

Two Alekhine Interviews (1941)

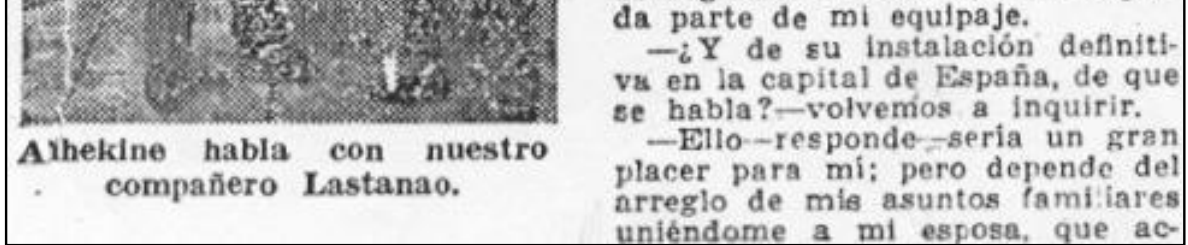
Edward Winter

In 1987 the late Pablo Morán (Gijón, Spain) sent us items from two Madrid publications, *El Alcázar* and *Informaciones*, dated 3 September 1941: a pair of Alekhine interviews which included material of relevance to the Nazi Articles affair. Below is our complete translation of those texts, beginning with the article in *El Alcázar*:

'At eight o'clock this morning the world champion Dr Alekhine arrived in Madrid from Lisbon and on his way to Munich, where he will take part in the International Chess Tournament which begins next Monday. He was welcomed at the Delicias station by Mr Ansoleaga (President of the Regional Federation), Mr Alba (Secretary of the National Federation, who was representing its President, Mr Fernández Balbuena, who was unavailable), Mr Rodríguez Suárez, and representatives of the press. Alekhine immediately went to his hotel, the Ritz. To take advantage of his stay in our capital there will be two exhibitions by the champion. The first will be tomorrow at the Madrid F.C. and will be a display of eight or ten games with clocks. The second will be on Friday at the Casino de Madrid, where he will probably play 30 games simultaneously. He intends to leave for Munich on Saturday.

Dr Alekhine kindly granted us an interview in the foyer of the Ritz Hotel, and his pleasant, friendly conversation covered many most interesting chess topics.

<p>Refiriéndose al Torneo en que va a participar, nos dijo que contará con 16 jugadores de diferentes países: húngaros, suecos, holandeses, suizos, etc. Los nombres de los inscritos no los conocía, pero dijo que había leído que el suizo Grob participaría, así como</p>	<p>Estados Unidos, ganado por Rechowsky, y que también hubo un torneo bastante importante en Buenos Aires, en la primavera, en el que venció Sthalberg.</p>
	<p>Respecto del Campeonato del mundo, nos ha respondido que es muy difícil disponer que pueda celebrarse un match antes del fin de la guerra. Con este motivo se citan nombres de algunos jugadores, y nos dice que entre los jóvenes los hay muy destacados, fijándose principalmente en Keres, Elliskases y algunos otros, con quienes la lucha sería interesante.</p>
<p>Alekhine habla con nuestro compañero Lastanao.</p>	<p>—De Lisboa—le interrumpimos— vino la noticia diciendo que se iniciaban gestiones para concertar un match entre usted y Capablanca. ¿Es ello cierto?</p> <p>—Esa noticia—nos responde—la leí en un diario de Madrid que me enviaron; no sé dónde nacería, y me extrañó, porque no sé el fundamento que tendría.</p> <p>—¿Cuáles son sus planes—le hemos preguntado—al terminar el Torneo de Munich?</p> <p>—Seguramente—dijo—, habré de regresar a Madrid, donde queda parte de mi equipaje.</p> <p>—¿Y de su instalación definitiva en la capital de España, de que se habla?—volvemos a inquirir.</p> <p>—Ello—responde—sería un gran placer para mí; pero depende del arreglo de mis asuntos familiares</p>



Referring to the tournament in which he is going to participate, he told us that there would be 16 players from various countries: Hungary, Sweden, Holland, Switzerland, etc. He did not have the names of those who had entered, but he said he had read that the Swiss Grob would be participating, as well as Junge and Schmidt, the latter currently being considered German. He also thought it probable that Euwe and Bogoljubow would be playing.

