

Red letter day

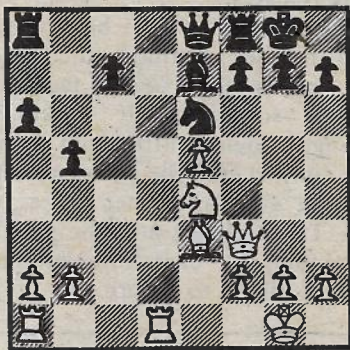
THE RARE front-page letter of congratulation from Leonid Brezhnev in a recent issue of *Sovietsky Sport* gives an indication of just how important Anatoly Karpov's world championship victory was to Soviet prestige. Not only did Karpov deny 50-year-old Soviet defector Viktor Korchnoi the crown for the second time; he did it in such crushing style that the 18-game contest, which he won by six wins to two, was the shortest in International Chess Federation history. Karpov also received the Order of Lenin for his efforts.

The politicians, no doubt, viewed the Merano match as a sort of symbolic cold war between the loyal Soviets and the emigres. In chess terms it turned into a mis-match. Karpov, at 30, is clearly approaching his peak. Korchnoi's play was inexplicably tired and erratic. Only two sparkling come-backs in games six and 13 gave any hint of the marvellous energy and vitality usually so characteristic of his games.

His problem may have been a combination of poor openings preparation, his age, and the unerring accuracy of Karpov's play. The champion made perhaps as few as two discernible errors in the entire contest, and his phenomenal technique was such that grandmasters are still scouring the final game to find where Korchnoi went wrong.

Karpov now retains his title unchallenged until 1984, when he will have reigned for nine years. Here is how he decided the last two decisive games of the match.

KORCHNOI



KARPOV

This is the critical position in game 14, reached after Black's 16th move ...Qe8. Karpov found a way to smash his opponent's defensive kingside pawn formation by 17.Nf6 ch! Now 17...gxf6 gets wiped out by 18.exf6 Bd6 19.Rd5 Kh8 19.Rh5 Rg8 (to defend with ...Nf8) 21.Rxh7 ch Kxh7 22.Qh5 mate.

Instead play continued 17...Bxf6 18.exf6 Qc8 19.fxg7 Rd8 20.h4 c5 21.Ra1 Qc7 22.h5 Qe5 23.h6 Qxb2 24.Rd7 Rxd7 25.Qxa8 ch Rd8 26.Qxa6 and White's extra protected passed pawn on g7 proved the deciding factor.

Now here is Karpov's win in the 18th game, which decided the match.

RUY LOPEZ

A. KARPOV 1. e4
V. KORCHNOI e5

- 2. Nf3 Nc6
- 3. Bb5 a6
- 4. Ba4 Nf6
- 5. 0-0 Nxe4
- 6. d4 b5
- 7. Bb3 d5
- 8. dxe5 Be6
- 9. Nbd2 Nc5
- 10. c3 d4
- 11. Bxe6 Nxe6
- 12. cxd4 Ncxd4
- 13. a4!

Varying from 13.Ne4 as in games 14 and 16. Korchnoi now lapsed into thought for some 53 minutes — hadn't he and his analytical team considered this natural move?

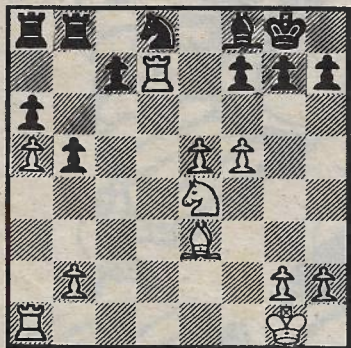
- 13. ... Be7
- 14. Nxd4 Nxd4

One of the points of White's 13th move is that 14...Qxd4 would fail to 15.axb5 as Black's a-pawn is pinned.

- 15. Ne4 Ne6
- 16. Be3 0-0
- 17. f4 Qxd1
- 18. Rfxd1 Rfb8

Contesting the d-file doesn't prevent White's rook penetrating to the seventh — 18...Rfd8 19.axb5 axb5 20.Rxa8 Rxa8 21.Rd7.

- 19. Rd7 Bf8
- 20. f5 Nd8
- 21. a5!



Having harassed every Black piece back to the first rank, Karpov now cancels out any counterplay Korchnoi might have got from opening the b-file. Already the challenger's position is desperate, and Karpov follows up with ruthless aggression.

- 21. ... Nc6
- 22. e6 fxg6
- 23. f6! Ne5
- 24. Rxc7 Rbc8
- 25. Rac1 Rxc7
- 26. Rxc7 Rd8
- 27. h3 h6
- 28. Ra7 Nc4
- 29. Bb6 Rb8
- 30. Bc5 Bxc5 ch
- 31. Nxc5 gxh6
- 32. b4!

A second temporary pawn sacrifice, after which Black's pawns fall like ripe apples.

- 32. ... Rd8
- 33. Rxa6 Kf7
- 34. Ra7 ch Kg6
- 35. Rd7 Re8

On 35...Rxd7 36.Nxd7 the White a-pawn would march through to queen.

- 36. a6 Ra8
- 37. Rb7 Kf5
- 38. Rxb5 Ke5
- 39. Rb7 Kd5
- 40. Rf7 f5
- 41. Rf6 e5 (sealed)

and Black resigned

Korchnoi probably sealed his 41st move only to avoid resigning the game, and thus the match, over the board. After 42.Rxf5 he stands two pawns down in an endgame, a hopeless disadvantage at this level.

MURRAY CHANDLER