

Is Pauline Hanson going back to jail?

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It's One Nation implosion time again. Watching various Pauline Hanson acolytes complain bitterly to *Four Corners* about being treated by their leader like, what's the best word, [untermenschen](#) I think, I couldn't help but recall Ernst Roehm's last words: "Mein Fuehrer! Mein Fuehrer!" A cry of desperate incomprehension as he was shot in the head for being, if anything, too loyal. Irony never bites so hard as when would-be fascists discover their own expendability.

But whatever; as Pauline often smirks with her trademarked exasperation, it's called "Pauline Hanson's One Nation". It is literally, as one disillusioned idol-worshipper mused, "all about Pauline".

Rather more interesting is the tale of Hanson and her personal pilot, James Ashby. Her propensity for developing weird co-dependencies with creepy men is well documented, but one wonders whether Ashby has been a little too clever by half in his attachment to Hanson Mark II. Have some laws been broken along the way, as [Four Corners suggested](#)?

In July 2015, One Nation posted on its website "Hanson takes her maiden flight in her new plane". Quoth the Hanson: "I am proud to announce, Pauline Hanson's One Nation will be launching their new plane just finished being built by an Australian company last week. The maiden flight will be at the Caloundra airport at 10am followed by the first official flight to Rockhampton this Friday, to attend the Reclaim Australia Rally on Sunday. I am thankful to now have a plane as this will enable me to visit people around the state, and interstate."

The pilot of the plane was, and is, James Ashby, former nemesis of Peter Slipper and current Svengali for Hanson. Interviewed when the plane first emerged, he said he had helped Pauline find an Australian-made plane because “Pauline’s all about keeping things local.” He noted that he was flying Hanson to political events at least once a week.

[\[Former One Nation heavyweights call for inquiry in wake of Four Corners report\]](#)

The plane, a Queensland-made Jabiru 230-D single-engine machine, carries the logo of Pauline Hanson’s One Nation along with the leader’s smiling face and the tag “Fed Up Tour”. It has a fly-away base price of \$106,450.

Four Corners established that the plane was insured in Ashby’s name, so it’s safe to assume that he owns it. According to former Queensland state treasurer for One Nation Bill Nelson, the subject of a plane first came up at a meeting in April 2015 between him, Hanson, Ashby and Victorian property developer Bill McNee. Nelson reports:

“He [Ashby] just kept saying ‘I’m a pilot, you know, we should be flying Pauline around’. And then Bill said ‘Well we’ll have to get you a plane then.’”

Two days later, Ashby texted to another party official: “We need to talk to Bill about funding it.” The reply came back: “We had a good chat with Bill. I think Pauline’s going to go for the plane.”

On April 21, McNee emailed to Hanson and Ashby: “James we will sort out the plane tomorrow as well.”

According to Nelson, the Jabiru plane arrived shortly afterwards. He told *Four Corners*: “As it turns out, Bill McNee didn’t buy the plane but, as I understand it, he transferred the funds to James Ashby, not the party, not Pauline, but to James Ashby.”

Intriguingly, McNee denies that he funded the plane at all. For now, the actual benefactor’s identity remains uncertain.

And that’s where the law comes in. The facts as we know them are that Ashby has a plane, in which he flies Hanson around the country on what is clearly One Nation business. Hanson herself has made numerous public statements, including on the party website, asserting that the plane belongs to One Nation. It is literally plastered with her name and face.

One Nation is a registered political party. The *Commonwealth Electoral Act* requires each party, and each of its state branches, to lodge an annual return with the Australian Electoral Commission, within 16 weeks after the end of each financial year. The annual return must include disclosure of all amounts received by, or on behalf of, the party from any single source totalling more than \$13,000 (for the 2015-2016 year).

Donations are expressly defined as including the value of a gift. There is no room for doubt that, if a generous supporter gave an aeroplane to an official of the party, so that that official could fly the leader of the party around the countryside on party business, then the gift of the plane (or the cash to buy the plane, if that’s what happened) would be required to be disclosed in the party’s next annual return to the AEC.

Queensland has its own political donation disclosure laws, which are tougher than the federal regime. Returns are required to be lodged six-monthly, all gifts over \$1000 must be disclosed, and any gift worth more than \$100,000 has to be reported within seven business days.

[\[Disendorsed One Nation candidates unleash on Hanson and Ashby\]](#)

One Nation's Queensland Electoral Commission return for the relevant period in 2016 discloses nothing about the aircraft purchase or gift, but it does include an expenditure item of \$1187.09 paid by the party to "Jabiru Aircraft Service". There are numerous payments to Ashby's companies for printing services, totalling some \$17,000 in the same period. Who was paying for the running costs of the aircraft is a mystery.

But it's pretty simple, really. Whoever paid for Hanson's plane — however they paid for it and who legally or beneficially owns it — it was, in form and substance, a gift to the direct benefit of her eponymous political party, and she has treated it and talked about it as exactly that for the past two years.

Hanson said on January 16 this year: "I've still got my plane, well, the party's plane, but all the trips I've done in that since the [2016 federal] election I've filled it up myself."

There's no doubt who Hanson thinks the plane belongs to. It's her party, her way, her plane. That's fine — there's no reason to feel sorry for the deluded idiots who continue to join her strange crusade; it is, as she's always said, all about her. However, even Joan of Arc is subject to the law of the land, and Pauline Hanson's One Nation is currently in deep non-compliance.

Hanson recently proclaimed in her special grammatical style that "We have never received huge donations all the time. Our donations comes from small people."

That may be so, but the law obliges her to tell us which small people gave her an aeroplane.