

Christian right zealots incite violence

North Carolina man arrested for soliciting Michael Schiavo's murder

David Walsh
29 March 2005

An increasingly prominent element of the frenzy whipped up by the Christian right in connection with the case of Terri Schiavo, the Florida woman on life support for the past decade and a half, is direct or indirect incitement to violence. These fanatical elements have fanned a "flood of fury," in the words of one press account, against Schiavo's husband Michael, Circuit Court Judge George Greer and others who have prevented them from having their way.

This is nothing new. Various groups and individuals in the anti-abortion movement and fundamentalist right-wing have for years either advocated or been associated with attacks on women's clinics or doctors who perform abortions.

A number of recent developments demonstrate that the hysteria and charges of 'murder' and 'execution' of Terry Schiavo coming from these quarters, endlessly covered by the cable television networks, are finding a definite response.

On March 25 the FBI and local police arrested Richard Alan Meywes of Fairview, North Carolina, for allegedly offering \$250,000 for the murder of Michael Schiavo and \$50,000 for the death of Circuit Court Judge George Greer, who ordered Terri Schiavo's feeding tube removed. Meywes sent an email containing the reward offer to friends and three media sources, including an unnamed prominent right-wing talk show host. In the message, he claimed to be passing along word that a multimillionaire was willing to finance the murder for hire.

An FBI affidavit alleges that Meywes wrote: "It is my understanding that whoever eliminates Michael Schiavo from the planet while inflicting as much pain and suffering that he can bear stands to be paid this reward in cash." The affidavit notes that the same sadistic email

refers to the recent killings of a judge in Atlanta and family members of a federal judge in Chicago.

According to a report in the *Asheville Citizen-Times*, Meywes has made his right-wing, militarist views clear in the past through letters to the editor of that newspaper. He will eventually be brought to Tampa, Florida to face charges of solicitation of murder and sending threatening communications.

One day earlier, in Seminole, Florida, only a few miles from Terri Schiavo's hospice in Pinellas Park, a man was arrested after trying to steal a weapon from a gun shop so he could "take some action and rescue Terri Schiavo," according to authorities. Police allege that Michael Mitchell, 20, of Rockford, Illinois, entered the shop with a box cutter and ordered the store-owner to fill a backpack with weapons before breaking a display case and removing a .454-caliber handgun, the most powerful in the shop.

The owner, Randy McKenzie of Randall's Firearms, told the press, "He told me if I wasn't on Terri's side I wasn't on God's side, either." McKenzie drew his own gun at Mitchell, who eventually fled out the store's back door before being picked up by police.

The *New York Daily News* noted Friday that "right-wing Web sites have had to post warnings against threats of violence on their discussion boards after calls for the armed 'liberation' of Terri Schiavo from her hospice and comments suggesting that if her husband were taken out of the picture, guardianship would revert to her parents, who want to keep her alive."

"Culture of life" activists have made death threats against various figures in the Schiavo case, in addition to the unfortunate woman's husband and Judge Greer, both of whom remain under 24-hour police protection.

Christian right zealots have handed out the home

addresses of judges who have rejected the various legal appeals to keep Schiavo alive. The biography of US District Judge James Whittemore of Tampa, who rejected one such appeal last week, disappeared from the court's Web site shortly after he was assigned the case, while the biographies of other judges remained posted. This was presumably a security measure.

An article about the Schiavo case on one ultra-right Web site asks rhetorically, "Does anyone wonder for even a moment why a judge was assassinated recently? Or another judge's family was assassinated for being in the wrong place at the wrong time? The judiciary has pushed the envelope too far, starting with banning prayer in school and now ordering the execution of a person who has committed no crime. Folks are fed up with the judiciary and it is manifested by the unstable. Don't bother to provide more protection for judges until judges provide more protection for the Constitution they swore to uphold, as well as for the most vulnerable of our citizens."

Just prior to the Florida state senate's defeat of a bill designed to keep Terri Schiavo alive, Democratic State Senator Frederica Wilson of Miami told her colleagues about the death threats she had received. According to a story in *USA Today*, Wilson said she was a veteran of the civil rights movement of the 1960s and did not scare easily.

"Today I am afraid," Wilson declared. "I am asking the people who have threatened me to stop. I don't appreciate what you are doing to me. We're talking about the sanctity of life, and you are threatening my life."

The nine Republican Florida legislators who voted against the measure showed up on anonymous "Wanted" posters in the state capitol in Tallahassee. State Sen. Nancy Argenziano told the media that one of the "un-Christian" voice mails she had received wished stomach cancer on her. Guards have been posted outside the nine legislators' doors.

At least one portion of the "pro-life" crowd is now directing its ire toward George W. Bush and his brother, Florida governor Jeb Bush, for supposedly not doing enough to keep Terri Schiavo on life support. Randall Terry, the anti-abortion fanatic, told protesters outside Schiavo's hospice on Easter Sunday, "If Gov. Bush wants to be the man that his brother is, he needs to step up to the plate like President Bush did when the United Nations told him not to go into Iraq. Be a man. Put politics aside."

Terry, a spokesman for Terri Schiavo's parents, was an

organizer of the notorious "Operation Rescue" in the 1980s and 1990s, during which he and his activist supporters blocked the entrances to abortion clinics and harassed women seeking abortions. A 2001 *New York Times* article reported that one of Terry's "most avid" followers in the late 1980s in Binghamton, New York, was James Kopp, later convicted of the 1998 murder of a doctor who performed abortions in Buffalo, New York. In 1993 Terry was accused of inciting violence when he called for the trial on "war crimes" and "execution" of another abortion doctor. At a protest last Thursday Terry vowed, "There will be hell to pay" if Schiavo dies.

When Terri Schiavo's brother, Bobby Schindler, who supports his parents' misguided effort to keep his sister alive, recently admonished the crowd outside the hospice for its increasingly noisy and disruptive behavior, he was heckled by the assorted fanatics on hand. Some 40 people have been arrested in the protests.

Jeb Bush was obliged to issue a statement cautioning supporters of the Schindlers to remain calm. "Though we may disagree with the courts, there is no justification for violent acts," he told a news conference.

The president's brother and others in the political establishment may be alarmed by the possibility of acts of violence committed by right-wing fanatics, but those actions have been prepared and encouraged by the Republican right and their media mouthpieces.

After all, Texas Republican and House Majority Tom DeLay characterized the court order to remove Schiavo's feeding tube March 18 as an "act of medical terrorism." DeLay has also accused Judge Greer of "trying to kill Terri for 4 ½ years." Evangelist Pat Robertson, a former candidate for the Republican presidential nomination, told a CNN interviewer March 24 that Schiavo's approaching death was "judicial murder," and said it was "obvious" that Michael Schiavo was trying to murder Terri.

Once again, the entire Schiavo experience underscores that when it comes to threats emanating from right-wing elements, the Bush administration, for all its hysteria about "terrorism," falls silent.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact