

BRIAN EASTON

Tender seats

THE Royal Commission on Electoral Reform missed the point; elections are no more than a complex and expensive way of allocating a scarce resource: parliamentary seats.

It is not clear why there should be a scarcity of seats, although at the moment the number of seats is restricted for physical reasons. Unfortunately the seminal paper which calculates the optimal number of seats is yet to be written. No doubt it will appear soon in the authoritative *Chicago Journal of Economics and Law*. In the interim we are stuck with the present number.

Allocating seats by voting is extremely expensive. It is all very well to get carried away with "democracy" but the 1984 election cost the taxpayer almost \$5 million, and then there were the costs of the political parties, pressure groups, electoral rolls, reform commissions and the like.

This country is facing an economic crisis; we have to ask whether we can afford elections. During World War II the 1941 election was delayed for a year. Surely the country faces an even greater threat today.

If the commission had consulted an economist it would surely have proposed a more efficient allocation of seats which would also have reduced the budget deficit.

Economics textbooks do not offer any justification for the ballot. But there is a theory which shows the merits of allocation by selling to the highest bidder. This involves rather special assumptions, which probably do not apply in this case. But that has not been a reason against advocating the theory's use in other inapplicable situations.

All we need is that everyone who wants a parliamentary seat puts in a financial bid. In each case the highest bidder would become the Member of Parliament, and the payment would go into the public account, thus reducing the deficit.

To ensure the market for seats is contestable (and whatever else is the current jargon) it will be necessary to change their property rights. First, they would be transferable, registered on the stock exchange. Second, any consortium (the old-fashioned would call them "parties") would be allowed to bid. The articles of association would specify the way its agent had to vote; thus introducing the principle that MPs were legally bound to support what would be, in effect, an election manifesto.

This might upset Maoris who are likely to claim some seats as their exclusive preserve, under the Treaty of Waitangi (which is always getting in the way of economic efficiency). We could allow this anomaly, since the four seats do not have much effect, and it would save economists having to face up to Maori issues for at least another century.

The Reserve Bank, who have got the tendering of government stock to a fine



Eminent St Albans jurist Sir Alan Grant: commission agent?

art, could sell off the seats in a quiet week. (No doubt the financial institutions would be putting in bids anyway.) Perhaps we could leave the problem of determining the right number of seats to the bank, which they would tackle as soon as they have worked out what is the optimal supply of money.

At present the electoral term is three years but the seats could be sold off in perpetuity — everything else seems to be. The Royal Commission recognised that elections interfere with the smooth running of government, but it was pussy-footing when it suggested a four-year term.

There will be complaints that this approach would leave the political process vulnerable to those with the most money, or special pecuniary interests. But this is already true; today heroin pushers could fund political parties to legalise heroin. Under the new system they would buy the seats directly, cutting out the Labour and National middlemen. That heroin remains illegal shows that the anti-heroin lobby has more funds (or that the present laws are in the interests of the heroin industry).

We have got away from the mindset of 1894 when the principle of universal suffrage was established. We seem intent on abandoning the social and economic strategy that developed thereafter, so why should we keep to an outmoded and inefficient electoral system? We face an economic crisis which requires the radical solutions of modern microeconomic theory, even if that leads to an end of society as we have known it.

The one problem I have not quite solved is how to embed the property rights so that the new Parliament would not change them. At one stage I thought there should be a commission headed by that eminent St Albans jurist, Sir Alan Grant. However, I realised that seats on the commission should also be up for tender, and that its terms of reference should be capable of change by those who are willing to pay an appropriate fee. ■

Patently odd

by Murray Chandler

A QUICKPLAY match on television between Britain's Nigel Short and Soviet world champion Garry Kasparov, filmed in London during February, could become an interesting chess copyright case. Aly Amin, proprietor of Chequers Cafe and a part-time publisher, has had a high court injunction served on him by Thames Television. The injunction, signed by Mr Justice Hoffman, forbids Amin from publishing a book of the six-game Docklands Speed Challenge, which Channel 4 is releasing as a series of half-hour programmes shortly. The legal case rests on the fact that all 400-500 spectators present during recording were invited with tickets that forbade publishing either the games or results before transmission of the series.

