

My System

Aron Nimzowitsch

English Version by Philip Hereford
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The Elements

Part II.

Position Play

1. The Conception of Position Play and the Problem of the Centre

1.1. The mutual relations between the treatment of the elements and of position play

As the reader will soon see, my conception of position play is based for the greater part on the knowledge we have laboriously wrung from our consideration of the elements. Especially is this true of the devices of Centralization and of Restraint which we have outlined. The connexion which thus exists has the advantage, that it must give to this book a certain unity of structure, which can only be of benefit to the reader. It would, however, be an error on his part to indulge in the expectation that the exploration of the spirit of position play cannot now afford him any further difficulties worth mentioning. For firstly, position play contains other ideas than those we have met so far, as for instance the law of "over-protection", which I discovered, or the very difficult strategy of the centre; while secondly, the actual transference of the ideas which we have learnt from the elements on to a new field, that of position play, is difficult enough. The degree of difficulty is much the same as that which faces a composer who wishes to adapt a violin sonata for a full orchestra. However unchanged the theme, the motives, may be, the whole must gain in depth and breadth. Let us explain this by a concrete case in chess, for instance "restraint". In the "elements" this touches a comparatively small field; a passed pawn is to be checked, or an enemy pawnchain which is become free to move is to be prevented from advancing. In position play on the other hand the restraint theme makes a much more impressive appearance; now it is often a whole wing which must be held in check. In games in which the player who is putting restraint on his opponent is

"scoring" his theme very heavily (I have in mind for instance my game against Johner, No. 35), we have the whole board, both wings, every corner taking up the theme, and blaring it forth.

The second case is even worse for the student; for here the theme appears in epic breadth, with a series of seemingly purposeless moves, to and fro, mixed with it. This kind of manœuvring corresponds in a way to the accompaniment in music. Many people hold both this manœuvring and accompaniment as things which may be dispensed with; many lovers of chess go so far as to characterize this moving to and fro as a fruit of decadence. In reality, however, this manœuvring often enough provides the only strategical - be it noted strategical, not merely psychological - way of throwing in the scale a slight advantage in terrain and the consequent capacity of moving our troops more quickly from one wing to the other.

1.2. On certain noxious weeds which choke a proper understanding of position play

Namely

- (a) the obsession to be for ever doing something which haunts so many amateurs, and
- (b) the overrating of the principle of the accumulation of small advantages which may inspire the Master

There are, it would seem, a number of amateurs to whom position play appears to mean nothing. Twenty years' experience in teaching chess has, however, convinced me that this trouble can be easily removed, since it results from a faulty presentation of the subject. I maintain that there is nothing inherently mysterious in position play,

1. The Conception of Position Play and the Problem of the Centre

and that every single amateur who has studied my "elements", in the first nine chapters of this book, must find it an easy matter to penetrate into the spirit of this style of play; he has only

- (1) to destroy the weeds which perhaps choke his understanding, and
- (2) to carry out the precepts laid down in the rest of the book

A typical and very wide-spread misconception is the assumption of many amateurs that each single move must accomplish something directly; so that such a player will only seek for moves which threaten something, or for a threat to be parried, and will disregard all other possible moves such as waiting moves, or moves calculated to put his house in order etc. Positional moves as I conceive them, are in general neither threatening nor defensive ones, but rather moves designed to give to our position security in the wider sense, and to this end it is necessary for our pieces to establish contact with the enemy's strategically important points or our own. This will be brought out later when we are considering **over-protection**, and the fight against enemy freeing-moves.

When a positional player, that is one who understands how to safeguard his position in the wider sense, engages one who is a purely combinational player, the latter who has only attack in his thoughts, is preoccupied with but two kinds of counter-moves, and looks only for a defensive move from his opponent, or calculates on the possibility of a counter-attack; and now the positional player dumbfounds him by choosing a move which will not fit into either of these categories. The move somehow or other brings his pieces into contact with some key point, and this contact has miraculous effects; his position is thereby imbued with strength, and the attack on it comes to naught. A similar disconcerting effect is also often produced by a move which protects a point which is under no sort of attack. The positional player protects a point not only for the sake of that point, but also because he knows that the piece which he uses for its defence must gain in strength by mere contact with the point in question. This will be considered further under **over-protection**.

And now I will take a game which is an admirable illustration of very widespread misconception to which I have referred. I had the White pieces against a very well known and by no means weak amateur, who, however, was under the impression that a proper game must take some such course as this:

- one side Castles K-side,
- the other Q-side,
- a violent pawn attack is launched on both sides against the respective castled positions, and
- he who gets in first wins!

We shall see how this amateurish conception was reduced ad absurdum. The game was played in Riga in 1910 and ran:

Nimzowitsch - anonymous
Riga 1910

1.	e2-e4	e7-e5
2.	♘g1-f3	♘b8-c6
3.	d2-d4	e5×d4
4.	♞f3×d4	d7-d6

This move is quite playable but only in conjunction with a strong defensive structure, attainable by say ... ♞f6, ♕e7, 0-0, and ♖e1 with pressure on White's e4;

5.	♞b1-c3	♞g8-f6
6.	♕f1-e2	♕f8-e7
7.	♕c1-e3	♕c8-d7
8.	♖d1-d2	a7-a6?
9.	f2-f3	0-0
10.	0-0-0	b7-b5

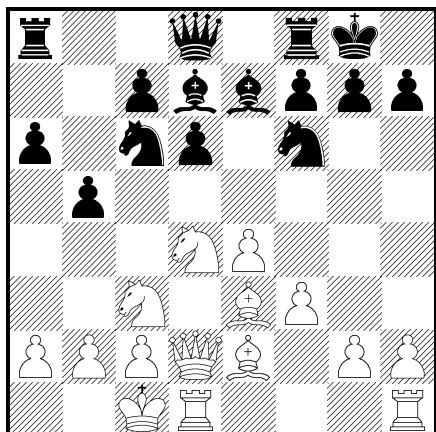
The attack seems hardly in place here, so that my opponent's expression, "Now we're in for it," charged as it was with the lust of battle, struck one as all the prettier. I understood him at once; he clearly expected the answer g2g4 with a consequent race between the pawns on both sides according to the motto "who gets in first wins" (Diag. 1). What did happen however was

11.	♞c3-d5	
-----	--------	--

With this move, by which an outpost station in the Queen's file is occupied, White obeys another principle of position play, namely that premature

1. The Conception of Position Play and the Problem of the Centre

DIAGRAM 1:



The attempt of an attack by 10 ... b7b5? is to be defeated by a positional move. What is this to be?

flank attacks should be punished by play in the centre (i.e. break through in, or occupation of the centre), there followed

- | | | |
|-----|--------|--------|
| 11. | ... | ♞f6×d5 |
| 12. | e4×d5 | ♞c6×d4 |
| 13. | ♙e3×d4 | |

and White has very much the better game. He has a centralized position which cannot possibly be taken away from him by, say, 13 ... ♙f6 14. f4, ♖e8 15. ♙f3 followed by ♖h1-e1 and moreover Black has a disorganized Q wing which exposes bad weaknesses for the end game. And the moral of the story is: **Do not be always thinking of attack!** Safeguarding moves (in the higher sense), indicated by the demands made on us by the position, are often much more advisable.

Another erroneous conception may be found among Masters. Many of these and numbers of strong amateurs are under the impression that position play above all is concerned with the accumulation of small advantages, in order to exploit them in the end game. This mode of play is said to demand the finest intelligence and also to be aesthetically most satisfying.

