National Socialist Network members in army-issued clothes, suggesting previous military training. Police sources also reveal that some of the number plates of network hikers link to Victorians with active gun licences. Locals describe multiple members who look no older than 18.

Later, ASIO chief Mike Burgess says in an interview that his agency is seeing neo-Nazis as "young as 16 and 17" and that the number of Australians involved in these groups is growing, as is the number engaging in activities that raise terrorism red flags.

"They look like everyday Australians and they're not openly showing their true ideology and not openly showing their violent beliefs or their use of violence, which they believe is justified," says Burgess. "It is a big deal if you truly understand ... [what] some of them are prepared to do."

Not so, says Sewell. In his online account, the Grampians trip is simply "us marching around the bush, having a nice little camping trip. A bunch of white guys out in the bush spending time under the stars."



The neo-Nazis described the Grampians trip as an innocent camping expedition.

The lead: Late January 2021

A story in *The Age* about the Grampians camping trip generates a critical lead. A wary neo-Nazi insider gets in contact, claiming the network's leaders across Australia are far more dangerous than they appear. He offers intelligence on its internal activities on condition his identity is protected "so that I am not targeted". What he's worried about is people's access to weapons and the network's plans for a "white ethno-state".

Multiple sources, including officials in law enforcement agencies and researchers, raise similar concerns. They suspect the network secretly endorses the ideology of international neo-Nazi terror groups, including Combat 18, which has been banned as a terror group overseas and which instructs members to prepare for a coming race war. Members of Combat 18 have been arrested for violent hate crimes, including the murder of a German politician in 2019 and, nine years earlier, shooting up a Perth mosque.

A few days later, the neo-Nazi insider tells us Sewell is off to NSW and then Queensland to hold in-person meetings in pubs with other leaders and new recruits. And so, as Sewell travels up Australia's east coast in February, meeting dozens of people in NSW and Queensland, we arrange for several sets of eyes to observe him and take photos.

The men he meets range from budding neo-Nazis to veteran white supremacists. Some have gun licences or are ex-military. Others are known or suspected members of Combat18.

The Age, the **Herald** and **60 Minutes** are not the only ones interested in these east coast meetings, though. Counter-terror police later contact our team, having spotted them secretly taking photos. They, too, have been watching.

In-person recruiting sessions might take place one-on-one in pubs, but online, the National Socialist Network uses the protection of encrypted anonymity to let it all hang out. Their chat rooms are a living, growing example of what Burgess describes as an "online force multiplier for extremism".

A digital sea of hate: February 2021

"There is currently a nationwide recruiting effort going on," the neo-Nazi insider explains during a brief tour of the group's online presence, "so there are two vetting servers up and running ... This chatroom consists of major white nationalist groups in Australia." It has 12,000 followers.

A different "room" on the encrypted messenger app Telegram is available in each Australian state for recruits who have only been partially vetted. Fully vetted members communicate on a different encrypted app called Element which is considered even more secure.

Gaining access to the Telegram rooms requires answering a brief Q and A: Are you a national socialist? Do you believe Australia's political system is collapsing? Can you fight? Use weapons? Have you read Hitler's **Mein Kampf**? Do you have any traces of Jewish or Muslim heritage?

Once in, members post streams of memes, messages and videos glorifying extreme racism and violence into a digital sea of anonymous hate. They use online aliases such as "klansman-fetch-the-rope" and "truth-viking".

A leaked copy of the network's internal manual includes a chapter about "methods to maintain the anonymity of activists" which instructs members to "live a double life online". It directs them to set up fake identities on encrypted platforms and warns against leaving any "little bits of information" for "journalist detectives".

"Basically everyone's partner thinks that their husband comes to a Nazi meeting where we just straight up preach race war, which we do."
National Socialist Network leader Tom Sewell

Discerning the difference between serious calls to violence and mere violent rhetoric and hate speech is almost impossible in this environment. When one member messages on Telegram about regional towns attracting migrants, another responds: "Where's Tarrant when you need him?"

In another Telegram chat, a network member appears to encourage violence, "as we all know talk only gets ya so far".