We discussed world chess, and he told us that there was a certain amount of activity in South America at present. This was mainly in Argentina and Brazil, where chess was becoming active owing to the Rio de Janeiro Automobile Club, which was interested in the game and intended to organize a major tournament.

We asked him about European chess magazines published today, and he mentioned the German and English ones; in France at the moment there is no magazine, and about Holland he knew nothing. He added that in the German magazine *Deutsche Schachzeitung* and the German daily *Pariser Zeitung*, currently published in Paris, he had been the first to deal with chess from the racial point of view. In these articles, he said, he wrote that Aryan chess was aggressive chess, that he considered defence solely to be the consequence of earlier error, and that, on the other hand, the Semitic concept admitted the idea of pure defence, believing it legitimate to win in this way.

Speaking about recent tournaments, he said that last year the Championship of the United States had been held, the winner being Reshevsky, and that there had also been a fairly important tournament in Buenos Aires in the spring, won by Ståhlberg. [Presumably Mar del Plata was meant.]

With regard to the world championship, he replied to us that it was very difficult to imagine that a match could be held before the end of the War. In this connection the names of various players were mentioned, and he told us who were the most outstanding younger players; he was particularly watching Keres, Eliskases and a few others, with whom battles would be interesting.

"From Lisbon", we interrupted, "came the news that arrangements were being started for a match between you and Capablanca. Is that true?"

He replied: "I read that in a Madrid newspaper which I was sent; I don't know where the news came from, and it surprised me because I do not know what foundation it has."

"What are your plans after the Munich Tournament?", we asked.

He replied, "I shall certainly have to return to Spain, where part of my luggage is being left."

"And what about the possibility, of which there is talk, that you will settle in Spain?", we enquired again.

"That would please me very much, but it depends on family arrangements involving my wife, who is currently in Paris, and certain difficulties have to be resolved for her to be able to leave the occupied zone, since she is an American subject. If the necessary arrangements should work out, as is probable, because they are on the right track, then of course my wish would be to settle in your beautiful capital."

"What are your plans?", we asked.

"I have many ideas about the future of European chess, and I think I shall have the opportunity of speaking with the heads of the German Federation, and in particular with Mr Post, who is the chess life and soul of that nation."

In conclusion we touched on a matter which is interesting for us, as it is a national question. We spoke about chess in Spain and about our champion, Dr Rey Ardid, whose last work he said he had read; he praised it highly. He told us: "I have known your champion for 20 years; he is an excellent annotator, and I consider him very strong and of international class. With regard to your country's progress: my last visit to Spain was in 1935, and I have not been back until today. I believe there has been progress, because I already noticed it during my last trip, and my wish is to be able to note that the progress now has been greater still."

As we said farewell, we spoke about several famous international players, and he told us that he supposed the Soviets would have mobilized Keres, Mikenas and Petrov, although they were not subjects of Russia but of small countries of which the USSR had taken possession; he believed that Lilienthal and Flohr were in Moscow because they had chosen to become Soviet citizens.

Many other topics were discussed, but we have to omit them. The above should be sufficient to satisfy the curiosity aroused in enthusiasts by the arrival of the leading figure in world chess. After extending to him a most warm welcome, we expressed the hope that his stay in Madrid would be pleasant and, even more, that he would indeed return and remain with us, so that we could reap the fruit of his lessons.

Lastanao.'

The article in *Informaciones*

was by Valentín González:

EL DOCTOR ALEHKINE, EN MADRID...