In contradiction to this we would remark that the accumulation of small advantages is by no means the most important constituent of position play. We are inclined rather to assign to this plan of operation a very subordinate role. Moreover the difficulty of this method is very much overestimated, and lastly it is not quite easy to see how the petty storing up of values can be called beautiful. Does not this procedure remind one in some sense of the activities of some old pinch-penny; and who would think of calling them beautiful? And so we here note the fact that there are quite other matters to which the attention of the positional player must be directed, and which place this "accumulation" wholly in the shade.

What are these things, and in what do I see the idea of true position play? The answer is short and to the point - in a "prophylactic".

1.3. My new principle of over-protection, its definition and meaning

My original conception of positional play as such: the well known idea of the accumulation of small advantages is only of second or third significance; of much greater importance is a prophylactic applied both externally and internally.

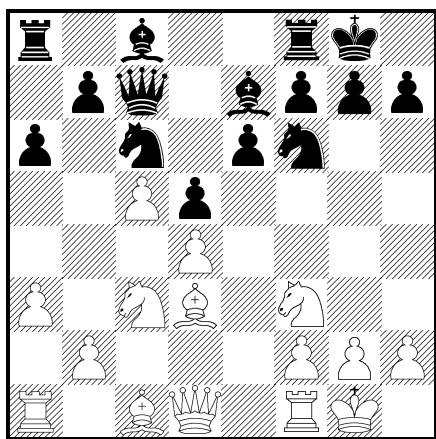
As I have several times observed, neither attack nor defence is, in my opinion, a matter properly pertaining to position play, which is rather. an energetic and systematic application of prophylactic measures. What it is concerned with above all else is to blunt the edge of certain possibilities which in a positional sense would be undesirable. Of such possibilities, apart from the mishaps to which the less experienced player is exposed, there are two kinds only. One of these is the possibility of the opponent making a "freeing" pawn move. The positional player has accordingly so to arrange his pieces that enemy freeing moves may be prevented. In connexion with which it is to be noticed that we must examine every case that arises to see whether the freeing move in question really is freeing. For as I pointed out in my article on Dr. Tarrasch's Die moderne

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Schachpartie, the true saying, "all is not gold that glitters," applies to freeing moves. Many there are which only lead to an unfavourable premature opening up of the game, whereas other freeing moves should be considered as normal reactions, and as such must be calmly accepted; for it were a presumption to wish to fight against natural phenomena! In spite of the fact that freeing moves will be considered in detail in another place under "restraint", it will not be amiss to give here two illustrations.

For an example of an incorrect freeing move, see Diagram ???. In similar positions the move e4 would properly be classed under freeing moves; for it opens up Black's otherwise cramped game, and in addition stands for the action in the centre, positionally indicated as a counter-measure to the encircling movement which White is striving for on the Q's wing. Nevertheless White rightly plays here c4! (instead of ♖e1), as will be seen.

DIAGRAM 2:



White by playing b4, allows his opponent to make the freeing advance e5. Was he right in so doing?

- | | | |
|----|---------|---------|
| 1. | b2-b4! | e6-e5? |
| 2. | d4×e5 | ♞c6×e5 |
| 3. | ♞c1-f4! | ♞e5×f3+ |
| 4. | ♞d1×f3 | ♞c7-d8 |
| 5. | h2-h3 | |

followed by ♞d1 and the occupation of the

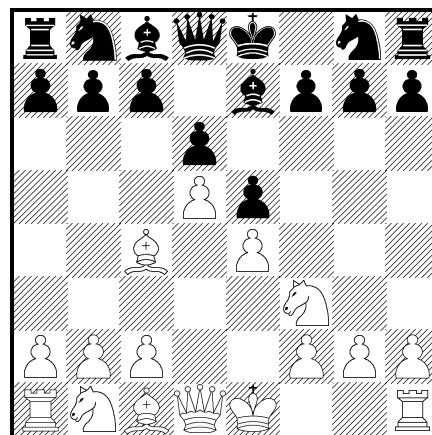
square d4 (blockading point) by ♞ or ♞, with superior game for White: Black was, to start with, behind in tempi, hence the failure of his freeing manoeuvre.

Our second example, Diagram 3, shows us that it is not possible permanently to hold up a freeing advance for which in the nature of the things the time is ripe; our object must therefore in similar cases be limited to making the freeing manoeuvre as difficult of execution as possible, nor must we under any circumstances persist in the attempt, impossible of achievement from the start, to stop such an advance. The position in Diagram 3 was reached after the moves

game
unattributed

- | | | |
|----|--------|--------|
| 1. | e2-e4 | e7-e5 |
| 2. | ♞g1-f3 | ♞b8-c6 |
| 3. | ♞f1-c4 | ♞f8-e7 |
| 4. | d2-d4 | d7-d6 |
| 5. | d4-d5 | ♞c6-b8 |

DIAGRAM 3:



The pawn-chain made up of the K and Q pawns will make White strive for c2c4, c5, Black for f7f5.

Forcible measures, such as say 6. ♞d3, ♞f6; 7. h3, 0-0; 8. g4? would not be in keeping with the position;

1. The Conception of Position Play and the Problem of the Centre

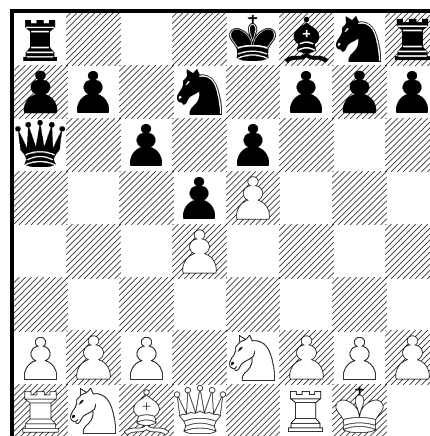
On the other hand 6. ♔d3, ♘f6; 7. c4, 0-0; 8. ♘c3, ♘e1; 9. ♖e2 would seem to be indicated; in order in reply to 9 ... f4, to undertake the operation 10. e4×f5, ♙×f5; 11. ♙×f5, ♖×f5; 12. ♘e4 (cf. the remarks on Diag. ??).

We note then, that the prevention of freeing pawn moves (as far as this appears necessary and feasible) is of great importance in position play. Such prevention is what we wish to be understood as an exterior prophylactic. It is much more difficult to grasp the idea of an interior prophylactic, for here we have to do with an entirely new conception. We are in fact now concerned with the warding off of an evil, which has really never been understood as one, yet which can, and in general does, have a most disturbing effect on our game. The evil consists in this, that our pieces are out of, or in insufficient contact with their own strategically important points. Since I conceived of this condition as an evil, I was led to advance the strategical proposition that one must over-protect one's own strategically important points, that is, provide defence in excess of attack, i.e., lay up a store of defence. My formulation of this argument runs as follows: **Weak points, still more strong points**, in short everything that we can include in the collective conception of strategically important points, **ought to be over-protected**. If the pieces are so engaged, they get their reward in the fact that they will then find themselves well posted in every respect.

There are two explanatory remarks to be made here; firstly, that as we have incidentally shown in our discussion of the passed pawn we have the enigmatical circumstance that blockading squares prove themselves as a rule to be in every respect good squares; and the pieces detailed for dull blockade duty find, unexpectedly, their reward in the possibility of a heightened activity from their blockading station, just as in a fairy-tale where good deeds are always rewarded. The idea of over-protection is in a certain sense no other than that above sketched though in an expanded form, as we may see from the following example (Diag. 4). Here we over-protect the strong e5 which has been pushed forward. The

defence afforded by the QP is insufficient, since White plans to reply to ... c5 by d4×c5 (i.e. surrender of the base of his chain and occupation of the point d4 now become free.) We over-protect the e5 by pieces thus 9. ♘d2, and the game continued

DIAGRAM 4: Nimzowitsch - Giese



White to move. What point must be over-protected?