ASIO director general Burgess warns that while some online neo-Nazis “are just talking a good game, it could unfortunately spur someone on who’s on the fringe of that group”.

To get clarity, we will need to move offline and into the real world.

Enter Insider No.2, whose identity must be protected for his own safety. He is considering a dangerous assignment: to infiltrate the National Socialist Network. As he is assessing the prospect he is contacted by an anonymous network figure with the Telegram handle “Race War Pete” and invited to undergo an interview. After obtaining comprehensive legal and security advice and reviewing the journalistic ethics of receiving information from an undercover agent, **The Age**, the **Herald** and **60 Minutes** approve the mission.

Insider No.2 is aware that the vetting process will be designed to sniff out any potential law enforcement or media informers, but he says he’s confident. He has a cover story whose virtue is its simplicity. He will pose not as a well-read neo-Nazi, but as a simple, politically incorrect racist eager to learn and to meet other anti-woke men.

“There is less for me to remember,” he says.

A few days later, he is contacted again by “Race War Pete”, this time via an encrypted call. “Pete” first questions the mole’s knowledge of Nazism. Our insider professes ignorance and the vetter changes tack. “What are your views on the Jews? What are your views on homosexuals? What do you want Australia to be like in the future? So you’d describe yourself first and foremost as a racist?”

In a vetting process, 'Insider 2' is questioned about his views on Jews, homosexuals and his knowledge of Nazism.

“You sound like you would be well suited to our organisation,” Race War Pete finally tells Insider No.2. “You don’t have any views that turn us off.”

A quick check links Race War Pete’s handle to an online alias leaked in a massive hack of an online neo-Nazi forum in the US. Race War Pete is the National Socialist Network’s propaganda man: Jacob Hersant.



Jacob Hersant

Inside Racism HQ: March 2021

Insider No.2 sits in his car, psyching himself up to walk into the ordinary suburban home the National Socialist Network calls Racism HQ. Dressed, as ordered, for a training exercise, he is carrying no recording equipment for fear of being searched.

Then he calls his safety contact, turns off his phone and walks alone into the brown brick duplex opposite a sporting oval in the outer Melbourne suburb of Rowville.

Sewell and Hersant are already there, boxing with a dozen or so young men at the end of the cement driveway. Behind a white roller door, there's a basic gym set up with weights, boxing gloves and pads. In the centre of the wall is a framed portrait of Adolf Hitler with printed quotes hung beside it. Insider No.2 scans them quickly: "those who don't want to fight ... do not deserve to live; carry on the racial struggle without mercy".



A portrait of Adolf Hitler at the breakfast table inside Racism HQ.

He shakes a few hands, trades wary introductions. He says later he is struck by the eclectic mix; hardened criminal types next to chubby, nervous teens. All are wary of the newcomer. Today, he will box, stay quiet, and watch.

In addition to Hersant and Sewell, there are two or three fit men who act like leaders. They live in a four-bedroom unit at the back of the property, with the living spaces open for any members to use. The only place that's off limits is Sewell's bedroom and office on the ground floor.

The fridge is packed with meat and beer: Sewell has a strict rule that no bread is allowed in the house. The backyard is for bonfires and BBQs, where network members celebrate key events on the neo-Nazi calendar.

Hersant's girlfriend, Samantha, offers further details: this room is being converted into a full-time propaganda hub; fighting training is twice weekly, led by Sewell. Insider No.2 decides he will use training to become a regular presence at Racism HQ. Hidden camera, private admissions

When video starts to arrive from the insider a few weeks later, shot on hidden cameras, we start piecing together first names, snippets of biography. We search for them and share with others for confirmation. If Insider No.2 can collect a phone number or job description, it takes us a step closer to identifying a member of the network.

Fighting training is the main group event, but there are also ideology workshops. On weekends, most of the young members huddle in the Racism HQ lounge room,

scanning their encrypted chat rooms and watching racist videos on a laptop hooked up to the TV.
It's also where they gather to watch the Senate inquiry into far-right extremism

The recordings make clear almost immediately that the National Socialists' public repudiation of violence is itself propaganda. When Insider No.2 discloses to a committed neo-Nazi in his early 50s, Brendan, that he is struggling to make sense of talk about the coming race war, Brendan explains that all he needs to know is that Jews are "a parasite".

