

Letters on “Right-wing propaganda and scientific fact in the case of Terri Schiavo”

30 March 2005

The following is a selection of letters received by the World Socialist Web Site in response to the article by David North, “Right-wing propaganda and scientific fact in the case of Terri Schiavo”. The article was written in response to a reader, CR.

I read the second letter posted by CR responded to by David North. I found that this letter of CR raises a point many people seem to gloss over. She says “If we wish Terri to ‘die with dignity’ then why not give her a lethal injection and be done with it?”

I can see that this argument can penetrate into the conscience of sincere people as it points to the inhumane, medieval nature of starving “someone” to death. But what is not explained is that this method is not a matter of multiple-choice. It is the only method sanctioned by the law to end her life. Furthermore, due to her condition of permanently losing the most important cells of her body, Terri Schiavo is not going to “starve” to death, but she will literally fade away just a like a picked flower does.

The method of putting her to rest was used to sensationalize her situation, at least by implication. More humane options are off the table thanks to severe attacks by the extreme right in the US. This was vividly demonstrated in the state of Oregon.

The state passed the “Death with Dignity Act” in 1997 to approve so-called “Physician-Assisted Suicide.” In November 2001, U.S. Attorney General John Ashcroft issued a directive aimed at nullifying this act through a radically new interpretation of the federal Controlled Substances Act. After the state decided to defend the law, several court cases and appeals bounced back and forth, and finally the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals ruled against the Attorney General. The case is now slated to be heard by the US Supreme Court.

In another, more democratic era, one would be certain that the Schiavo case would not have bubbled up onto the political arena, much less be presented as a life-and-death scenario. Even if it did, it would have only led to renewed arguments for and against euthanasia in the US, the result of which could have been educating the masses.

But this is not how it turned out and the prejudices resolved a few centuries ago bubbled up instead! The question is then: how this was possible in a country with a proud history of constitutionalising the separation of state and the religion? To answer this question with any seriousness, I suggest that CR keeps reading WSWS.

Reaching the truth sometimes may resemble unpeeling an onion. The more the layers are removed, the higher the chances of being blinded by false tears.

KK

Melbourne, Australia

Thank you so much for your cogent and incisive response to reader CR, whose objections to the WSWS outstanding articles on the Schiavo case were summarized and stated completely in the reprint of

her letter. CR’s arguments are just as misguided (to be charitable) in that letter as they appeared in your summary. It is difficult to be patient with these arguments that take a subjective form and elevate emotional responses above reasoned, scientific, i.e., Marxist analysis. Perhaps, despite your efforts and strong supporting arguments from some readers, CR will still continue to see the world with blinders on; perhaps CR will persist in her complaints that the WSWS is needlessly politicizing this issue and persist in her apparent inability to see how the ultra right and their political spokespersons, the Bushes, the DeLays and all the “right to life,” anti-abortion bigots and fascist-minded coterie have made this their number one *political* campaign. Hopefully, if she is sincerely a person who has relied on the political analyses of the WSWS, as she states, she will reconsider.

Regardless, this discussion—which will undoubtedly continue—is something that is raising the level of analysis of the Marxist (Trotskyist) movement. It’s illustrative that the understanding and enrichment of a scientific, materialist (again, “Marxist”) conception of society, history and politics can come about through numerous paths. That is why when we speak of the Schiavo case, the Minnesota high school shootings, etc., the many cultural issues that the WSWS has so brilliantly covered—and yes, even the arts, we find links leading to the most fundamental international issues, above all, the Iraq war and the ongoing drive for geo-political hegemony by the US. Here, the same sort of analysis—a scientific dissection of the forces working behind the scenes, so to speak, i.e., of the contradictions of the global capitalist economy—comes into play as in the Schiavo case, even if our own emotion and sense of outrage is the starting point.

Once again, bravo for your continued excellent work.

DF

New York, New York

One of the more interesting points in the media frenzy associated with the Schiavo campaign is that 43 of the Democrats voted with the vast majority of the Republicans. It is scientifically clear from the examinations of four court-appointed neurologists that this woman’s CAT scans and her physical lack of response conclusively show that she is not merely “brain damaged” but her cortex is dead and by maintaining the feeding tube that the family is basically performing organ culture. There has never been a documented recovery from PVS. This information was available to our members of Congress. It was even presented by some members of Congress during the abbreviated debate and, yet, 43 Democrats voted with the Republicans because they are cowed and spineless in the face of the irrational fanatics of the religious right. For me, this is the last bit of evidence that I need to conclude that the Democratic Party in the USA is dead.

NH

Thank you, David North. You are a beam of light as we slide,

stumble, and are pushed back into the Dark Ages.

