BERLIN, BY THE WALL - Somewhere, I hope Ol' Max Schmeling is smiling, while more divisive fellows like Adolph Hitler and Nikita Khrushchev are spinning in their graves.

Here was an international pleasure party where once were politics that led to world war.

When Nikolai Valuev and John Ruiz engaged Saturday night in this amazing, artistic city at the Halle that bore Schmeling's name, many observers figured "bore" would be the operative term involved.

Not so.

Both men kept true to their word of providing more action than before as Valuev held off the relatively tiny Ruiz and captured a debatable decision.

"I really thought he was doing better this time than before," said Valuev. "He improved one hundred percent, but he missed too much to win."

"I felt great and thought I won," said a scuffed up Ruiz as a mob of German supporters surrounded him with consolation. 'I thought I put him down (in the second), but what can you do."

As promised, Ruiz kept attacking before finally fading just enough to let Valuev justifiably squeak out the nod, behind a strong, much improved jab.
Ringsiders and the attentively polite bleacher crowd were split, so it definitely wasn't a shady score even though "The Russian Giant" was an obvious local favorite coming in.

Valuev is a huge, almost comic looking target, but also an imposing wall of defense.

Wild trades in the second session made the assembled swarm scream. Ruiz scored early and pitched right hand mallets that made it look like he could stop his foe. Valuev looked akwardly confused at Ruiz's blastoff persistence. A flurrying exchange sprawled Valuev into the bright white strands for what could have been called a knockdown, but it was ruled a slip.

Ruiz worked his way in well, but Valuev shoved him out of range consistently by the fourth frame. Ruiz got his own gutshot jab in and Valuev was breathing through his mouth, with a bloody lip by the halfway point.

Valuev is a big man with a very long stick. Ruiz slipped punches effectively but his face and torso still grew bright red.

In the eighth, a huge right stopped Ruiz in his tracks. Mauling ensued as the fighters grew tired, but they maintained a punishing pace in a hall that was cloudy from smoke machines. Way back

when, such a haze would have come from cigars.

Valuev had a point deducted in round ten for too much pushing, but the strategy was effective a la Foreman-Frazier. By the time the affair got sloppy, it was over.

Scoring : 114-113, 116-113, 116-111 all for Valuev. I saw it for Ruiz by a point or two, but it was close enough for no complaints. The verdict was initially announced as a split decision, which would have been just as accurate.

Many in the crowd had a mixed reaction to Valuev's victory, and Ruiz got plenty of cheers when he climbed the ring post to claim his props.

It wasn't Margarito- Cotto, but it certainly wasn't Klitschko - Ibragimov either.

Nobody will confuse Valuev-Ruiz II with the heroics of Schmeling or his eventual pal Joe Louis, but for a little while there were some definite thumping thrills. I've seen some of my favorite heavyweight immortals like Evander Holyfield, Larry Holmes and Mike Tyson have worse performance nights.

The tale of Valuev and Ruiz may be extended, and now that's not such a bad thing. When asked in front of the crowd what was next, Valuev said, "I want to fight John Ruiz again."

"Sure I'd be willing to fight him again," said Ruiz with an ironic, bruised smile. "Even in Germany. I love it here, even though the scoring got me again. What can I do but keep trying?"

I can remember being in second or third grade, watching a little black and white TV. My mom reassured me as Khrushchev banged his shoe on the United Nations table and ranted "We will bury you!" at North America.

Not quite, buddy. They buried your twisted take on communism first, at places like the Berlin Wall.

Then President John Kennedy's tragedy proves history can be good and bad. Current affairs also show it often repeats itself, as always.

In a little corner of this crazy planet, Valuev and Ruiz improved their shared professional history as around 4,000 frantic fans made uncharacteristic noise for a "boxen" event in these parts. European media ringsiders said the high energy scene was nothing like the initial plodder.

Not far away, at an early morning downtown cultural street party after an event called "Long Night of the Museums", well heeled socialites and scruffy bohemians from many nations danced in a united beat.

It was a great dawn to see, wherever you hail from.

For tonight, an American duking David took on an adopted hometown Russian Goliath, with

some pretty commendable results.

It's been almost fifty years (October '61) since USA and Russian tanks faced off at the Checkpoint Charlie blockade, when true global heavyweights Kennedy and Kruschev stared each other down in the type confrontation that makes it a joke when boxers babble about a personal "war".

Ruiz and Valuev may or may not be punching political symbols. But it was good to see them embrace after the fight, further evidence that perhaps at least the sweet science world of A. J. Liebling, if not all heavyweight boxing, is indeed moving forward after all.