- | | | |
|-----|---------|--------|
| 9. | ♘b1-d2 | ♘g8-e7 |
| 10. | ♘d2-f3! | ♘e7-g6 |
| 11. | ♖f1-e1 | ♙f8-b4 |

to get the ♙ finally to c7, and then, despite the over-protection of White's e5, to play f6

- | | | |
|-----|---------|--------|
| 12. | c2-c3 | ♙b4-a5 |
| 13. | ♙c1-f4! | |

the third over-protection

- | | | |
|-----|---------|--------|
| 13. | ... | 0-0 |
| 14. | ♙f4-g3, | ♙a5-c7 |
| 15. | ♘f3-g5 | |

and now the inner strength of over-protection is manifested in a drastic manner; the seemingly lifeless over-protectors, the ♘f3, the ♙f4, and that old blade, the ♖e1, suddenly raise a considerable hub-hub

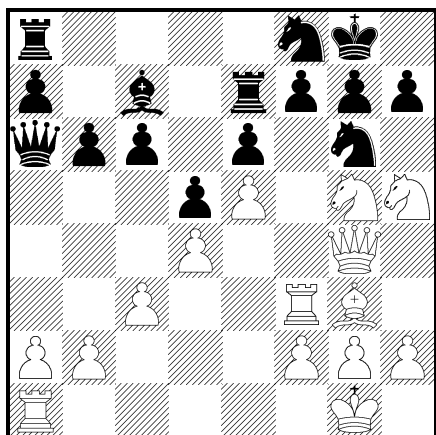
- | | | |
|-----|--------|--------|
| 15. | ... | ♖f8-e8 |
| 16. | ♘e2-f4 | ♘g6-h8 |
| 17. | ♖d1-g4 | ♘d7-f8 |
| 18. | ♖e1-e3 | |

the old soldier sniffs a fight and rejoices

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18. ... b7-b6
 rather better was ♔d8
 19. ♘f4-h5 ♘h8-g6
 20. ♚e3-f3 ♚e8-e7

DIAGRAM 5: Nimzowitsch - Giese



The career of the "over-protector"

21. ♘h5-f6+ ♔g8-h8

and now White could win right off by 22. ♘f6×h7, ♘h7×h7; 23. ♘h7×f7+, ♚f7×f7; 24. ♚f7×f7. The idea was the following: It was a good deed to over-protect a strategically important point, the reward came in the form of a large radius of activity for the pieces engaged on that service.

Just one more example, for later on a whole chapter will be devoted to over-protection in all its hearings (Diag. 116). After 15. QR - Q1, QR - K1; there followed a manoeuvre which seemed most unlikely, namely 16. R - Q2 and 17. KR - Q1 Why? Because the QQ3 Nimzowitsch - Alekhine (and perhaps too the PQ4) is the key Baden-Baden, 1925 stone of White's position, and hence Alekhine's last move was 14 over-protection is indicated. And in Q - B4! there followed 15. QH - fact after a few moves the two rooks Q1, QR - K1. Which point now prove to be most serviceable combatants calls for over-protection? (they protect their own K excellently). After 16. R - Q2 the continuation was 16 Q - Kt4; 17. KR - Q1, B - R2!!; 18. Kt - B4, Kt - B4; 19. Kt - Kt5, B - Kt1 and now R - K2

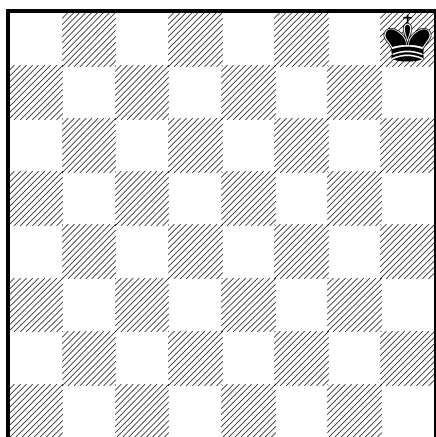
and R - K1 ought to have been played, when the over-protectors would have reaped their merited reward.

Secondly, the rule for over-protection applies as is natural most particularly to strong points, i.e., to important squares in the centre, which are likely to come under heavy fire, to strong blockading squares, or to strong passed pawns, etc. Ordinary weak points should under no circumstances be over-protected, for this might very well lead to the defenders getting into passive positions (cf. I. vi. §2). However a weak P that forms the base of an important pawn-chain may and should be well over-protected. To illustrate this let us return to our old friend the pawn-chain made up of the Q and KP's on each side. See Diagram 117a and compare it with Diagram 117b. In the former the H's protect the weak base of the pawn-chain (every such base is in a certain sense to be classed as weak since the one sure defence, by a P, is wanting). Yet this protection stands the strong PK5 also in good stead; for, as we know, the strengthening of the base involves at the same time a strengthening throughout the whole chain. The reader is recommended to play over again my game (No. 20) against Dr. Tarrasch, in which I, after first laboriously over-protecting the point Q4, having achieved my purpose, got a strong attack which led to victory. The soul of that attack was however the PK5, who could so to speak trustfully lean up against the PQ4, who by that time was thoroughly healthy. On the other hand in the position shown on Diagram 117b the PK5 is wanting, and hence the role which the RQ1 and RQ3 would otherwise have had to play, is much restricted. In fact, of the once so responsible role nothing really remains but the tedious obligation of preventing the PQ4 from going under. In other words, the disposition of the over-protection a in the case of Diagram 117b does not carry with it any sort of plan of attack for the future (in marked contrast to the case of Diagram 117a), and consequently we get nothing but that passive disposition of defending pieces, against which we had to register so emphatic a warning. To recapitulate: - The law of over-protection applies in general only to strong points. Weak

1. The Conception of Position Play and the Problem of the Centre

points can only lay claim to over-protection in such cases where they help to support other and strong points.

DIAGRAM 6: The safeguarded base Q4 in- Here the piling up of the White creases the importance of the R's does not have the effect of attacking (wedge) PK5. The over-protection, but, absolutely, heaping up of R's acts therefore that of a passive defensive posi- as a deliberate over-protection tion which is classed as an evil

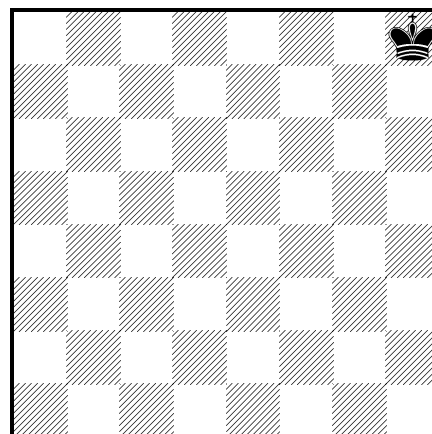


§4 Side by side with the idea of prophylactic, that of the collective mobility of a pawn-mass is a main postulate of my teaching on position play.

In the last resort position play is nothing other than a fight between mobility (of the pawn-mass) on the one side and efforts to restrain this on the other. In this all-embracing struggle the intrinsically very important device of the prophylactic is merely a means to an end.

It is of the greatest importance to strive for the mobility of our pawn-mass; for a mobile mass can in its lust to expand exercise a crushing effect. This mobility is not always injured by the presence of a pawn that has possibly remained behind in the general advance i.e., by a backward pawn, who can perhaps be used as a nurse to tend his fellows at the front. In the case of a mobile pawn-mass we must therefore look for collective and not individual mobility, each pawn for itself. For instance in Diagram 118a we should expect sooner

DIAGRAM 7:



or later the levelling advance P - Q4, in order to be rid of the backward pawn. In the game, however, there was played more correctly 17. P - KB4, Q - K2; 18. P - K4!, B - B3; 19. P - KKt4 (Diag. 118b), and White won easily. See game No. 25.

