



# Soviet-link cash got GetUp! going

**EXCLUSIVE**

**BRAD NORINGTON**  
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

The first big campaign run by GetUp! — to free David Hicks from the US military prison at Guantanamo Bay — received funding from a communist-backed organisation with close links to the former Soviet Union.

The Australia USSR Friendship Association gave GetUp! at least \$10,000 in 2006 to help pay for newspaper ads that backed the then fledgling activist group's "Bring David Hicks Home" campaign.

The ads were authorised publicly by GetUp! and did not mention the friendship association or other donors, which preferred to use GetUp! as the public brand.

Stan Sharkey, one of five trustees of the Australia USSR Friendship Association, told *The Australian* yesterday that his group funded GetUp!'s Hicks campaign as part of its mission, following the break-up of the former Soviet Union, to use funds to fight "fair dinkum" social justice causes.

With GetUp! consistently refusing to identify early donors, Mr Sharkey's upfront confirmation of support is the first time details of how the Hicks campaign was funded have been released.

*The Weekend Australian* reported earlier this month that Bill Shorten was a big union donor to GetUp! when it started in 2005, providing about \$100,000 and possibly more to the activist group when he led the Australian Workers Union.

Mr Shorten has since confirmed the payment, after years of declining to comment. He was an original GetUp! board member, and sat on the board in 2006 when GetUp! started its Hicks campaign that is widely credited with boosting membership and having "put the group on the radar".

The biggest donor to GetUp! in

its 12-year history is the Construction Forestry Mining and Energy Union, which donated \$1.12 million to fund a TV advertisement attacking Tony Abbott's alleged "archaic" views of women during the 2010 election campaign. GetUp! authorised the ad when it aired nationally, and no mention of the CFMEU was made until a later funding disclosure.

Mr Sharkey, now retired, is a former national secretary of the CFMEU, and a past prominent figure in Australian left-wing politics with the Communist Party and its various splinter groups.

The GetUp! funding by the Australia USSR Friendship Association  
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Stan Sharkey

# Group linked to Soviets got GetUp! going on Hicks campaign

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Association is not connected to the CFMEU, despite Mr Sharkey's past role with that union.

But in 2006, when Mr Sharkey wanted to lend support to the Hicks campaign, he did contact the CFMEU's then NSW branch secretary, Andrew Ferguson, and officials of other unions to ask for their financial backing as well.

Mr Ferguson is understood to have helped put Mr Sharkey in touch with GetUp!'s then national director, Brett Solomon.

The CFMEU's \$1.12m donation to GetUp! in 2010, and disclosed after that year's federal election, was arranged by construction div-

ision secretary Dave Noonan.

GetUp! national director Paul Oosting and his predecessors have consistently maintained that GetUp! is "fiercely independent", "sets its own agenda", and does "not accept funding from political parties". They have promoted GetUp! as a grassroots advocacy organisation mainly funded by small donors that "aims to build a more progressive Australia".

But GetUp! does receive a slew of big donations every year from individuals and organisations.

The decisions on which issues to support are then made by a small GetUp! leadership group. Its funding history of larger donations from the CFMEU, Mr Shark-

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ey's organisation and others also suggests a pattern, in some circumstances, that GetUp! is willing to accept funding and authorise spending in its name following requests to earmark money for particular causes.

Other examples include the \$240,000 donation last year from

Tony and Maureen Wheeler, founders of Lonely Planet, to help advocacy for asylum-seekers and refugees. Another large donor with similar funding interests is board member Anne Coombs.

Known also as the "Australia-Soviet Friendship Society", Mr Sharkey's group was established in 1938 by feminist Jessie Street, and other Australian admirers of the Soviet way of life, to promote cultural exchanges with Moscow

under Josef Stalin. When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, a fortune amassed by Mr Sharkey's organisation from acting as a go-between for touring USSR ballet companies and other artists was deposited in a Commonwealth Bank account as a dedicated trust fund. Earnings on interest were then spent on social justice causes identified by the five-member trust.

Mr Sharkey told *The Australian* the association only chose "fair dinkum" causes, including indigenous and environmental campaigns and the Hicks campaign. He said the group's trustees included a serving judge and "every cent is accounted for".

Mr Hicks returned to Australia in May 2007 in a transfer deal between the Bush administration and the Howard government. He served the balance of his sentence by a US military commission in

Adelaide's Yatala Labour Prison, and was released in December that year.

As well as donating to GetUp! for the Hicks campaign, the Australia USSR Friendship Association made two payments while Mr Hicks was in Guantanamo Bay to help his legal costs.

Since then, the association has made further donations to GetUp! with donations of \$5000 in 2010, at

least \$5000 and possibly more in 2015, \$10,000 in 2016, and \$3000 so far this year.

GetUp!'s listing of donations since 2007 shows something different. It identifies only a \$12,500 donation from "Stan Sharkey" in the 2014-15 financial year. It is possible the discrepancy was caused by one cheque from Mr Sharkey's organisation not getting banked, and being later replaced.

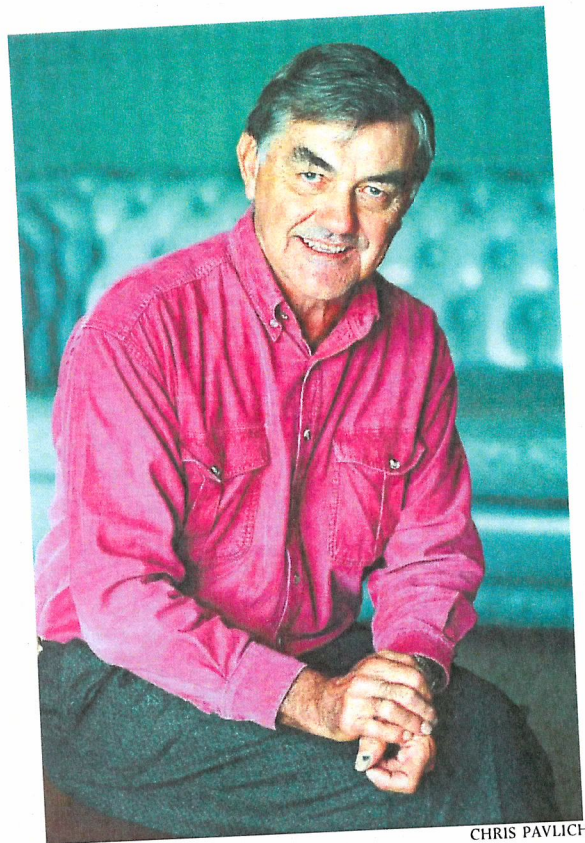
It remains unclear, however, why GetUp! chose to name Mr Sharkey as a donor in 2014-15 when the funds came not from him but from the trust controlled by the Australia USSR Friendship Association.

GetUp! supports a "clean up" of the Australia's political donations system, saying only individuals should be allowed to donate to parties, and transparency rules should be enhanced to ensure corporate money is "not funnelled through individual donations".

But while Mr Oosting accepts GetUp! should be regulated, he appears to continue supporting overseas funding for his group.

The source of some of that funding remains opaque.

And Mr Oosting, like his predecessors, has continued to decline to disclose any details of early GetUp! funding prior to the 2006-07 financial year when disclosure provisions changed.



CHRIS PAVLICH

Stan Sharkey, one of the five trustees



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ROHAN KELLY

Opposition Leader Bill Shorten



AAP

David Hicks, the subject of the campaign