Although the Thames TV case is based on a breach of confidentiality clause, it has never been clear why chess games do not fall within normal copyright law. The argument that anyone could play a particular game is sometimes used as a defence; think of the chaos, for example, if Graham Chandler successfully patented a cover drive in cricket. Of course one could never prevent others from playing a particular chess game. But as far as publishing a specific game and naming the participants (i.e. Spassky v Fischer, Reykjavik 1972), is it not logical that either the organisers or the players should retain royalty rights? A game created by a clash between two grandmasters could be compared to a musical score created by two composers. Yet, Tim Rice and Andrew Lloyd Webber get rich but Bobby Fischer won't get a cent from any of the collections of his games.

A curious anomaly, perhaps, although this does not mean I am in favour of writers having to pay fees. Many books and columns would not survive even the smallest increase in expenditure, and imagine if one let slip that Kasparov beat Short by, shall we say, four wins to two? Thames TV would probably put your newspaper in liquidation. But in this particular case, Amin is well out of order. The spectacular presentation of this challenge, staged in the trendy Hippodrome discotheque, might do for chess what *Pot Black* and one-day cricket did for their respective sports.

Music and a laser light show set the mood before each game as Kasparov and Short strode out in white or black dinner suits, depending on which colour they were playing. At 25-minutes per player the pace was brisk and decisive, and TV viewers will benefit from a live grandmaster commentary.

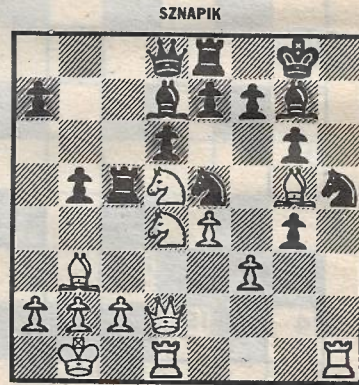
I am tempted to publish all six games just to see what happens. But just maybe someone in New Zealand TV might see the potential in chess, as the British channels now do, and bring this spectacular to your screens. Therefore we will have to make do with the following Dragon-slaying which appeared on live Dubai TV during the Olympiad last November. Former world champion Ana-

toly Karpov is quoted as saying he had prepared this stunning opening novelty for his 1978 match against Viktor Korchnoi, but had never used it.

SICILIAN DEFENCE
(Dragon Variation)

A KARPOV (USSR)	A SZNAPIK (Poland)
1. e4	c5
2. Nf3	d6
3. d4	cxd4
4. Nxd4	Nf6
5. Nc3	g6
6. Be3	Bg7
7. f3	O-O
8. Qd2	Nc6
9. Bc4	Bd7
10. O-O-O	Ne5
11. Bb3	Rc8
12. h4	h5
13. Bg5	Rc5
14. Kb1	b5
15. g4!	
15. ...	h×g4
16. h5!	N×h5
17. Nd5	Re8

This new move was first played by Karpov against Kiril Georgiev in round 11 at Dubai. After 15. ... a5 16. B×f6 B×f6 17. a3 h×g4 18. f4 Nc4 19. Qd3 Qc8! was unclear but, forestalling any improvement, Sznapik chooses the critical response to White's ultra-aggressive strategy.



18. R×h5!

An essential follow-up to White's double pawn sacrifice, if about as subtle as a sledgehammer. White intends to open the h-file, plonk his remaining rook and queen on it and deliver checkmate. Although this will take several moves, Black's material advantage is remarkably unhelpful in preventing it.

18. ...	g×h5
19. Qh2	Rc4

Trying to blunt the assault with 19. ... R×d5 has already been seen in two post-Dubai games. It worked in neither.

20. B×c4	b×c4
21. Q×h5	f6
22. f4!	Nf7

22. ... f×g5 23. f×e5 d×e5 24. Nf5 gives a winning attack.

23. Bh4	Qb8
24. Rh1	c3
25. b3	Qb7
26. f5	Ne5
27. Ne6	Resigns

There are innumerable threats to the Black king (eg 27. ... Qa6 28. B×f6 e×f6 29. Qh7 ch Kf7 30. Q×g7 mate) and 27. ... B×e6 allows 28. Q×e8 ch.

15. g4! is definitely an opening novelty worth patenting, and I reckon I owe Karpov a couple of roubles already. ■