KL

Malden Bridge, New York

Two points, briefly. 1) While I do assume that the facts of the case (Terri's condition) as you represented them are true, I take exception to the way you publicly beat CR over the head with them. It should be plainly obvious to you that she has a deeply personal connection to the issue, and she is, beyond a socialist, a human being and a mother. I don't mind that you corrected her mistakes only that you seemed to do it with great anger and no compassion (regardless of the tenor of her letter to you). We all need to act toward each other as compassionate human beings while speaking the truth, i.e., with compassion. If you don't believe that, your efforts to bring about peace and justice will be in vain.

2) A rarely mentioned dynamic of this case: bulimia, a life-threatening eating disorder, was the primary contributor to Terri's current condition. In the end, it will be true that Terri starved herself to death. Thanks for all your hard work and vigilance.

GG

Medford, Oregon

Because CR lives in Britain she could not have seen the A&E [cable television] program on Ms. Schiavo. It was quite objective and presented a different picture from the Murdoch media. It depicted the initial care by her husband. It also referred to a financial award that her husband deservedly was awarded, which Terri's parents wanted to get a piece of.

WJH

Winnipeg, Canada

Although I respect the fact that the WSWS perspective is not influenced by the pressure of its readers, I am surprised at the lack of sympathy shown to the Schiavo case and particularly to the writer CR. I don't understand how you could be so stubborn in your conclusions, as if you were aware of everything involving this case. I have not seen you question Mr. Schiavo's resilience to end life-support. Your disdain towards the religious right is understandable, but your judgments seem to be based solely on this bias. As a consequence, your analyses are ever more simplified, relying mostly on labeling Terri's support as the "extreme-right," "neo-fascist movement" and "religious fanaticism." Has it slipped through your reasoning that it is much more complex than these terms exemplify?

It is well enough to analyze the case, but I think you have made a mistake in casting a position without fully being aware. Furthermore, is it part of the WSWS policy to not show sympathy, as if being a social scientist prevented one from expressing emotion? This is probably why you avoided mentioning CR's claim that starving Terri is worse than what we do to animals. I would also dare to say that it is possible to contradict your analyses and still be a socialist.

AA

It takes a great deal to shock a cynic like me, but much of the commentary on Fox News on Terri Schiavo astonished me by its sheer loopiness. Increasingly, the right wing call to defend "life" sounds like the Nazi program of "blood" in its rejection of thought, and Creationism akin to the fascist "science" of Eugenics. Your excellent analysis was picked up by Google News where it no doubt attracted the attention of those who use letters as Nazis used torches, to make their small numbers seem larger. The Zionists have used this trick for some time. BBC recently noted how they were flooded by voluminous email all saying pretty much the same thing after a mildly critical article was printed concerning Israel. But one piece of good

news: The majority of evangelicals refused to go down this road with their deranged cousins, causing a massive drop in Bush's popularity rating. Zionists too are upset that American Jews seem increasingly detached from Sharon's vision. You can't fool all of the people all of the time. AL

I must say that I am delighted in the critical view of the WSWS about the Schiavo case. While I am a follower of the site for some years now, the site always surpasses my expectations. The conservative right, it seems, is by training, pedigree or some process trained to deal with the knee-jerk responses of the audience. It can always manipulate any case to suit its need, covering it up or bringing it to the forefront.

Let me offer you two examples from here in Argentina. On December 30, 2004, a nightclub, Cromañon, was burned to the ground, killing about 190 young people. The fire was started because an inebriated, underage youth (who, according to the law, shouldn't even be in a nightclub) fired a flare into the flammable roof, after soaking it with alcohol. Despite what clearly seems a sad case of death lacking any reason, many people are marching weekly asking for the leftist mayor of the city's head.

About one year ago, in the wake of the massive kidnappings, a young man, Axel Bloomberg, was kidnapped and killed. Massive marches took over the city, shaking the government, and his father became the national reference point of the right, espousing repressive measures and citing Bush's "war on terror" and "Patriot Act" as inspiration, and demanding that any criminal, even if it is a child who steals bread to eat, should be judged, incarcerated, and shot.

Why do those events create such massive repercussions? In a country where every month, in the poorer provinces, an average of 900 people die starving, and there are governors who enshrine themselves, making their "subjects" call them "High Lord and Lady"? Where the most popular "democratic" party, the Peronist party, bears the name of a military career officer, who attained power by a series of coups?

Because the conservative right is great at creating the semi-mythological dimension which makes people support them. The Cromañon burnings and the Bloomberg case hit people because suddenly it wasn't just the poor people in the outer provinces who were dying (and, frankly, most of those living in Buenos Aires know much more about other countries abroad than the poorer parts of Argentina), but it was their children who were in jeopardy.

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.

FA

Buenos Aires, Argentina

To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>