

Ross Winn's Obituary

Emma Goldman

1912

The inexorable master, Death, has again visited the Anarchist ranks. This time its victim was Ross Winn, one of the most earnest and able American Anarchists.

Never has the power of the Ideal been demonstrated with greater force than in the life and work of this man, Ross Winn. For nothing short of a great Ideal, a burning, impelling, all absorbing ideal could make possible the task that our dead comrade so lovingly performed during a quarter of a century.

Born in Texas forty-one years ago, of farmer parents, young Winn was expected to follow the path of his fathers. But the boy had other dreams, dreams extending far beyond his immediates. His were dreams of the world, of humanity, of the struggle for liberty.

He was possessed by a passionate longing to learn the printing trade, and by that means to carry a message to mankind. His father, however, was opposed to such 'foolish notions', but Ross could not be daunted either at the age of sixteen nor during the rest of his life. He worked as a farm hand, picked cotton, and out of his meagre earnings he bought for himself a small hand press. It was at the time when plutocracy, drunk with power, was about to put to death the men whose ideas became the beacon light in the life of Ross Winn: the Chicago Anarchists. Verily, Spies was prophetic: 'The voices in the grave will speak louder than those you strangle today.'

Voltaire de Cleyre and Ross Winn — two native children of America — heard the strangled voices and, and forthwith set themselves to keep alive the work for which our brave comrades had been put to death.

Ross Winn immediately made himself conversant with the philosophy of Anarchism, which found in him a powerful, uncompromising and daring exponent. Soon after the death of our Chicago comrades he revived the Alarm, founded by Albert Parsons, and later published by Dyer D. Lum.

Always harassed by poverty, this later caused his illness and untimely death; our comrade was often compelled to discontinue his publishing work. But never for very long. Thus we find him again at the helm in 1894, issuing a little paper called The Cooperative Commonwealth; then again in 1898, the Coming Era; in 1899, Winn's Freelance. Pressed by economic adverse conditions, Ross Winn this time was forced to suspend his publication, contributing, however, meanwhile for the Free Society published for many years before his family. But in 1901 Winn resumed his own paper, Winn's Firebrand, which he subsequently called the Advance, and later the Red Phalanx.

Always his supreme passion was a paper, to arouse, inspire, and educate the people to a higher conception of human worth. So intense was that passion that we find him preparing copy on the very last day before his death, for the August issue of his paper.

I met our comrade in Chicago in 1901, and was deeply impressed with his fervour and complete abandonment to the cause — so unlike most American revolutionists, who love their ease and comfort too well to risk them for their ideals.

Ross Winn was of the John Brown, Albert Parsons, and Voltairine de Cleyre type. He lived and worked only for his ideal, and would have gone to the gallows with the same fortitude. But fate decreed that he should die a hundred deaths.

Three years ago our comrade fell victim to the disease of the poor- tuberculosis. He had little faith in doctors and tried nature instead. Unfortunately one cannot live on nature alone, especially when one has a wife and child. And so Ross Winn had to return to civilisation. In Mount Juliet, Tenn., assisted by his devoted companion Gussie Winn, and cheered by their child Ross Jr., he eked out a miserable existence, and kept up his propaganda.

Last year, however, his condition made work impossible. But he was too proud to ask assistance from his comrades even. It was through his wife that we learned of their terrible plight, immediately some money was raised which might have kept him in comfort for a while. But the only thing that meant comfort for Winn was the spreading of his beloved ideas. And so he spent sixty dollars — a fortune to a little family- on a new printing outfit, and the Advance was again started.

It was this that helped more than medicine or nature to prolong the life of our tireless comrade. And then the end came. In the early morning hours of August 8 the inexorable master, Death stilled the fervent, burning tears of Ross Winn. Only the faithful Gussie and their boy were with him. The good Christian neighbours had no use for the heretic. Poor fools! How could they fathom the beauty and love that permeated the man whom they feared in life and shunned in death!

He is beyond them now, but not so his child, who next to his ideals he loved most, and whom he hoped to save from Christian kindness and patriotic beneficency. Ross Winn is beyond it all, but we are still here, not only to continue his work with the same ardour and devotion as he, but also to bring his boy, even in a small measure, the comradeship and care of his father. At the death of Ross Winn, nine dollars was all that was left to his family.

Their need is great and immediate. I therefore earnestly urge that a fund be raised at once to assist the faithful comrade and child of Ross Winn. Contributions can be sent direct to: Gussie Winn, Route 3 Mt. Juliet, Tenn., USA or to Mother Earth.

It is only through the manifestation of solidarity that we can prove the living force of the ideas and ideals for which Ross Winn lived, worked and struggled.

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