

Letters on the Terri Schiavo case

4 April 2005

Below, we continue to post letters received on World Socialist Web Site articles concerning the Terri Schiavo case, including “Jesse Jackson at the Schiavo hospice: Democrats make common cause with the Christian right”, “Right-wing propaganda and scientific fact in the case of Terri Schiavo”, “‘Culture of life’ or culture of lies: an exchange with WSWs readers on the Terri Schiavo case”, and “The Schiavo case: Bush and Congress trample on science and the Constitution”.

I felt sad on reading about Terry Schiavo’s slow death. I understand the agony her husband must have felt while taking the tough decision in the face of being publicly branded as a murderer. But such decisions are being taken all over the world—removing the life-support systems like oxygen and ventilators for terminally ill patients without a hope for recovery. I cannot understand why such a hue and cry is being made in this particular case, while ignoring the death of around half a million in Iraq, due to the absence of life-saving drugs during the UN sanctions sponsored by major countries.

JP

Hyderabad, India

In 1995, my sister, Rita, died after fighting HIV/AIDS for 13 years. A decade has passed, and I still think of my little sister every day. I still miss her. I’ll never “get over” seeing my sister waste away, become demented and then fall into a vegetative state, much like the one in which Terri Schiavo existed for so long. For the last few weeks of her life, my sister wasn’t really a person anymore.

Grief never goes away, it just changes. I’m happy for Michael Schiavo. I’m sure that these past 15 years have been terrible for him. Not only has he had to deal with all the emotions that arise when one loses a loved one, but he has not been allowed to properly grieve and come to terms with his loss. In a quiet way, he has been heroic. He deserves our support, our sympathy and best wishes.

Ms. Schiavo’s parents (and siblings) are deeply confused, but now that she is dead, perhaps their ecstasy of denial can come to an end. As for our pathetic public and brain-dead media figures, no words can describe the disgust I feel. But this is no surprise, for I have long held them in contempt.

Thank you for the series of articles about the Schiavo case. Nowhere else have I seen such rationality and compassion allied with tough journalistic practice. I read WSWs every day, and am grateful for your persistent hope for the future of humanity.

CD

Berkeley, California

1 April 2005

The real lesson to be learned from the Terri Schiavo spectacle of recent weeks is one of media perspective. People everywhere become emotionally involved with whatever is thrust into the limelight. It goes without saying that whatever is shrouded in darkness becomes of no consequence whatsoever.

The health of American public debate persists in a vegetative state,

and the worthless corporate media is the junk-food feeding tube primarily responsible for prolonging the condition. There’s only one sensible conclusion to be drawn: remove it.

Your news coverage, on the other hand, is exceedingly rich in vitamins.

NJ

Budapest, Hungary

1 April 2005

“The essence of civilization is that the strong have a duty to protect the weak. In cases where there are serious doubts and questions, the presumption should be in favor of life.” I couldn’t have said it better myself. The curious thing is that it was George W. Bush who made this public statement about the death of Terri Schiavo. Though they abound, it would be difficult to find a statement made by the president that is more hypocritical. The administration’s economic and foreign policies seek to, whenever possible, deny protection of the weak. This is because such protection clearly interferes with the relentless pursuit of profit and military domination.

Every year in the US, thousands of workers die on the job due to illegally unsafe working conditions. Even more die due to inadequate access to health care. How many die due to the increasingly toxic nature of the air and water is hard to estimate, but it is known that, for example, a hefty proportion of inner-city children have unsafe levels of lead in their bodies, and that rates of asthma have skyrocketed over the last couple of decades.

Abroad, millions of children die every year due to the poverty created by a global economic system that ensures the continued subjugation of developing nations to the interests of multinational corporations. More directly, the US military has killed over 100,000 Iraqis, the majority of whom were noncombatants, since the second Gulf war began. Before it did, it was estimated that our ongoing bombing campaign and economic sanctions were responsible for the deaths of 1.5 million Iraqis killed since Desert Storm. Where is the protection for these people? I have serious doubts and questions about their desire to die.

On the other hand, there were no serious doubts and questions over Schiavo’s condition. For 15 years, she had registered no cerebral activity, and in fact may have experienced a total deterioration of the parts of the brain associated with human thought (an autopsy will tell). The only doctors who suggested she was in any way conscious or sentient were associated with Christian Right organizations. These sorts of groups have no concern for facts when they fly in the face of dogma, else they would heartily accept scientific explanations for things like the origin of the universe or species. By their own admission, belief is all that is required to make something so—and Schiavo’s self-awareness and desire to live is based on nothing but that.

