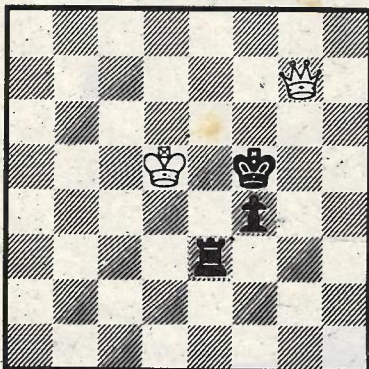


Time for change

by Murray Chandler

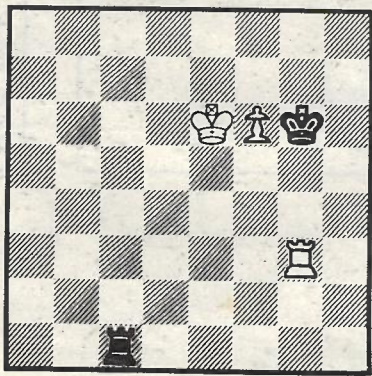
LATE LAST YEAR the World Chess Federation, Fide, announced it was changing the time-control in all official events from the usual five-hour session in which each player has to make 40 moves in two and a half hours. With the proposed new six-hour session of 40 moves in two hours, followed by 20 moves in the next hour, Fide believes the number of adjournments will be drastically reduced. Unfortunately for Fide, mutiny followed an initial attempt to introduce it at the World Teams Championship in Lucerne. But if this experiment is eventually favourably received, it may herald a change in non-Fide competition too. Events such as the New Zealand Congress, and North and South Island Championships, might well elect to try the change.

One major implication of this new time limit would be an increased importance of endgame knowledge and skills. In the past players could adjourn after 40 moves and dash for their *Basic Chess Endings*. By 60 moves it may be too late. With a dedicated study of endgames, I think, a player might easily reap an extra half or whole point in a tournament. Even grandmasters sometimes have only a sketchy knowledge of whether many complex theoretical positions are wins or draws. Take, for example, this following position where White has a queen v rook and f-pawn. Is it a win or a draw? It nearly arose in a clash between Karpov and Korchnoi in the IBM tournament recently concluded in Vienna. In the post-mortem even these two world-class experts were unsure of the verdict!



It is, in fact, a known draw. White can give a lot of checks, but as long as the rook oscillates between e3 and g3 Black holds the balance. Note, though, that a similar situation with Black having an e-pawn instead of an f-pawn is lost! (Don't ask me why — I'd have to look it up in a book.)

Rook endgames are by far the most common in actual play, and a thorough grounding in these is invaluable. A training method I use is to work through the 1712-position *Encyclopaedia of Rook Endings*, pencil in hand, checking my calculations against the answers after each diagram. Start with rook and pawn v rook — many of these are fiendishly complicated.



Sax-Tsheshkovsky, Rovinj/Zagreb 1975.

As Black to play, the Soviet Grandmaster Tsheshkovsky resigned this position. But he could have drawn:

1. ... **Kh7**
2. **f7**
2. *Rg7 ch Kh6 3. Rg8 Rc6 ch 4. Ke7 Rc7 ch 5. Kd6 Ra7! also holds.*

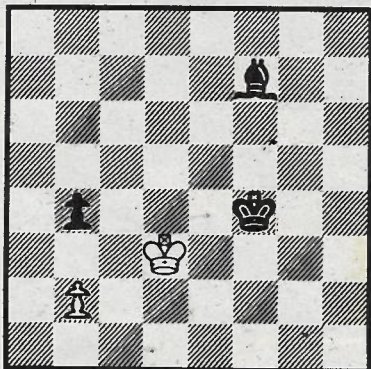
2. ... **Rc8!**
Here Black draws because he has what is known as the "checking distance". This is the number of squares available to his rook on the left hand side (in this case) of White's pawn — a matter of crucial importance.

3. **Ke7** **Rc7 ch**
4. **Ke8** **Rc8 ch**
5. **Kd7** **Ra8!**

If the a-file was chopped off, and Black had to play 5. ... Rb8, he would lose his checking distance. White would win with 6. Rb3! Rf8 7. Ke7 Kg7 8. Rg3 ch.

6. **Ra3** **Rb8!**
7. **Ke7** **Rb7 ch etc**

There are a number of positional draws worth knowing in various endgames. A blockade or threat of stalemate can save the day against considerable material disadvantage. The best known one is king, rook's pawn and bishop of the wrong colour (ie, it cannot control the queening square) v king. But just imagine how shocked an opponent might be if he assumed that, as Black, he had a trivial win in this next "simple" endgame.



Y Averbakh 1972

Instead of resigning you could play:

1. **Kd4!** **b3**

The threat was 2. b3 Bxb3 3. Kc5 winning Black's pawn.

2. **Kd3!** **Ke5**
3. **Kd2** **Kd4**
4. **Kc1**

... and scandalously, a bishop down, White has forced a standard positional draw. Black can force the opposition king into the corner, but stalemate possibilities mean he can never win the b-pawn. ■