Again in my game against Rubinstein (Black) in Dresden 1926 (No. 33) I was in no hurry to get rid of my backward pawn. Thus if after the opening moves 1. P - QB4, P - QB4; 2. Kt - KB8, Kt - KB3; 3. Kt - QBB, P - Q4; 4. p x P, Kt x P; 5. P - K4, Kt - Kt5; 6. B - B4, P - KB; 7. 0 - 0, Black had played 7 P - QR3, I should not have been in any hurry to advance the backwards QP, for 8. P - Q4, PXP; 9. QxP, QXQ; 10. KtxQ, B - QB4; 11. B - K3, BxKt; 12. BxB, Kt - B7!; 13. QR - Qi, Kt x B; 14. R x Kt, Kt - BB; 15. R - Q2, P - QKt4, followed by B - Kt2 and K - K2 would have only lead to an equal game. I should rather, after 8. P - QR3, Kt(Kt5) - B3 have chosen 9. P - Q3 and after B - KB and marshalling my major pieces I should have been well prepared to attack. In the game he played 7 QKt - QBB (instead of P - QR8) and after 8. P - QB, Kt - Q5 (else 9. P - QRB); 9. Kt x Kt, P x Kt; 10. Kt - K2, White got, after P - KB4, a mobile pawn-mass, effectively supported by the BQB4.

We will now turn our attention to that terrible region in which the amateur (and on occasion also the Master) only too often trips up, namely the

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DIAGRAM 8: Nimzowitsch - Prof. Michel, Semmering 1926 White establishes a mobile The Ps at K4, KB4, and KKt4, in pawn-mass and leaves one of conjunction with the diagonal them at home as nurse. How QKt2 to KR8 lurking in the rear, does he do it? form the storm troops. The backward QP after P - Q3, safeguards the QB and KPs

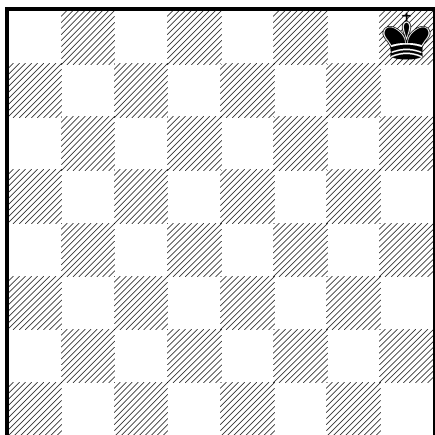
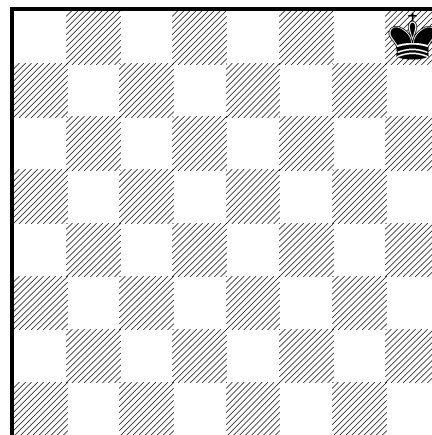


DIAGRAM 9: Nimzowitsch - Prof. Michel, Semmering 1926 White establishes a mobile The Ps at K4, KB4, and KKt4, in pawn-mass and leaves one of conjunction with the diagonal them at home as nurse. How QKt2 to KR8 lurking in the rear, does he do it? form the storm troops. The backward QP after P - Q3, safeguards the QB and KPs



centre.

§5 The centre. Insufficient watch kept on the central territory as a typical and ever-recurring error. The centre as the Balkans of the chess-board. On the popular, but strategically doubtful diversion of the attack from the centre to the wings. On the invasion of the centre. The occupation of central squares.

It may be taken as common knowledge that in certain positions it is necessary to direct our pieces against the enemy centre; for instance in positions characterized by the presence of White P's at K4 and KB4 and of Black Ps at Q3 and KB2 (or White at Q4 and QB4; Black at QB2, and K8). On the other hand it is not so well known that it is a strategical necessity to keep the centre under observation even if it be fairly well barricaded. The centre is the Balkans of the chess-board; fighting may at any moment break out there. Take the position, already discussed under Diag. 89; which from the point of view of the centre seems harmless enough, yet after the

moves 1. P - K4, P - K4; 2. Kt - KBB, Kt - QBB; B. B - B4, B - B4; 4. Kt - QBB, Kt - KB3; 5. P - Q3, P - QB; 6. B - KKt5, P - KR3; 7. B - R4, P - Kt4; 8. B - KKt3, Black's centre is threatened by two raids, (i) B - QKt5 and P - Q4, (ii) Kt - Q5 followed by P - QB3 and P - Q4. Another example is furnished by the opening of the game Capablanca - Martinez (1914). After 1. P - K4, P - K4; 2. B - B4, B - B4; 8. Kt - QBB, Kt - KBB; 4. P - Q8, Kt - QB8; 5. B - KKt5, P - KR8; 6. B - R4, P - KKt4; 7. B - KKt3, P - KR4; 8. P - KR4, P - Kt5; 9. Q - Q2, P - Q3; 10. KKt - K2, Q - K2; 11. 0 - 0, Black thought that he could treat himself to a move like 11 P - QR8 (Diag. 119). The loss of time involved weighs the more heavily in the scale since the position is only in appearance a closed one, and in reality can be opened at any moment. (The same applies to 90% of all closed central positions.) There followed 12. Kt - Q5, Kt x Kt; 13. P x Kt, Kt - Q5; 14. Kt x Kt, B x Kt; 15. P - QB3, B - KtB; 16. P - Q4, P - KB3!, and as I first pointed out White could get a decisive advantage by 17. KR - K1 (Capablanca

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played the weaker QR - K1), e.g.,

17 B - Q2 (if 17 0 - 0, then 18. P x P, BPXP; 19. RxP, BxPch; 20. QxB, QxR; 21. BXQ, RxQ; 22. KxR, PxB; 28. R - K1, and wins; but not 23. P - Q6 ch?, K - Kt2; 24. P x P, P - QKt4, followed by R - QR2); 18. P - QR4, 0 - 0 - 0; 19. P - R5, B - R2; 20. P - QKt4, followed by R(K1) - QKtL and P - Kt5 with a winning attack. After the first Diagram 119 six moves Black by a little more skilful strategy in the centre could have got the initiative, thus: - 6 P - QB (though 6 B - K2 would be simplest), and if 7. Kt - Q5, P - KKt4; 8. B - KtB, then 8 B - KB; with the well known threat 9 BxKt; 10. PxB, Kt - K2; 11. B - Kt5 ch, P - BB; 12. p x P, P x P; and Black would dominate the centre. Another possibility was 6 Kt - Q5 (instead of P - QB). e.g., 7. Kt - Q5, P - KKt4; 8. B - Kt8, Capablanca - Martinez P - QBB!; 9. Kt x Kt ch, Q x Kt; White punishes the waste of 10. P - QBB, Kt - K3; 11. P - KR4, time involved in Black's last P - Q3, followed by B - Q2, 0 - 0 - 0, and move (P - QR3) by an invasion when opportunity occurred, Kt - KB5. of the centre

All these examples teach us that the function of a Kt at QBB does not solely consist in holding up a pawn advance to Q4. No, the Kt so posted is under obligation, the moment the enemy gives him the chance, of undertaking an invasion of the centre by Kt - Q5. Such a chance is often given by amateurs, who show a preference for starting a manœuvre on a wing before it is justified, without unfortunately giving much thought to the question whether they may perhaps be taking too many troops away from the centre: else how could such a line of play as the following persist for so many years, yes and even in Master tournaments! 1. P - K4, P - K4; 2. Kt - QBB, Kt - KB3; 3. B - B4, B - B4; 4. P - QB, Kt - QBB; 5. P - KB4, P - Q3; 6. P - B5?? (Diag. 120: naturally 6. Kt - KB3 is the proper move), and now by 6 Kt - Q5 followed by P - QBB, P - QKt4, P - QR4, Q - QKt3, and, when opportunity offers, P - Q4, Black gets a strong game in the centre and on the left which yields him a pronounced advantage.