This is a group that wants to protect children when they are blobs of protoplasm but loses interest in their welfare the moment they’re born

into poverty. It's a group that seeks to protect the brain-dead but gleefully calls for the bombing of undeniably conscious people. Randall Terry, a Schiavo protest organizer, expressed scorn at Jeb Bush in these terms: "If Governor 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." Some Schiavo supporters have threatened or even tried to use violence to save the brain-dead woman. Would these same zealots throw themselves in front of a US bullet to save a healthy Iraqi child?

If Bush is right, if the essence of civilization is the strong protecting the weak (and, given the history of civilization, an argument can be made for the exact opposite definition), then the culture he represents has indeed abandoned civilization. It is at its essence a primitive culture, as anti-intellectual and dogmatic as the Taliban. In addition to this orientation's backward stance on civil rights, its patent ignorance facilitates an economic climate characterized above all by destructive individualism. It is a politics of, by, and for the brain-dead.

BB

Oklahoma

31 March 2005

On "Jesse Jackson at the Schiavo hospice: Democrats make common cause with the Christian right"

A conscious decision has been made to try to co-opt some members of the religious right into the Democratic Party. This has been espoused by the Democratic Leadership Council, the right element of the party that has controlled it for the last 15 years. They were responsible for pushing the Clintons to the fore.

The way they intend to do this is give up ground on the abortion issue. This has been espoused by the Clintons, Kerry, and others. Even Howard Dean, current chair of the party, and not part of the DLC, has made hints at this.

On the surface, this appears to be a fundamental misread of what happened in the 2004 presidential elections, where Kerry lost only by a few percentage points. The thinking is if "we pander a little to the religious right, we can pick up enough percentage points to win."

This is fundamentally flawed. The reason Kerry lost was that he did not campaign on the issue most fundamental to his base, opposition to the illegal war in Iraq. At the start, he even said he agreed with it, only changing at the end of the campaign to criticize the tactics, not the strategy. Indeed, by changing policy to gain a few voters on the right, the Democrats risk alienating their base and losing a much greater number of voters. The thinking is these voters have nowhere else to go; however, the voters may actually just not vote or vote for a minor party.

However, on a deeper level it signifies something much worse. The Democrats have always been a party of big money, the Republicans being a party of bigger money. One thing the Democrats always did, however, was campaign more on the issues than the Republicans. After seeing how well the "politics of demagoguery and hysteria" have worked for the Republicans, it appears that the Democrats are headed down this path.

This reflects the pernicious influence that money is having on political campaigns in the US. People are insignificant. If the party has enough money, it can buy their vote. Forget about appealing to their basic needs, like healthcare, jobs, and housing. As time goes by, the two dominant US political parties are becoming more alike, as if they were ever that different.

TR

Garland, Texas

1 April 2005

Thank you for some scientifically aware coverage. As for Jackson, Lenin had a lot to say about opportunists, and maybe one result of the Florida circus will be that more of us will recall and cite Lenin.

GA

Las Cruces, New Mexico

31 March 2005

On "More letters on the Terri Schiavo case"

I would like to congratulate you on your presentation of opposing views on the Schiavo case. This shows a remarkable degree of open-mindedness, because the natural tendency of rational persons is to dismiss the pro-life supporters as a bunch of ignorant fanatics. That you included two or three letters from those who believe that her 15-year vegetative period should be artificially prolonged by tube feeding is a tribute to your sense of "fair play."

RD

Thunder Bay, Ontario, Canada

One of the letter writers wrote, "We of the left should learn to create such mythological *istigkeit* [is-ness], to create a connection with most of the apolitical people, before we can begin to unravel the web with which the right enmeshes poor victims of propaganda."

I am leery of the idea of engaging in such tactics. Though it is tempting to pitch such a battle of words, the Right builds its mythology on lies, lies that grab at the hearts of so-called conservatives and that push emotional buttons.

We should not do the same. An appeal to the minds with the truth would be a much better and more ethical course. Some people are difficult, if not impossible, to rouse, it's true, but trying to engage the jaded with pomp ultimately leaves us open to accusations of being (if not actually becoming) no different from that which we are trying to overcome.

To the High Road!

CMS

Portland, Oregon

30 March 2005

It is pleasing to have noted that in the majority of cases in the letters received on this subject, rational thinking has been applied to this disgracefully beaten-up story, read through the eyes of the rancid Murdoch press outlets. Seldom do the true facts emerge from the mainstream press, and with a large percentage of Americans digesting the output of such media groups, daily, it is no wonder that such right-wing opinions predominate.

We in Australia make no claim on Murdoch and his sycophantic staff and are pleased for him to have left our shores. You are welcome to him and all those media groups who try to emulate him. The sooner that the US returns to factual and truthful reporting on subjects such as the Schiavo matter the better. But such reporting will not be for some years yet, sadly.

RW

Kaleen, Australia

30 March 2005



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