"I f---ing hate them with a passion mate and I think ... it's got to the point, there's two options, one is sterilising and the other one is not so kind," he says. "Pity we haven't got guns. Would be a lot easier."

In training, neo-Nazis as young as 16 are exhorted to attack non-whites.

Sewell laments that some of the group's younger members are too soft. "In the '80s and '90s maybe you had young white guys going out and beating up people, beating up faggots, beating up Viets, whatever it was, skinheads or not skinheads," he says. "But these days ... there is no fight in them."

But there are harder types in the mix as well.

One is Danny, a man we later identify as Daniel Newman. He's a senior Australian member of the ultra-violent and secretive international neo-Nazi terror group Combat 18, which has been banned in both Canada and the UK. Sewell tells Insider No.2 that Newman is the National Socialists' link to skinhead gangs in Victorian jails. Any network member who found themselves inside had been promised protection.

"Danny said don't stress, we have got Excalibur," Sewell says, referring to a "shank [makeshift knife] apparently, like, this long".

"They called Danny recently and I am the most loved and hated man in Barwon prison," a grinning Sewell boasts on another covert recording. "Danny said they have got the coconuts [dark-skinned people] under control."

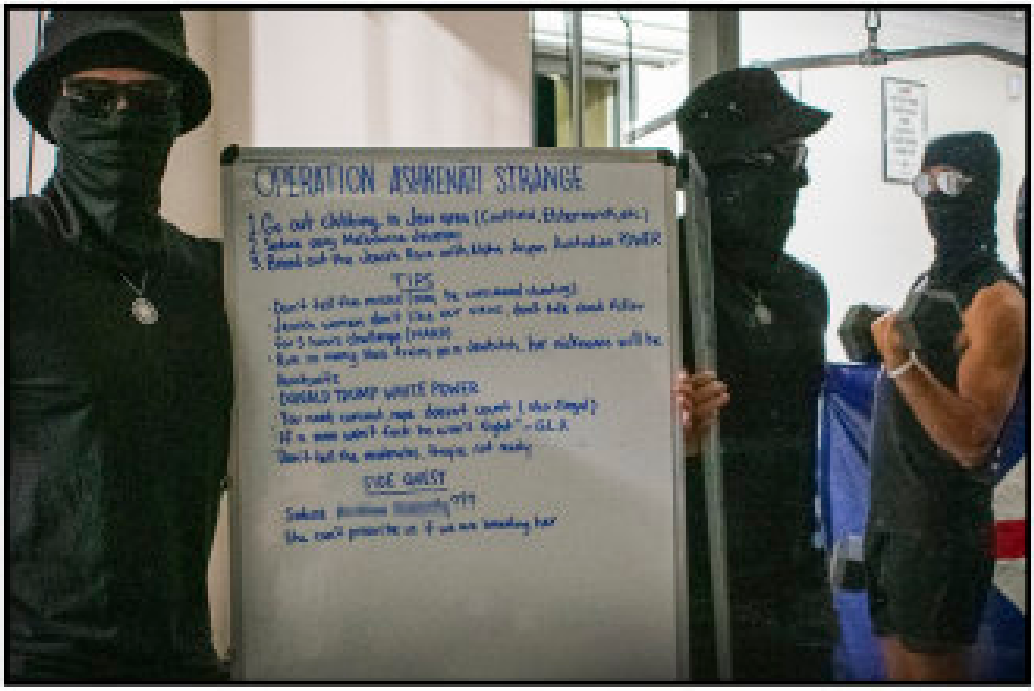
The National Socialists also use Newman to recruit those fresh out of jail, including a fresh-faced young man who confides to Insider No.2 that he's spent years in youth detention.

"I've done burgs [burglaries], dumb childish shit, then armed robs, like dealers, kidnappings and that," he says after one training session.

Two regulars at Racism HQ are affiliated with outlaw bikie gangs. One says his name is "Paul", but his arm tattoo allows us to confirm he is Ryan Ulf Lindfors-Beswick, a veteran neo-Nazi and bikie associated with the violent gang the Finks. Victoria Police records also reveal that, inexplicably, he holds a police approved and vetted security licence.

