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### **Abstract**

On May 16th, 1997 six hundred people from all walks of life, gathered to pay tribute to and celebrate the lifetime of achievements of Arthur Osborne. His death on May 13th at Woonona Public School resulted from a second massive heart attack. His passing was a sudden and tragic end to the life of one of the Illawarra's finest trade union figures and magnificent human being. Arthur Osborne, teacher, administrator, Life Member of the NSW Teachers' Federation and for 11 years. President of the South Coast Labour Council, was the quiet colossus of the South Coast Union movement for decades.

## ARTHUR OSBORNE (1943–1997)

On May 16th, 1997 six hundred people from all walks of life, gathered to pay tribute to and celebrate the lifetime of achievements of Arthur Osborne. His death on May 13th at Woonona Public School resulted from a second massive heart attack. His passing was a sudden and tragic end to the life of one of the Illawarra's finest trade union figures and magnificent human being. Arthur Osborne, teacher, administrator, Life Member of the NSW Teachers' Federation and for 11 years. President of the South Coast Labour Council, was the quiet colossus of the South Coast Union movement for decades.

Arthur Osborne was the quintessential 'spirit' of a working class trade unionist who never forgot his roots, nor his socialist objectives. His was a spirit that strode strongly and proudly through many facets of his life—his teaching career, his Herculean efforts on behalf of the NSW Teachers' Federation, his strong, uniting leadership and development of the South Coast Labour Council, his involvement in local community politics and in the administration of many local sporting groups.

You need only have known Arthur for the briefest of times to have recognised his great earthiness, his strong humanist character, his great sense of humour and his impatience with pretence. No matter how long people knew Arthur for, there was

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a sense of knowing and feeling that he was a true leader, a courageous and genuine human being whose loyalty and sincerity were his hallmarks. Arthur Osborne's word was his bond. Arthur Osborne was a straight shooter.

Every teacher with whom Arthur taught, counted it an absolute privilege to have known him, worked with him, been inspired by his energy, dedication and commitment to public schools in particular and to education in general. His wise counsel in personal, professional and industrial matters was sought by all and always freely and generously given. Arthur had an amazing capacity to draw people together around a common cause, to plan successful industrial and political strategies, and in mounting, leading and winning strong campaigns.

His gift for the most calm, organised and practical implementation of trade union ideals and policies and his drive and exceptional organisational ability were a feature of Arthur's contribution to the many trade union initiatives which came to fruition during his period of leadership in the Illawarra. Arthur combined vision with determination, and integrity with strength. One of the best examples of this was his co-founding with Merv Nixon of the South Coast Worker's Medical Centre. That service epitomised Arthur's ability to implement in very practical ways his absolute commitment to the notions of a fair and just society in which workers and their families received quality medical care under the umbrella of a universal, nationally funded health system.

Arthur was born of Scottish parents in the mining village of Bulli, and grew up in and around the parks and beaches of the area. He soon demonstrated great talent as a printer and soon became involved with Bulli Surf Club. His prowess as an athlete grew and he won many beach sprint titles including some professional races. He also became a great football three quarter, taking to both rugby union and rugby league with flair. When his father died while Arthur was in his teens, he took over the role of running the family, being father to his three younger sisters. His character and leadership qualities even at this early age were recognised by all and he was elected the first school captain of Bulli High School.

The strong sense of community which he developed in Bulli, stayed with him always and it was fitting that his first teaching appointment after training at Wagga and Wollongong Teachers College, was in another village with a strong mining and trade union tradition, Mt Kembla. Arthur quickly became involved in the affairs of the NSW Teachers' Federation and his enormous capacity to lead the union locally soon became evident. He

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developed great life long associations with Max Graham and Him Dombroski, and forged a place for South Coast Teachers at the forefront of the industrial movement. Arthur's great belief in unity and his ability to inspire his fellow unionists were pivotal in the Federation becoming strong and respected leaders in the South Coast Labour Council. His achievements in forging strong, permanent and ground breaking unity between blue and white collar workers in the Illawarra were monumental.

Arthur's integrity, intelligence and inherent leadership qualities saw him elected as leader of the Illawarra Teachers Association for decades. He was a Federation State Councillor, State Executive Member and had it not been for his great commitment to the Illawarra and his family, a move to Sydney would have effortlessly won him even higher positions of leadership in the Federation. He was awarded Active Life Membership of the NSW Teachers' Federation at an early age and continued his support for the organisation at every level. It was however, Arthur's great commitment to the people of the Illawarra that saw him take on the leadership of the South Coast Labour Council, and with the help of Merv Nixon and others, developed the organisation into the strongest provincial council in Australia.

His enormous capacity for work astounded others as he continued his widely recognised teaching and administrative roles at Tarrawanna, Wollongong, Helensburgh and finally, Woonona Primary where he was Assistant Principal for over a decade. The incredible work lead over more than 25 years encompassed much more than his teaching and trade union roles. Following his fine achievements as a footballer, he became heavily involved in the administration of Thirroul Rugby League Football Club: the Butchers. In this role as in everything he took on, Arthur excelled.

In addition to his wide ranging commitments, Arthur continued to find new ways of empowering working people, True to his life long belief that traditional political parties always had to be reminded of their commitment work working people, Arthur became a leading figure in the push for community based representatives in local government in Wollongong. He gave enormous, selfless support to Jellie his wife, as a candidate in the initial campaign of the Active Community Team. His stature in his community, his deep knowledge of and understanding of people's needs soon saw ACT candidates being regularly elected to Wollongong Council. The fact that both seats in the Northern suburbs are held by community independents is testament to Arthur's great vision, inspiration and commitment to on-going involvement and grass roots action.

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Arthur Osborne's determination never faltered. As a father and husband, friend and mate, he was, as in every other aspect of his life, one of the most loyal, trusted, respected and loved friend that anyone could have. Few people ever attain the heights that Arthur achieved in everything that he took on. His life and work for the people of the Illawarra are a beacon for us all.

*Dave Martin*