

Alekhine on Munich, 1941

Edward Winter

Below is our translation of a report by Alekhine on Munich, 1941 which appeared on pages 187-189 of his book *¡Legado!* (Madrid, 1946). As pointed out by Miquel Artigas (Sabadell, Spain) in C.N. 5079, the article had been published in *Ajedrez Español*, January and February 1942 (pages 6-7 and 32-33).

'The importance of the recently-held Munich tournament has many facets, and its consequences will doubtless be of great significance. This is not because Greater Germany has been able to hold a strong international masters' tournament during the present war, nor because for the development of chess a brief interruption in international cooperation would have been particularly significant, nor even because the tournament produced especially valuable games, although the fight was generally a good one. No, the greatness of Munich lies mainly in the fact that it marks a new and probably decisive step in the consolidation of European chess. This means active cooperation under the ready leadership of a central directorate, on the basis of equal rights for all European chess organizations. But that also signifies complete emancipation from FIDE, which practically no longer exists. This does not mean that if, after the war, there were to be formed a world organization worthy of the name, European chess would not be called upon to play a role, in accordance with its importance.

To symbolize the unity of European chess thought, it seems that the idea of creating two European titles (individual and team championships) would be as desirable as it would be topical, and such a wish was shared by all participants at the Munich tournament. The attractiveness of the title would probably appeal to the top European players, including those who, on this occasion, abstained for "diplomatic" or other reasons, and who would in the future be invited to cooperate.

The Team Championship could be held according to the model of the so-called FIDE tournaments, with minor changes. Such tournaments held regularly would make it possible, amongst other things, to form a high-quality team which could later, over many boards, triumph against other continents (especially America). This would destroy the phantom of the claimed American superiority in team events. For what has regularly happened until now (that is to say, up to and including Stockholm, 1937) has been the following: the unified representation of half a continent met scattered European teams, and miracles could not be expected. Henceforth it will be necessary to dispense with isolated efforts, by organizing a European team to fight against the American one.

Before discussion of the detailed results at Munich, mention must be made of the organization which made such performances possible. This organization was a masterpiece since there were no incidents of the kind that usually occur at tournaments; there was not the slightest friction between the players, and from start to finish there reigned a spirit of camaraderie which made it possible to overcome the numerous difficulties that arose. It was

not easy in a strong international tournament to finish 15 games in 13 days, but this was necessary owing to the limited time available and the numerous difficulties that the majority of participants had over leave. Nonetheless, there was time not only for chess but also for the theatre, museums, etc. etc.

This tournament can be compared with advantage to Semmering-Baden 1937 and AVRO 1938, in which the aims were chiefly connected with commercial propaganda; the masters had to play in an unsatisfactory atmosphere quite out of keeping with the elevated spirit which the art of chess requires. There were nonetheless excellent individual results, but the sporting performances were falsified by the inevitable physical fatigue of the players, who were taken on a *danse macabre* , from one Dutch town or city to another (in the case of AVRO) like exhibition objects or low-grade fighters.

Although the Munich tournament was a brilliant organizational victory for German chess, it was also a technical triumph for Sweden, since first prize went to one of the world-famous musketeers of Swedish chess, Stoltz, while Lundin shared second place.

When it is recalled that the third player, the Swedish champion, Ståhlberg, recently won a very strong tournament in Argentina and also established a chess marathon record which, although without artistic value, was very useful as propaganda for chess, when he played 400 games in 36 hours without a break, it may be said that as far as chess is concerned, this year has been a very good one for these three champions' homeland.

This is not by chance, for to achieve such success requires, apart from talent, of course, continuous and consistent theoretical work and regular, untiring practice. In addition to all this, Stoltz, the first prize-winner, has a particularly fine feel for unexpected chess tactics. This cannot be learned from any book, and it is this "something" which makes a player a grandmaster. In general, he played the best chess and since he is at a favourable age (36 [*sic*]), great things may be expected of him.

Lundin may perhaps know more than Stoltz, but he lacks the latter's fiery style. He also played a number of solid games, and his placing corresponds to his merit.

Fourth and fifth prizes went to Bogoljubow and Richter. This is easy to explain, for although they are not really of that rank a great number of Germany's best players were missing from Munich. For example, the triumphant team from Buenos Aires and the two winners of the Championship tournaments, whose participation would doubtless have had a great influence on the outcome of the tournament.

A share of the last prize went to the kindly Danish Champion, Nielsen, a very experienced player, imperturbably tranquil; despite his defensive approach, he can occasionally be very dangerous in a counter-attack.

I was able to see for myself in the penultimate round of the tournament that for some time it seemed as if Foltys would also win a prize, but he allowed himself to be strongly influenced by some defeats. A master with such a sound positional sense as he possesses will certainly have future opportunities to demonstrate his strength.

The other representative of the Czech Protectorate, Opočenský, was tired of chess and apart

from his formidable game against me, he was not able to achieve much; nevertheless he was always deceptive and dangerous.

The Army representative, Kieninger, was apparently out of training. In some games (for example, against Mross and Foltys) he did, however, show his original strength.

Of the four youthful players (youthful in terms of both years and international experience), the Croat Rabar appears very interesting. His main defect may be insufficient knowledge of the openings, but that is something he can easily remedy.

The representative of the General Government of Poland, Mross, played in original and bold style. His beautiful game against Leepin is characteristic of this.

Considerable skill was also shown by the other participants, down to young Leepin, the least experienced player, who "nearly" defeated Richter.

The results of the tournament showed clearly that there was no player lacking in true merit.

Finally, a few words *pro domo sua*. As a general rule, and especially for me, it has been a surprise when I have failed in a tournament. But this time it would have been a surprise had I been able to cope with this tremendous fight to the very end because I was the only participant who, since the war began, had not only not played a single tournament game but had not even given thought to the problems of practical chess. In the first part of the tournament my poor form was noticeable (a superficial opening against Opočenský), and it became increasingly clear as the event continued. Above all, it was obvious when with the white pieces, in a drawn position, I tried to force matters à la Janowsky. Although this happened twice there were reasons for it (and it may be said that this rarely occurs with me); I nonetheless lost with more justification against Nielsen.

My conviction that I have played, above all, some fairly acceptable games gives me the hope of recovering from my lack of practice, and I am hoping that the forthcoming tournament in Cracow will give me an excellent opportunity to show this.'

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