A second bikie, who we identify via his LinkedIn profile as federal government agency employee Ari Fink, discloses he is drawn to the National Socialist Network because outlaw bikie gangs have begun to "allow any colour to join their branch".

"The Hells Angels used to be white only," Fink explains.



Around the neo-Nazis Rowville house, which they dubbed Racism HQ.

The video shows tattooed skinheads and bikies mixing with two young men who have barely started shaving and who work in disability care. In the confines of Racism HQ, they too boast about inflicting violence, including on the vulnerable in their care.

"You do get to kick a bit of arse," jokes one.

As the weeks pass, more neo-Nazis come into our frame. One is a security manager for Crown Casino, Daniel Todisco, a former special forces soldier who also has a Victoria Police vetted security licence and says he carries a baton in his boot. He boasts of "bossing around the f---g n----rs" who are his subordinates at Crown.

"I just get them to do the shit jobs to be honest with you."

Michael Edwards, an older member, travels to HQ from regional Victoria where he is trying to set up a neo-Nazi cell in Bendigo. He is a full-time carer for his elderly father but, in a taped conversation, he proposes videoing the network bashing a black person. "I mean the publicity would be through the roof."

‘The coming race war’

The secret recordings from Racism HQ reveal a deep sense of anger. David Hiscox is a 50-something who despises his casual work as a piano teacher; Vinnie O’Neill can’t afford a house; even Tom Sewell can’t find regular work.

Among them are men, young and old, angry at being left behind by economic and social forces beyond their control. The National Socialist Network urges them to channel their anger against Jews, liberal multicultural democracy, black people, migrants, Muslims. And it offers the promise of a coming race war to restore their lost status and superiority.

Sewell presides over it all, delivering rhetoric about the coming clash of systems in the tone of an angry suburban footy coach.

“We have a different vision of the future ... And for that we are called extreme ... There is nothing, nothing, that our enemies can truly do to stop us,” Sewell says at one monthly meeting. “We do not kneel and die. We stand and fight and live.”

One of the group’s plans is to buy a country property to begin a kind of neo-Nazi alternative lifestyle. One night in a Shepparton pub, the Peppermill Inn, Insider No.2 meets three followers including Ty, an overweight, bearded information technology consultant for federal government agencies who has brought along his wife and child. Ty confides that the three of them are scouting for a rural property to help realise Sewell’s plan “to become a white ethnostate, a Balkanised parallel nation”.

Another, Steve, talks of owning several guns and reveals he has scoped out “a place just out of Benalla, not bad, 60 acres” where they would “run some goats, run some sheep, run some chooks, run some cattle and put some greenhouses up”.

These rural havens will also host overseas neo-Nazis. The National Socialist Network has links with international terror groups because, according to Sewell, “this struggle is global”.

“So when we fight for a free white Australia we are joining our brothers in the struggle for a free white world. A global white revolution is the only solution to our troubles.”
Among this global brotherhood is Australia’s most notorious white supremacist, Brenton Tarrant, who in August 2020 was jailed for life without parole. To the world, Tarrant is a multiple murderer who killed 51 Muslim worshippers in New Zealand. To Sewell, he is a hero.

“He will be in there [in prison] until we win the revolution,” says Sewell in a discussion in which he compares Tarrant to Nelson Mandela.

“He doesn’t come out unless we win ... He’s putting us on a timeline.”

Camping group or cult? April 2021

US psychiatrist Robert Jay Lifton, who gained acclaim for his academic work studying terrorism and violence, has noted how violent cults commonly share three characteristics: a charismatic but unaccountable leader, a system of brainwashing, and the exploitation of cult members who end up acting against their own interests.

The National Socialist Network displays aspects of all three. Sewell appears on the secret recordings both controlling and charming, encouraging and vicious. Those who pass his vetting requirements, scramble to meet his calls to "compulsory" meetings and pledge allegiance to the group are rewarded with a white wristband in front of the group in a secret ceremony. From then on, they greet each other with Roman handshakes, clasping each other's forearms.