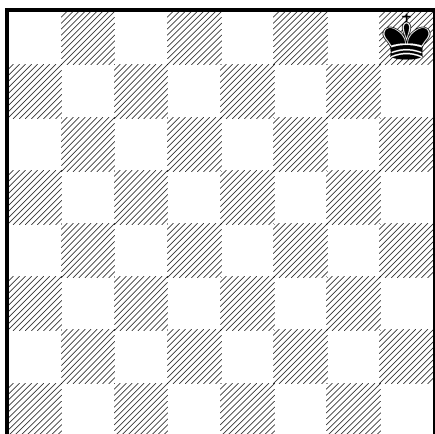
Another example, though this time a mild one,

of the evils which follow an unwarranted change of front from centre to flank, against which the student cannot be sufficiently warned. 1. P - K4, P - K4; 2. Kt - KB8, P - Q3; 3. P - Q4, Kt - KB3; 4. P x P, KtxP; 5. B - Q3, Kt - B4; 6. B - KB4, KtxB (Black had the opportunity here, by Kt - K3 and P - Q4, to build up his position on scientific principles; the KtK3 would have been our strong, elastic blockader); 7. Q x Kt, Kt - QB8; 8. 0 - 0 (8. Kt - QB3 followed by 0 - 0 - 0 would please us better), 8 B - K2; 9. P x P. B x P; 10. BxB, QxB; 11. QxQ, PxQ. See Diagram 121; there followed 12. R - K1 ch?, B - K3; 18. Kt - Kt5 (the change of front characteristic of non-positional players) 18 K - Q2; 14. P - QB8, and White does not stand particularly well. The right course was 12. Kt - QB3 (instead of R - K1 ch?), and, after 18. Kt - QKt5 and 14. Kt - Q4, he would be centralized and have the superior game. It will be instructive to give here an example characteristic of the disregard so often shown even by strong players for central strategy; it is from a game played in 1920 in a Swedish tournament between K. Berndtsson (White) and S. J. jurulf (Black). 1. P - Q4, P - Q4; 2. Kt - KB3, Kt - KB8; 3. B - B4, P - K3; 4. P - K3, P - QB4; 5. P - QB3, P - QKt8 (the following line of play seems best here. 5 Kt - QB3!; and if now 6. QKt - Q2, B - K2; 7. P - KR8, anticipating Kt - KR4, then 7 B - Q3!; 8. Kt - K5, B x Kt; 9. P x B, Kt - Q2; 10. Kt - KBB, and now a fierce fight will be waged round the point KS. See Diagram 122a. We strongly recommend the would-be positional player to exercise himself in such central fights. In the present position a good plan would be 10 P - QR3!; ii. B - Q3, P - KB3! [not 11 Q - B2 because of 12. 0 - 0, Kt x P?; 13. Kt x Kt, Kt x Kt; 14. Q - R5 and wins]; in order after 12. P x P, Q x P; to seize the hotly disputed point K4 by P - K4. We recommend our readers to study this position. The move 5 P - QKt3 is a typical error in that it seems to disregard the fact that there is such a thing as a central theatre of war. 6. QKt - Q2, B - Q3; 7. Kt - K5 (this move pleases me well, although here there is by chance a tactical possibility which is perhaps objectively preferable, namely 7. B - Kt5 ch, B - Q2?; 8. B x KB, B x B; 9. P x P. But 7. Kt - K5

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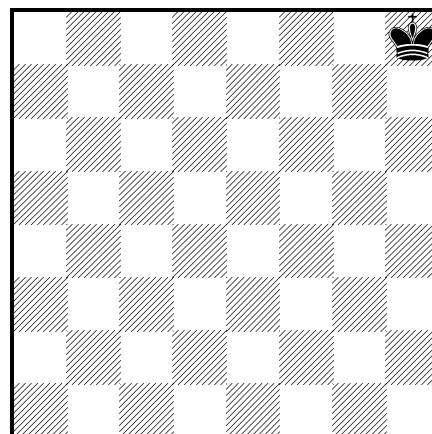
is the more logical move, since owing to the loss of time involved in Black's P - QKt3, the centre was ripe for an invasion.) 7 B x Kt; 8. P x B, KKt - Q2; 9. Q - Kt4, R - KKt1; 10. Kt - B3, Kt - QBB; 11. B - QB, Kt - KB1 (Diag. 122b); 12. Kt - Kt5 (White commits the strategical error of under estimating the importance of the point KS, the key point of his whole position. Under no circumstances should the attack be so conducted as to endanger its safety. On the contrary, as we know, over-protection of this point would here be indicated. The right course to adopt was to remain passive on the K's wing, to advance P - K4 in the centre and on the Q's wing P - QR4, and in some such order as this. 12. 0 - 0, B - Kt2; 13. P - QKt4!, P - B5 [not PXP; P x P, Kt x P; because of B - KKt5 winning a piece or causing some other similar unpleasantness.] 14. B - B2, Q - Q2; 15. P - QR4, P - QR3I [if 15 0 - 0 - 0, then 16. P - R5, P x P; 17. P - Kt5!, with a winning attack.] 16. P - K4!, 0 - 0 - 0; 17. B - K8, K - B2; 18. P - Rs!, with a decisive attack.) 12 Q - B21;

DIAGRAM 10: White's last move P - B5 does White, after R - K1 ch, B - nothing in the sense of observa- K8, executed the popular tion of the centre, but is rather change of front Kt - KKtS. a movement directed away What central strategy was from the centre. How is this indicated here (instead of faulty strategy to be punished? R - K1 ch?, etc.)



13. B x RP, R - R1; 14. B - B2 (Diag. 122c).

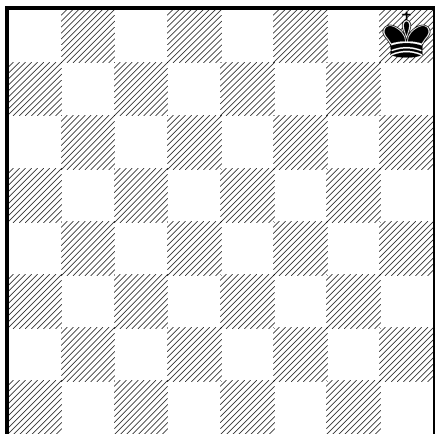
DIAGRAM 11:



14 B - Kt2? (Black must here seek to conquer the point K4, dangerous as this may appear. So simply 14 Kt x P!; and he would have got a satisfactory, in fact the better, game. For instance: 14 Kt x P!; 15. Q - Kt3, P 2 KB3; 16. Kt - B3, KtxKt ch; 17. QxKt, P - K4!; 18. Q x QP, B - Kt2; 19. B - R4 ch, K - K2, and Black wins a piece. Or, 14 Kt x P; 15. B - R4 ch, K - K2, with the threat Kt - Q6 ch; on the other hand the reply 15 B - Q2 would have been bad, for White by means of 16. B x B ch, Kt(B1) x B; 17. KtxKP!, PxKt; 18. QxKP ch, K - QL; 19. QxQP, would get a strong attack, with three pawns for his sacrificed piece. But, as suggested with 14 Kt x KP; 15. B - R4 ch, K - K2, Black could have got an excellent game. The strategical events in this game present themselves as follows: 5 P - QKt3 had no bearing on the centre, and in consequence White waxed strong and mighty there (Kt - K5); but at his 12th move he did not pay sufficient regard to the key point (K5) and this, if Black had made the proper reply, could have led to his losing all his advantage. We see then what a dominating influence central strategy exercises.) 15. Kt - B3, P - KKt3; 16. B - KKt5? (Scarcely had he by luck escaped the dangers in the centre, than the leader of the White forces, always on the look out for a combination, again sacrifices his chief possession from a strategical point of view, the point KS. The over-protectors, the KtB8 and the BB4 should have remained at their posts. His

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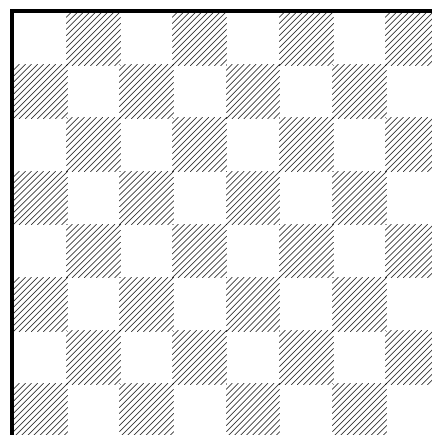
DIAGRAM 12: White to move. The point K5 is in his undisputed possession. But where should the attack be directed, on the right, or the left, or in the centre?



proper course was indicated in the note to move 12:) i6.. ... Kt X P1 (now he shows courage!); 17. KtxKt, QxKt (Diag. 122d); 18. P - KR4. (It is absolutely essential for White to play to recover the point K5. Accordingly, 18. B - B4! and if in reply 18 Q - R4, then 19. Q - Kt3, P - KB3; 20. B - Q6, and Black could hardly succeed in consolidating his position, which is threatened in every nook and corner. After the text move Black, on the contrary, could make himself fully secure.) 18 P - QKt4? (not only spells loss of time but also weakens the PQB4 and allows P - QR4. The right move was 18 Kt - Q2, and if 19. B - QR4, then 19 P - KB3; 20. B - B4, Q - KS!; 21. B - QKt5, P - KKt4, or 21 0 - 0 - 0, and Black stands well.) 19. O - O, Kt - R2; 20. B - B4, Q - R4; 21. Q x Q, P x Q; 22. P - QR4 and White won the ending which he conducted very cleverly.

The moral of this game runs thus. (i) Watch the centre, cf. Black's 5th move, White's 12th and following moves, Black's 14th move. (ii) Over-protect the key point; cf. White's 12th and 16th moves. (iii) Do not divert your attack prematurely; cf. White's 12th and 16th moves. (iv) After the pawns are gone the key points must be occupied by pieces; cf. White's 18th move.

DIAGRAM 13: Black to move. A typical example of a fight for a central point. Here White's K5



§6 The leitmotif of correct strategy is the over-protection of the centre, with, further, a systematically carried out centralization of our forces. Wing attack met by play in the centre.

In the very characteristic game which has just been quoted we saw how the diversion of the attack from the centre to a wing, and, what is in principle the equivalent, the disregard of the central key points, led to some curious situations. This "diversion" sometimes appears also in games by Masters. We need only remind the reader of Game No. 22, Opocensky - Nimzowitsch, in which in the position shown on Diagram 123, there occurred the following moves: 13. Kt - K2?, Kt - R4; 14. Q - Q2, P - KKt3; 15. P - KKt4, Kt. - Kt2; 16. Kt - Kt3, P - QB3!. The diversion of the Kt, now completed, has so altered the situation that Black, though much cramped on the Q's Wing, can venture to proceed to the attack!

Centralization is ever a characteristic of Master play - and the talented Czech Master Opocensky is of course no exception. Alekhine makes use of this strategy with special predilection, and this (with play against enemy squares of a particular colour) forms the leitmotif of all his games. Even when the knife seems actually to be at his

King's throat in a K side attack, he yet finds time to mass troops in the centre. A typical example

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DIAGRAM 14: Black to move. How shall White can and must win back he best punish his opponent's the point 1(5). How? neglect to keep the centre (1(5) under observation in his last moves

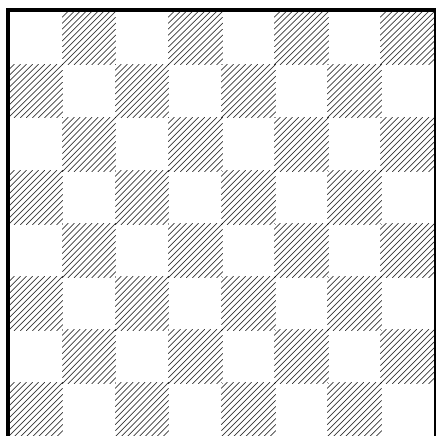
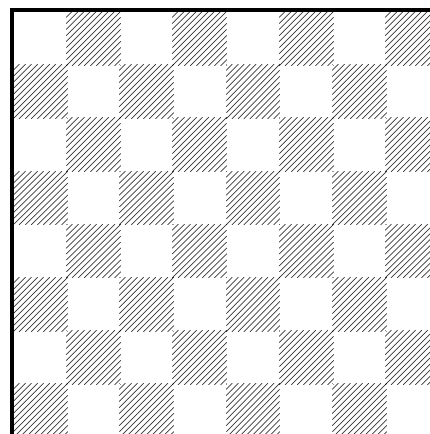


DIAGRAM 15:



is furnished by his game with me at Semmering in 1926 (No. 43), in which after the moves 1. P - K4, Kt - KB3 (Alekhine was Black); 2. Kt - QB3, P - Q4; 3. P - Ks, Kt - Q2; 4. P - KB4, P - K3; 5. Kt - KB3, P - QB4; 6. P - KKt3, Kt - QB3; 7. B - Kt2, B - K2; 8. 0 - 0, 0 - 0; 9. P - Q3, Kt - Kt3, he got into some trouble through having omitted to play 9 P - - KB3. There followed 10. Kt - K2, P - Q5; 11. P - KKt4 (the beginning of a violent attack), P - KB3; 12. P x P. P x P (else would follow the centralization of the White Kt, by Kt - Kt8 - K4); 13. Kt - Kt3, Kt - Q4!; 14. Q - K2, B - Q3!; 15. Kt - R4 (Diag. 124) Kt(B3) - K2!; 16. B - Q2, Q - B2; 17. Q - B2, and now the inner strength of the centralized structure of Black's

124 position was made clear by the surprising Diagram continuation 17 P - QB5!; 18. P x

P, Kt - K6! and Alekhine had equalized the game. I too, both theoretically and in practice, am absolutely on the side of centralization. Examine, say, my game against Yates (Semmering, 1926), in which I had the Black pieces. 1. P - K4, P - KB; 2. P - Q4, P - Q4; 8. Kt - QB3, B - Kt5; 4. PxP, PxP; 5. B - Q3, Kt - K2; 6. KKt - K2, 0 - 0; 7. 0 - 0,

