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GetUp! handout showed Shorten's bad judgment



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No wonder Bill Shorten is so coy about donating \$100,000 or more of workers' union fees to GetUp! as national secretary of the Australian Workers Union when the green-left activist group was launched in 2005. The anti-mining, anti-development agenda of GetUp! is diametrically opposed to the needs of AWU workers, jobseekers and Labor's traditional base. Until last Saturday, when associate editor Brad Norington broke the story of the donation, the Opposition Leader had persistently refused to discuss what support he provided the activist group when he was in charge of the AWU and served as a founding board member of GetUp! from August 2005 until March 2007. Yesterday's move by Employment Minister Michaelia Cash to refer the matter to the Registered Organisations Commission (former minister Eric Abetz did the same a day earlier) will provide much-needed transparency.

Under the AWU's rule No 57, a loan, grant or donation cannot be made unless approved by the national executive. The AWU and Mr Shorten's office have said the donation was endorsed by the executive. Mr Shorten's office referred *The Australian* to the union "for further particulars", including the exact amount of the donation. We've sought those particulars for more than a week from AWU national secretary Dan Walton. But to date the union has had difficulties finding the information. As Norington wrote on Saturday, members of the AWU's national executive from 2005 recall Mr Shorten seeking the donation for GetUp! but others have no memory of a vote.

If the issue is pursued properly by the Turnbull government, it could be highly damaging for Mr Shorten's credibility on two fronts. First, his and the AWU's lack of transparency about the size of the donation and its authorisation raises questions about the use of members' fees. Second, and more important, if Mr Shorten is not embarrassed about some of the major campaigns run by GetUp! he should be. They are starkly at odds with opposition policy and undermine jobs, especially those of AWU members.

GetUp!'s "anti-Adani war chest ... to fund an epic campaign attacking Adani's polluting coalmine from all angles at once" is a prime example. The AWU, whose members would benefit from new jobs in central Queensland and farther afield, has backed the development of the Carmichael mine in Queensland's Galilee Basin. It also supports the provision of a \$900 million loan to Adani from the Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility to help build the rail line to unlock the Galilee coal precinct. The opposition and Queensland's Labor government support the mine. On the issue of the loan, Mr Shorten is siding with GetUp!

Politically, given ALP policy at odds with it, he could hardly afford to side with the GetUp! campaign demanding the closure of Manus Island and Nauru offshore detention centres and the transfer of detainees to Australia through its "Let Them Stay" campaign. Minister Peter Dutton is a prime target of GetUp! which has a war chest of hundreds of thousands of dollars to target Mr Dutton's marginal Brisbane seat, Dickson, at the next election. GetUp! ignores the fact it was the Rudd-Gillard governments' shambolic policies that drew 50,000 asylum-seekers to Australia. It also ignores the fact that Labor reopened the Manus Island detention centre and that Kevin Rudd, in 2013, vowed to send all new asylum-seekers to Papua New Guinea. If ever imposed, the GetUp! policy would reopen the floodgates. Its campaigns against fossil fuels and Sunday penalties rubber-stamp Labor's and the Greens' policies.

Individuals and businesses with serious concerns about such policies need to understand the imbalance at the heart of political campaigning in Australia, creating what senior Liberals have described as a "democratic deficit" of about \$200m as the major parties prepare to fight the next election. The Turnbull government will be outspent heavily by an opposition bolstered by "anti-Liberal" campaigns funded by unions, GetUp! and sectoral interests opposed to the government. Such spending is likely to far exceed the donations to the Coalition by business, a challenge for Liberal president Nick Greiner to address. But Mr Shorten's support for GetUp! — whose members were prominent at his post-election party when he was elected to parliament a decade ago — is a political gift to the Coalition.

The GetUp! network runs wide. Socialist billionaire George Soros, who seeks to influence elections in Western countries, has reportedly supported GetUp! In 2014, *The Australian's* Hedley Thomas reported that a large donation for GetUp! was provided to green group Friends of the Earth by philanthropist and Wotif founder Graeme Wood, meaning the funds could have been treated as a tax deduction. Mr Wood said that was not an issue. GetUp! is far more than the grassroots movement it purports to be, leaving Mr Shorten with explaining to do about why he backed its extremist agenda ahead of the workers whose interests he was paid to represent.

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