Una charla para INFORMACIONES con el campeón del mundo de ajedrez

Seis años de ausencia forzada.— El sábado saldrá para Alemania, pero regresará.—La actividad del ajedrez internacional.—El campeón de ajedrez proyecta vivir en España. Mañana y el viernes jugará aquí.

Más de 50.000 partidas desde 1908.—Admira a Capablanca porque ganó al judío Larket.—El trofeo del zar de Rusia, que no se perdió.—Los seis gatos del doctor

— ALEHKINE —

Por Valentín GONZALEZ

A los seis años de su última visita a España, vuelve a estar entre nosotros el doctor Alejandro Alekhine, campeón mundial de ajedrez. Llegó a Madrid esta mañana, a las ocho, en el expreso de Lisboa, y fué recibido por el señor Ansoleaga, presidente de la Federación Centro de Ajedrez; el señor Alba, secretario de la Nacional, y el señor Suárez, uno de nuestros más destacados ajedrecistas.

Effusivo, sonriente, rebotando simpatía—esas características tan suyas—, encontramos al doctor Alekhine sano y fuerte, como si apenas hubiesen pasado unas semanas desde la última vez que le vimos. La huella del tiempo no ha hecho gran meña en la fortaleza física—pletórica de vitalidad—del campeón mundial.

Ha llegado el doctor Alekhine a



El doctor Alekhine conversa con nuestro redactor en el challo



'Seven years after his last visit to Spain, the world chess champion Dr Alexander Alekhine has returned. He arrived in Madrid at eight o'clock this morning on the express from Lisbon, and was welcomed by Mr Ansoleaga (President of the Federación Centro de Ajedrez), Mr Alba (Secretary of the National Federation), and Mr Suárez, one of our leading players.

Effusive, smiling, brimming over with kindness – which is so characteristic of him – Dr Alekhine looked healthy and strong when we met him; it was as though hardly a few weeks had passed since we last saw him. Time has done little harm to the world champion's physical strength, and he is full of vitality.

Dr Alekhine is only passing through Madrid. On Saturday he will catch an aeroplane for Germany; in Munich he will participate in a 16-player tournament.

With the arrival of such an illustrious figure in our capital we naturally had a conversation with him for the readers of *Informaciones*. Below are some of the declarations made by Dr Alekhine, world chess champion, to our newspaper.

How is the state of world chess?

– "It would be rather risky to offer a categorical answer to your question, given present circumstances, in which there is little news about colleagues from various countries. Activity is continuing in South America and the United States. Reshevsky recently won the US Championship against Horowitz by a score of three wins and 13 draws. Keres, who is Estonian, will certainly be in Russia, mobilized by the Soviets. Lilienthal will also be in the USSR, where he has married. Tartakower, the great chess columnist – he who has collaborated a hundred times [*el de las cien colaboraciones distintas*] – deliberately double-edged? – is Polish and, probably, naturalized French; he is in England, in de Gaulle's army. Cukierman, the French champion [*sic*], committed suicide, throwing himself from a balcony for no apparent reason, since he enjoyed excellent health and fortune. Capablanca today is not the same as a few years ago; in one of his last tournaments, the AVRO in Holland, one of the greatest in the world, he showed signs of exhaustion ... There are many other players travelling throughout the world of whom we have no concrete information. As regards myself, since I last visited Spain seven years ago I have made reasonable progress. It is a great pity that now is not the time to arrange major tournaments."

And chess in Spain?

– "I cannot tell you very much after my protracted absence, which events have made longer than I should have wished. The only person I have seen in play recently, in Lisbon, is Rey Ardid, who has been a friend for 20 years and for whom I have great admiration. I nonetheless hope that as a result of my stay in Madrid and my future projects I shall be able to answer that question one day in the not too distant future."

Do you intend to play in Spain?