Nimzowitsch - Alekhine B - KKt5; 8. P - KB3,

B - KR4; Semmering, 1926 9. KtB4, BKt3; 10. Kt(B3) - K2,

White's PKKt4 and KtKR4 B - Q3; 11. Q - K1. (Here B x B point to a diversion having followed by Kt - Q3 would have corn- been started. His KtKKt3 has a fairly clear conscience in ported with the spirit of centralization, the centralizing sense, but he and the points QB5 and KS would then has too his eye on KR5. hay Black as against this has in his e been kept under perpetual obser- PQ5 and KtQ4 the kernel of a vation.) 11 P - QB4! 12. P xP, beautifully centralized struc- B x P ch; 13. K - Ri, QKt - QB3; ture, which he completes in the 14. B - Q2, R - K1; 15. Kt x B, RP X sequel Kt! (creates a central point at KB4);

16. P - KB4 (the normal development of things would have been 16. Q - R4, Kt - B4; 17. Q x Q, QR x Q; and Black has a slight advantage for the end g me), 16 Kt - B4; 17.. P - QB3, P - Q5!; 18. P - QB4, Q - Kt8; 19. R - B3, B - Kt5 (to clean up the central point K6); 20. P - QR3, B x B; 21. Q x B, P - QR4 (==restraint); 22. Kt - Kti, R - K6; 23. Q - KB2, QR - K1; 24. QR - Q1, Q - Kt6!; 25. R - Q2, Kt - Q3; 26. P - .QBS, Kt - Bs!; 27. B x Kt, Q x B (White's QBP is weak, the blockading BQ3 has been got out of the way, and the central pressure is more burdensome to White than ver.); 28. R - QB2, Q - Q4!; 29. R - QR1, Q - K5! (Diag. 125). With this move centralization

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DIAGRAM 16: White manmuvres the KtQBS over to the K's side, though his true business was to look out for Black's P - QB3. An- other example of an unseason- able diversion

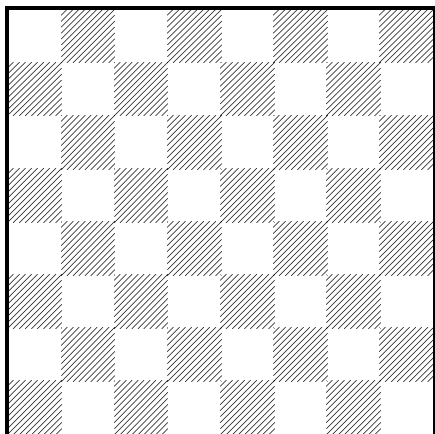
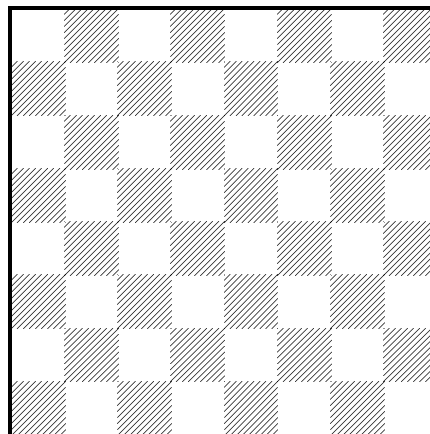


DIAGRAM 17: Yates - Nimzowitsch Semmering, 1926 Possession of the open centre file, the PQ5, and in particular the position of the QK5 stamp Black's structure as being centralized in a high degree



is completed. White sacrificed a pawn, by 30. P - B5, in order to defend himself against the ever-increasing pressure in the K file, but lost the ending after 30 R ; R; 31. Kt x R, Q x P. Further striking examples of centralization will be found in great plenty in the games of the Masters; we will only mention Alekhine - Treybal, Baden-Baden, 1925, and Nimzowitsch - Spielmann, San Sebastian, 1912 (Game No. 49).

We now proceed to the analysis of play in the centre vs. play on a wing. The game Nimzowitsch - Alekhine, just given, furnishes an example of how such a struggle usually proceeds. The "central player" always has the better prospects, and very especially in the frequently recurring positions which we are about to outline. One

party has undertaken a diversion against his opponent's King's wing which in itself promises a reward. All would be in the most perfect order, but that (there's always a "but"!) his opponent holds an open centre file, and with astounding regularity the flank attack is ship-wrecked on this rock.

We will first note (Diag. 126) the ground plan of such a situation. In the position shown Black's attack must always fail, because his Rooks are under the unpleasant obligation to guard their

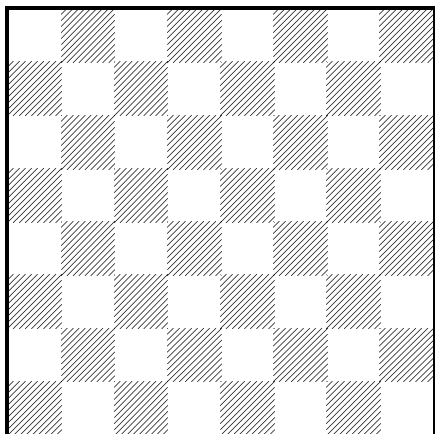
base (here their 1st and 2nd ranks) against an inroad of the White Rooks who are all ready for the adventure. In addition his K4 is insufficiently protected, and this again is not accidental, since the White KtKB3 is centralized in harmony with the rest of the White structure. As Plan to illustrate the theme centre file vs. flank attack".

The Black KtKB5 is the mainstay of the latter

the whole matter is of extraordinary importance to an understanding of the spirit of the dogma of the centre, we will illustrate it by a complete game, Rubinstein - Nimzowitsch, San Sebastian, 1912. 1. P - Q4, Kt - KB3; 2. P - QB4, P - Q3; 3. Kt - KB8, QKt - Q2; 4. Kt - QB3, P - K4; 5. P - K4, B - K2 (probably there is nothing against the immediate fianchetto, P - KKt3, B - Kt2); 6. B - K2, 0 - 0; 7. 0 - 0, R - K1; 8. Q - B2, B - B1; 9. P - QKt3, P - QB3 (here, as Lasker very rightly pointed out, the sounder line of play was P - KKt3, B - Kt2, then P x QP and Kt - K4); 10. B - Kt2, Kt - KR4?; 11. P - KKt3, Kt - QKt1; 12. QR - Qi (the centre file looms up!), 12 Q - B3; 13. Kt - QKt1!, B - R6; 14. KR - Ki, Kt - B5 (that I should be able to get the Kt to KB5 under any circumstances, I had foreseen when I played 10 Kt - R4, a misfortune, for else I

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DIAGRAM 18: Yates - Nimzowitsch Semmering, 1926 Possession of the open centre file, the PQ5, and in particular the position of the QK5 stamp Black's structure as being centralized in a high degree



had withstood the temptation to undertake this diversion) (Diag 127); 15. P x P, P x P; 16. Kt x P, RxKt;

17. B - KBL (after 17. B x R, Kt x B Diagram 127 ch; 18. Q x Kt, Q x B; 19. R - Q8 - the centre file! White would also have the advantage), 17 Kt - Q2; 18. Q - Q2 (now the Black pieces embarked on their diversion are in the air), 18 B x B; 19. R x B, Kt - R6 ch; 20. K - Kt2, Kt - Kt4 (threatening mate in two); 21. P - KB4, Q - Kt3; 22. P x Kt, RxKP? (after 22 Q x KPch, 23. K - RB, R - K2; 24. R(Q1) - - Ki would have won a piece. Relatively best was 22 R - K2; the win then White (Rubinstein) demon- could only have been attained by strates by clever play the 28.B QR3 weakness of Black's diversion ., P - QB4! [not 23 on the K-side Q x P ch; because of 24. K - Kt1, P - QB4; 25. R(B1) - K1]; 24. Kt - -B3; for after 23 P - QB4, which is forced, there is no possibility of Black playing Kt - QB4, while on the other hand White has his Q5 as a base for his operations); 23. Q x Kt, R - K7 ch; 24. R - KB2, and White won. See also Game No. 28, Kline - Capablanca for another variation on the same theme.

