

Border fences trap people into hopelessness

We all know that Neil Armstrong's small step onto the moon in the summer of 1969 represented a giant leap in terms of mankind's technological achievement. Armstrong drew our attention to this fact with his famous statement.

But eight summers before that famous technological leap, there was another leap made by a different man — a man who didn't realize at the time that his act would later be seen by millions as symbolizing a different kind of historical achievement.

It happened on Tuesday, Aug. 15, 1961. Nineteen-year-old Conrad Schumann, a corporal in an elite, militarized police force, was monitoring a section of barbed wire on a stretch of land where a mammoth wall was about to be built — a wall which would separate the residents of East and West Berlin. The barbed wire had been laid down suddenly, two days earlier during the middle of the night, and Schumann was



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given orders to prevent his own fellow East German citizens from entering West Berlin to immigrate to the West and freedom, as they had been doing in droves. Schumann was about to be trapped inside Communist East Germany unless he acted quickly. Just before his shift ended at 4 p.m., he made a break for it. A famous photograph, which became an icon in Cold War politics, shows him in mid-air, in full military uniform, leaping over tangled strands of knee-high barbed wire, casting his submachine gun off his shoulder in mid-flight. (On the Internet, see www.tinyurl.com/yqng35.)

East Germany's decision to construct a wall to deprive their own citi-

zens of the right to leave the country proved to the world that Communism was a morally bankrupt and fraudulent political system. Schumann's leap, then, represents humanity's giant leap toward a future of freedom for all mankind.

No such thing as fairness

I once met a Communist, and I asked him how he could justify the denial of a citizen's right to leave a Communist country. He claimed that it was unfair for a person to take advantage of the education that a Communist citizen received and then not stay and contribute to his country.

But this is upside-down reasoning. If you trap people inside a country and force them to attend Communist schools, then there is no such thing as fairness in that country, and no one is obligated to remain living there.

People who think it is "fair" to enslave one's fellow citizens are the last

holdouts in a strand of political thought that stretches back to Plato.

That line of thought has now fizzled out. Such fizzling out was an inevitable consequence of the abandonment of the belief in any kind of absolute truth. The process was accelerated by the German philosopher Martin Heidegger, who supported Nazism on that basis, and made complete by the French deconstructionist "anti-philosopher" Jacques Derrida, who, in effect, conceded intellectual defeat without openly admitting such.

Conrad Schumann was given West German citizenship, got married, had kids and spent the rest of his life in Bavaria, working as a machine operator at an auto plant. Unfortunately, he apparently suffered from a lifelong fear of being pursued by East German agents and was never able to recover from that and related trauma. He hanged himself from a tree in the backyard orchard of his country home in 1998, eight years

after Germany was reunified and his former countrymen were freed.

Schumann's death can also be interpreted metaphorically as representing the sober reality that the free world is not yet truly free in all of its aspects, and much of the world still lives under philosophically defunct, despotic systems.

Alive to see peace

Of the 2.5 million people who voted with their feet and left Communist East Germany in the years before the Wall was built, hundreds of thousands are still alive today.

Perhaps one of them will live to see the day when the flaws in our political systems are remedied and peace, prosperity and freedom reigns over the earth.

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