In one such ceremony in a suburban Melbourne pub, "Matty" receives his white band as Tom guides him through the oath.

"It is my duty to be a warrior, to be strong and defend my people. It is my duty to speak the truth no matter the consequences. I may die, but my blood lives forever, until my end, this is my oath. Blood and honour."

The watching members perform a Nazi salute and break into applause.

At another late-night meetup, Insider No.2 secretly records members trudging through a suburban cemetery. After lighting candles, they perform a ceremony inspired by Norse mythology, instructed by a tattooed Odinist at the grave of one of Australia's first well-known neo-Nazis, Alexander Rud Mills.

On another night, at a backyard bonfire, Sewell gathers the men to celebrate the birthday of Adolf Hitler.

"I was going to read out some quotes from **Mein Kampf** or just from his life and I decided that there was really no point because every time I try and find a quote, I find another one that I want to read out, and then another and I decided we would be sitting here reading **Mein Kampf** all the way through," Sewell intones.

At the end of his speech, the men cover their faces with black masks and pose for a photo. Sewell, at the centre, holds a portrait of Hitler.

Sewell wants network members to indoctrinate their wives, girlfriends and children, but even he recognises that this will require keeping secrets from them.

"Basically everyone's partner thinks that their husband comes to a Nazi meeting where we basically just straight up preach race war, which we do," Sewell says, to chuckling. Families, he says, are "one of the biggest taxes on individual members".

"The wife is at home going, 'This is risky, you are putting everything at risk, you are jeopardising our future, you are jeopardising the career, the job, the house, the kids' ... and they never f---ing stop. It never f---ing stops."

His advice is to expose them only to “nice guy” Nazism.

Insider No.2’s recordings reveal varying levels of commitment in the group. Daniel Todisco’s LinkedIn profile describes him as an “experienced and optimistic Security Services Manager” at Crown casino. He says he’s giving Sewell a small cut of his $100,000-plus salary – part of the requirement of membership. But he will let others engage in more overt extremism.

“As Tom said, we are not all expected to be activists,” he says. “As long as we all have a single beating heart, as long as we understand about natural order and blood and honour, then that’s all we need.”



Neo-Nazi and Crown security guard Daniel Todisco.

But senior cell members such as Jacob Hersant and Danny Newman appear to have resigned themselves to revolution or jail. Newman brings his girlfriend to Racism HQ; Hersant’s girlfriend, Samantha, lives in one of the HQ’s bedrooms. Asked if Hersant works, Samantha replies, matter-of-factly, “He’s a full-time racist.”

In return for loyalty, Sewell promises protection. Sewell discusses raising funds to help pay the bail for an alleged neo-Nazi and network affiliate in NSW facing a terrorism charge for allegedly plotting a mass casualty event.

“I don’t know the f---ing kid from a bar of soap. But what I do know is that he is one of our boys ...We spread and share the risk. That’s how it works. And the more of us there are and the stronger we are, the less risk we individually face.”

Sewell acknowledges members with children are “worried” if there are “going to be cops pointing guns at me and my family at five o’clock in the morning”. But those who falter in the face of this anticipated police attention are derided as cowards emitting the “smell of fear” and “fleeing like rats on a ship because there is a little bit of persecution”.

Those who do not toe the group’s line are shamed. One piece of covert camera vision shows a meeting in which Sewell describes expelling three of their brethren. One of the men is either gay or a Jew, he says, the second a “sex pest” who failed in his job of liaising with other neo-Nazi cells. The third, Ulf Lindfors-Beswick was engaging in

"outright illegal" activity, Sewell says, prioritising his outlaw bikie gang activities over his duties as a neo-Nazi.

He brought "illegal ammunition and shit into our f---ing headquarters," Sewell fumes. "In the past, we tolerated people associating with whoever the f--- they want ... but people are stressed and worried about their doors being knocked down."

Not all criminality is derided, however. Hersant is recorded on camera boasting that he spent much of the previous night painting a massive "HITLER" mural at Brunswick train station in inner-city Melbourne.



Graffiti in suburban Melbourne painted by members of the National Socialist Network.