§7 The Surrender of the Centre.

As early as 1911 and 1912 I had published some notes on games, in which I put forward what was then an entirely new idea, that the centre need not necessarily be occupied by pawns; that centrally posted pieces or even lines bearing on the centre could, as I main- tained, take the place of pawns, the main point being to place the enemy centre pawns under restraint. This idea I, in 1913, embodied in an article which, by the courtesy of G. Marco, Editor of the Wiener Schachzeitung, I am allowed to reproduce here, and do so, because in this the age of the "neo-romantic school" it is in a high degree pertinent. The article ran as follows: - When Black in the much disputed variation of the French Defence 1. P - K4, P - K3; 2. P - Q4, P - Q4; 3. Kt - QB3, plays 8 P x P, he gives up, according to the current opinion, the centre. This view seems to me to rest upon an incomplete grasp, in fact a misconception, of what the centre is. In what follows the attempt will be made, (i) to show that this view is based on a prejudice, (ii) to set out its historical development.

And first the definition of the concept "centre". Here we have simply to abide by the meaning of the word. The "centre" consists of the squares in the middle of the board, squares: not pawns. This is fundamental and must never under any circumstances be lost sight of.

The importance of the centre, that is to say the complex of squares in the middle of the board, as a base for further operations, is beyond question; and a note of Emmanuel Lasker's to a game is worth recalling. "White," he wrote, "does not stand well enough in the centre, to undertake an operation on the wing." This is finely conceived, and at the same time illustrates the close relationship between the centre and the wings, the centre being the dominating principle, the wings subordinate to it.

That control of the centre must be of great significance, is, other considerations apart, clear from one thing, that if we have built up our game in the centre, we have from thence the possibility of exercising influence on both wings at one and the same time, and of embarking on a diversion should opportunity offer. Without healthy condi-

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tions in the centre, a healthy position is definitely unthinkable.

We spoke of a control of the centre. What are we to understand by this? How is this conditioned?

Current opinion holds that the centre should be occupied by pawns; PK4 and PQ4 is the ideal, but in fact the presence of one of these two postulates occupation of the centre, provided the corresponding enemy pawn is wanting.

But is this really the case? Is the PQ4, after the moves 1. P - K4, P - KB; 2. P - Q4, P - Q4; 3. Kt - QB3, P) P; 4. Kt x P, justified in speaking of a conquest of the centre? If, in a battle, I seize a bit of debatable land with a handful of soldiers, without having done anything to prevent an enemy bombardment of the position, would it ever occur to me to speak of a conquest of the terrain in question? Obviously not. Then why should I do so in chess?

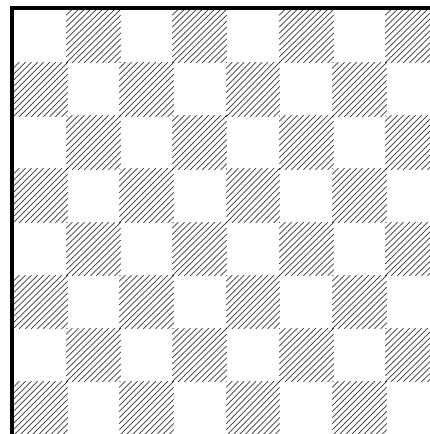
It dawns upon us then, that control of the centre depends not on a mere occupation, i.e., placing of pawns, but rather on our general effectiveness there, and this is determined by quite other factors.

This thought I have formulated thus: - With the disappearance of a pawn from the centre (e.g., P x P, Kt x P as above) the centre is a long way from being surrendered. The true conception of the centre is a far wider one. Certainly, pawns, as being the most stable, are best suited to building a centre; nevertheless centrally posted pieces can perfectly well take their place. And, too, pressure exerted on the enemy centre by the long range action of Rooks or Bishops directed on it can well be of corresponding importance.

We meet this last case in the variation 3 P x P (v. supra). This move, so wrongly described as a surrender of the centre, as a matter of fact increases Black's effective influence in the centre very considerably; for with the removal by P x P of the PQ4, which is an obstruction, Black gets a free hand in the Q file, and the long diagonal

That effective influence in the centre is independent of the number of pawns occupying it, appears from many examples, and of their abundance we will take one or two.

DIAGRAM 19: QKt2 to KR8, which he will open for himself by P - QKt3. Obstruction! that is the dark side of the occupation of the centre by pawns. A pawn is by nature, by his stability, his, so to speak, conservative spirit, a good centre builder, but, alas, he is also an obstruction.



Pieces in the centre. (1) Black's PK3 and PQ4 held under restraint by the White KtK5 and PQB3 and Q4, e.g., Diagram 128 from the game Nimzowitsch - Djwenfisch, Carlsbad, 1911. (2) the isolated pawn couple (see II. iii, §6) at Q4 and QB3 rigidly blockaded by White pieces as in Diagram 129. The two cases quoted show us a blockade. But blockade is an elastic term and often a slight restraint induced by an annoying Rook whose primary function was to hold up the advance of the enemy centre may be the prelude to a complete crippling, which culminates in its mechanical stoppage.

The cases in which pressure is exerted on the enemy centre are without number. See, e.g., Diagram 130, where the course of events will lead either to a blockade with consequent destruction of the KP (for movement is life), or to uncomfortable positions for the defending pieces, which will lead to the downfall of the "lucky possessor" of the centre.

All this teaches us that by counting the heads of the pawns in the centre, nothing, literally nothing, is gained. To make mere arithmetic the starting point of a philosophy of the centre can only

1. The Conception of Position Play and the Problem of the Centre

DIAGRAM 20: QKt2 to KR8, which he will open for himself by P - QKt3. Obstruction! that is the dark side of the occupation of the centre by pawns. A pawn is by nature, by his stability, his, so to speak, conservative spirit, a good centre builder, but, alas, he is also an obstruction.

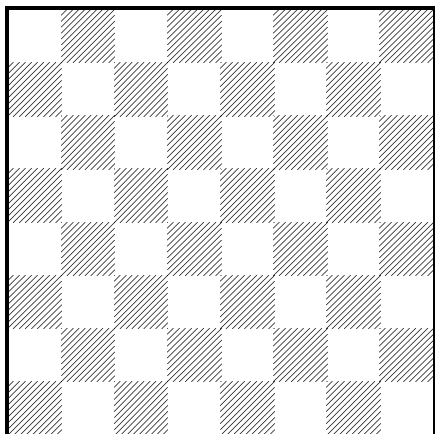


DIAGRAM 21: A word on the genesis of this prejudice, which is closely bound up with the history of position play. First came Steinitz; but what he had to say was so unfamiliar, and he himself was so towering a figure, that his modern principles" could not immediately become popular. There followed

be characterized as a mistaken proceeding. I am sure that in a very few years no one will regard 8 QP x KP as a "surrender" of the centre; and with the disappearance of such a prepossession, the way will be clear for a new and brilliant development in chess philosophy - and strategy.

Tarraseli who took hold of Steinitz's ideas and served them up diluted to the public taste. And now to consider the application to our case. Steinitz was, we repeat, deep and great, but deepest and greatest in his conception of the centre. When in his defence to the Ruy Lopez (P - Q3) he was able to transmute the enemy PK4, which was to all appearances so healthy, into one whose weakness was patent to every eye, this was an unsurpassable achievement. Nothing lay further from his thoughts than a formalistic, arithmetical conception of the centre. . .

So far the article. For illustrations we would refer the reader to 1. iii, on the Pawn-Chain, and to game No. 26 (Tarrasch - Mieses). The reader is further urged to study before proceeding further Games Nos. 25 - 80 inclusive, which bear on this chapter.