– "Certainly. Of course for now, during my three-day stay before I go on to Germany, not too much can be done. But tomorrow and Friday, at the Casino de Madrid, two displays have been arranged for me; one with clocks against ten players, and one simultaneous exhibition against 30. Later, when I return from Munich, which is my plan, I wish and expect to play in a tournament with young Spanish players."

And lectures?

– "Also when I come back, for I have good study material. In Germany I naturally intend to talk to Mr

Post, who is greatly encouraging chess there, about a number of plans for organizing European chess. For the moment I cannot confirm anything, for it all depends on the conversations I shall be having."

What will your promised lectures be about?

– "About the evolution of chess thought in recent times and the reasons for this evolution. There would also be a study of the Aryan and Jewish kinds of chess. Of course I am not satisfied with the direction of hypermodern chess, which is over-defensive. In German this tactic is called *Überdeckung* and its rough meaning in Spanish is 'to cover again', rather like wearing two coats, one on the other."

The Portuguese press has spoken of negotiations for a meeting between you and Capablanca. Is that true?

– "Not at all; there has just been a letter from me on this to the Cuban Federation, but we did not come to an agreement. And trips to the United States or England are out of the question; I am not in favour in those countries, as a result of some articles I wrote in the German press and some games I played in Paris during the last winter – against 40 opponents – for the German Army and Winter Relief."

How many games have you played in your life?

– "Oh! It is not possible to calculate even approximately. In 1908 I played in my first tournament, in Moscow [*sic*]. Over the intervening 33 years, as far as important tournament games against masters are concerned, I must have played about 3,000 [*sic*]. It is impossible to calculate the rest. Obviously more than 50,000."

Do you ever spend a day without playing?

– "Very few."

Who is the player you most admire?

– "All of them. But among them I must stress the greatest glory of Capablanca, which was to eliminate the Jew Lasker from the world chess throne."

Which victories have given you most pleasure?

– "First, Buenos Aires in 1927, where I won the world championship from Capablanca – I lost the title in 1935 by half a point [*sic*], against the Dutchman Dr Euwe – and second, I recovered the title from Euwe in 1937 by six points."

Any disappointments?

– "One big one: when I lost my title in 1935 through underestimating my opponent. I admit that it was a great mistake."

An anecdote?

– "I could tell you so many! But the most recent one will be the best. At a tournament in St Petersburg when I was 16 I won first prize, which was donated by the Tsar. It was a most beautiful Sèvres vase decorated with the Imperial Russian shield. I always kept it with great care. I took it everywhere with me in case I lost it. But, at the time of France's debacle I left it in my wife's keeping in Paris, in a small chest. From then until this last winter it was my nightmare that the wonderful vase should be mislaid. In Paris I looked for it and, not without effort, we found the chest, in a lamentable condition. In what state would

the contents be when the container looked so calamitous? But, miraculously, the vase was only slightly damaged, and I had it repaired in Lisbon. What a weight was lifted from my mind!"

Have you known good female players?

– "Many, but the best of all is the English player Vera Menchik."

What are your immediate plans?

– "After playing in Munich I shall go to Paris to fetch my wife and my six cats (Dr Alekhine has a particular liking for these pets) and bring them with me to Spain, where it is very possible I shall live for some time. And then ... we shall see. It is necessary to give things time and await events, for they usually determine the direction we will follow."

Dr Alekhine must have been tired after his journey. His kindness prevented him from thinking about rest, and he received us with delightful chivalry. We continued talking until Goodness knows when; he is indefatigable. But basic courtesy suggested to us that we should "withdraw".

During the days he is spending in Madrid we shall have the opportunity to speak further of the world champion, in the context of the games he is to play at the Casino de Madrid.

With a handshake, which Dr Alexander Alekhine asked us to extend to our readers, we brought to a close our conversation with the world's leading chess player.'

To the Chess Notes [main page](#).

To the Archives for [other feature articles](#).

Copyright 2007 Edward Winter. All rights reserved.