Cops and complaints: April-May 2021

Attention from the police is intensifying. On April 7, network members in Adelaide and Queensland are raided and two charged with terrorism offences after being found with components to make an improvised explosive device.

"You know it was just like sparklers? They are kicking up a stink about nothing," Sewell says dismissively.

Hersant, though, appears on the video recordings to be anxious. As well as sending out encrypted instructions to members in Melbourne to "square their shit away", he moves his computers to his father's house in North Melbourne.

"Go through everything and clear it all out and just don't be retarded," Hersant demands of the network's members.

Rookie Brendan confides to Insider No.2 that "I didn't realise these guys were getting so much heat from the cops ... it's f---en' bad". Others start to wonder if Sewell's desire for publicity is putting them at risk.

And even Sewell's bravado starts sounding hollower. In one meeting he joins Hersant in ordering his followers to clean up shop: "And what I mean by that is, get rid of your sparklers."

"You've got **Mein Kampf** in your room, you've got anarchist cookbook on your computer and ... a Facebook comment from 2013 saying I 'f---ing hate n----s, I hope they all hang'. And those three things together is now a f---ing evidence brief for you to go to jail for a year or two or five."

Sewell also offers up his own experience of being raided, revealing how investigators discovered a meme celebrating terrorist Brenton Tarrant as a "saint".

"I deleted five or six thousand before they raided ... I burned three phones, a laptop ... but yeah they still got it."

But his caution has its limits. One man confides to Sewell that he's nervous because he has a firearm licence and several guns and that if police knew he was a network member they might be "thinking I am a mass shooter or something". Sewell says he's advising everyone to hold on to their weapons.

"I am not going to tell you to get rid of your gun. We are not at that point yet."

In early May, the mood strained, Hersant and Sewell announce it's time for the group to head back to the bush. On May 14, Insider 2 gets an encrypted message to travel as part of a convoy to the Cathedral Range State Park, 100 kilometres north-east of Melbourne for a camping and hiking trip. After setting up camp, one of the older members, Michael, unfurls a large swastika flag.

But within hours, a wave of confusion sweeps through the group. The network's leadership cell, assembled at a different car park, has unexpectedly returned to Melbourne. Word spreads that the trip has been cancelled. Three days later, Hersant messages the Victorian members on Element.

"Do not talk to the police, exercise severe caution over the next month ... Hail [sic] Hitler. Nothing will stop us."

Three days after that, at 5am, counter-terror police swoop on Racism HQ. They use loudspeakers to demand Hersant, Samantha, Sewell and other occupants come out with nothing in their hands.

That afternoon, Sewell is charged and remanded in custody over allegations that someone in the network was involved in a violent incident involving hikers. The allegations are denied and are yet to be tested in court.

The king is dead, long live the king: June 2021

When Insider 2 returns to Racism HQ, the door is broken from the police raid and members appear dejected. Hersant tries to be upbeat. “The numbers have been a little less but you have got to give people time to digest everything that has happened and realise that the sky hasn’t fallen down and everything.”

Not everyone is buying it.

Member Bradley Ingram, a “white band” member and construction worker, says quietly that he feels lost.

“Yeah it’s different mate. Huge like, um, you can just sense the presence is gone. Something is missing, you know.”

Threat of white-power race war ‘grave concern’ to ASIO, says chief Hersant tells members to return to fighting training and promises a bigger, better headquarters than those Sewell provided.

“This place ... a lot of it is shit. I think we could definitely get a better set up. Now that we know what we are doing,” he tells Insider 2, still covertly recording. Ingram calls it their “Ritz Race War HQ”.

For Insider No.2, it’s time to call it quits. He rings to discuss his extraction plan. By the time his recordings are published he wants to be overseas or at least interstate. But before he withdraws he has one more lead to follow – a one-time Australian leader of the Proud Boys, the group whose American arm gained infamy by storming the US Capitol in January, has made contact.

This man is derisive of Hersant’s ability to lead the nation’s neo-Nazi movement and believes that with his Proud Boys networks and time spent in jail, he is a natural fit to become Australia’s next Tom Sewell.

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