

"Building Bridges and a World Without Borders"
(Lead-in to an ad placed in the program for a
conference on immigrants' rights)¹

During one of my favorite classical music radio programs the host waxed eloquent about "a world without borders." As a professional musician he sees music as the "universal language," noting that a Japanese violinist could perform an Austrian composer's work with an English orchestra conducted by an Israeli. He deplored the border controls that restricted the free passage of artists to perform in other countries.

I could appreciate his idealism, but it does not translate freely to other endeavors. This same man would probably welcome the zoning laws that protect his house and neighborhood from debilitating land-use, or the customs officials who reject the importation of plants and produce that could carry dangerous parasites. I doubt that he would really welcome "a world without borders" in all circumstances. In this connection I draw your attention to the book review by Michael Walzer in our Winter issue in which he points to the "globalism" which ignores the legitimate "forms of human fellowship."²

As a practicing physician I know the importance of borders in the human body. When the Rev. James Jones of Guyana gave his 900 followers cyanide to drink, he was erasing their internal physiological borders and poisoning the enzymes that kept their compartmentalized bodies alive. On the other side of the medical metaphor, there are diseases of the membranes in which their "bordering" becomes too tight, too impervious, so that the contained cells die from the inability of nutrition to get in or of wastes to get out.

There is a certain attraction in the idea of a world without borders. After all, few borders are logical in the sense that they respect geographic features like coastlines, watersheds, rivers and mountain ranges. Other national borders that do respect such geography may cut across cultural, tribal, language, religious and other lines. The boundaries drawn in Africa by the colonial powers largely ignored such concerns. When Pakistan was partitioned from India, religious strife soon made necessary one of the largest migrations in history. Literally millions of Muslims were moved into West and East Pakistan (renamed Bangladesh) to create a predominantly Muslim state. Pairing this move was a counterflow of Hindus from Pakistan and Bangladesh to India.

The concept of open borders is a seductive one, and apparently one that motivates those who advocate "open borders" as an immigration policy. Even *The*

Wall Street Journal editorialized for a constitutional amendment that would state simply: There shall be open borders.³

Believing as we do that ideas rule the world, and that the idea of a world without national borders is not a workable one, we explore the question of national sovereignty and its validity in this issue of *The Social Contract*. Indeed, as I write this editorial, the Coalition Forces in the Persian Gulf are reminding the world that national boundaries are important for a civilized order, and that all people have the right to dwell behind secure borders.

Our first article is by Glenn Frankel of *The Washington Post* foreign service and is a good summary of the world situation, with some borders falling (as within the European Economic Community) and attempts to erect others (as between the ethnic groups in the Soviet Union). Worldwide, there seems to be more movement toward erecting borders than toward dismantling them. Will more member-states be added to the 90 nations which have declared their sovereignty (that is, established their borders) and joined the UN since the end of World War II?

Next, Richard Cattani, editor of *The Christian Science Monitor*, emphasizes the economic counter-trend that "the global frontier is replacing national frontiers." He mentions the proposed US/Mexico free trade zone, which some see as expanding to a hemispheric free-trade zone. Will this be just for the flow of information, capital and goods, or for people as well? Cattani's article serves to remind us of the proposed free migration of peoples within the European Economic Community, coupled with stringent controls on immigration from outside the EEC. Agreeing on these controls is one of the main stumbling blocks to further EEC integration. All of these changes have implications of the highest order for those concerned with American immigration policies.

Our third piece is "Borders and Quaker Values: Reflections of an AFSC Working Group," prepared as a brochure under the auspices of the American Friends Service Committee. The Quakers tend to believe in more open borders. They have recently brought suit (*AFSC v. Thornburgh*) in an attempt to invalidate the employer sanctions provisions of the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986, claiming, among other things, that these strictures on employment impair the free movement of peoples. To their great credit, in this essay the "working group" takes a close look at both sides of the borders question. They arrive at interesting conclusions on whether or not borders should exist, and how existing borders should function. We have asked Kenneth Boulding and Gerda Bikales to respond to this paper.

As in many human affairs, I suspect the reasonable answer to the borders question lies with some *via media*, some middle path. We need borders that are tight enough so that people can manage their own affairs and lives, without a constant stream of people, uncommitted to their political unit, drifting through. Conversely, they need to be open enough so that ideas, artistic talent, capital, some goods, and a few newcomers (few in relation to the 5.3 billion now inhabiting the globe) can pass through. The concept of free trade must be one of controlled borders, not a world without borders. The debate should not be whether to have borders but about their management: who, how, why, what, when, where?

Underlying all of this are two realities. The first is the basic concept of a statute of limitations. At some point it becomes too late to challenge settled matters--at least some kinds of matters. Borders are probably one of these. It's getting very late in the history of the world to be redrawing national borders. To a large extent, we're stuck with what we have received, regardless of how inappropriate or irrational. Lithuania wants its historic border recognized, not redrawn.

The second underlying reality is the continuing increase of our numbers. In the two hours I have taken to do some background reading and write a draft of this editorial, some 30,000 people have been born worldwide, 10,000 have died, increasing our numbers by another 20,000. Every day there is another quarter-million of us. Our constantly increasing numbers will ensure escalating conflict: competition for resources, living space, disposal sites for our waste, and so on. We will encounter each other, and each other's interests, more frequently. People will understandably want to protect and preserve what they have from the rising human tide. This is not a situation in which borders, natural or otherwise, are likely to go out of date. We suspect that if our musician friend had to live in a world without borders, walls, doors, and--unfortunately--locks, he'd soon agree. Living, as he does, in New York City, we'll wager that he secures his personal borders by locking his doors.

We hope you find this issue of *The Social Contract* stimulating, and that you will send us your thoughts and opinions.

John H. Tanton
Editor and Publisher

¹ This ad was placed by the Coalition for Immigrants' and Refugees' Rights and Services in the program for a conference on "Immigration Rights: A Civil Rights Issue for the 90s" held at Berkeley, California, October 27-28, 1990.

² Michael Walzer in his review of *Nations and*

Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality by E.J. Hobsbawm, *The Social Contract*, Winter 1990-1991, pp. 90-92.

³ Proposed in a Wall Street Journal editorial of July 3, 1984 and reaffirmed in the editorials of July 3, 1986 and July 3, 1989.