

The U.S.-Soviet Chess Match

By WILLIAM Z. FOSTER

EVERY LOVER of sports in the U.S. will extend a hearty greeting to the team of Soviet chess masters recently arrived here to play a series of games

with the American champions. The match is important, as it will give chess lovers in this country an opportunity to watch close up the celebrated Russian players in action.



The match is doubly significant, inasmuch as it also represents the defeat, by world mass pressure, of the State Department's disgraceful attempt to prevent the contest by refusal last year to accord the Soviet players even the most elementary courtesies as guests of the nation.

The U.S.-Soviet chess match serves to emphasize the enormous difference in the stress placed upon the most intellectual of games in the two countries. In the USSR (and increasingly in People's China and the European People's Democracies) the playing of chess is a real mass activity. Vast numbers of workers, farmers, and intellectuals engage in it, and the game has penetrated to the most remote corners of this vast country. In the U.S., on the contrary, chess remains an esoteric game, played only by a relative handful of devotees, and it is almost completely unknown to the broad masses of the people.

A MAJOR explanation for the stunted growth of chess-playing in the United States is the fact that the capitalists have never been able to figure a way to make a lot of money out of it.

If it were possible to gather together enormous crowds to view chess matches, on the basis of fat entrance fees, as in the case of boxing, baseball, football, basketball, hockey, wrestling, etc., then, we may be sure, there would be a boom for chess in this country.

In the Soviet Union, however, where profit-making plays no role in sports and in general cultural activities, the government, trade unions, schools, armed forces, and hundreds of other organizations, turn their attention wholeheartedly to the cultivation of chess as a splendid avocation for the people in general. In Czarist Russia, as in many other feudal and capitalist countries, chess was a favorite game of the intellectuals, but it was only after the Socialist Revolution of 1917 that it began to become the broad mass sport that it now is.

ANOTHER BASIC reason for the undeveloped state of chess in the United States is the fact that it is essentially alien to the claptrap capitalist culture of today. Chess, a profoundly intellectual game, calls for the most intense study and application. But there is little room for such intellectual concentration in the vast sea of comic books, detective stories, quiz programs, soap operas, and other such commercialized trash poured out upon the American masses as culture by the great transmission media in the U.S.—the press, radio, motion pictures, television, etc.

Instead of concentrating over a chessboard for hours in deep study as the Russians do, the idea cultivated by the big capitalist interests is to sit before a television set and try to guess the answers to the moron questions put forward in the in-

numerable quiz shows. Other capitalist countries are also tending to take on increasingly this same pattern as the Wall Street imperialists grow more influential in shaping their culture.

The USSR, People's China, and the European People's Democracies, however, have much deeper and richer concepts of culture. They have none whatever of the Tin Pan Alley profit-making trash that is dominant in the commercialized mass cultural fields in the United States. Chess, with its intense intellectual concentration, naturally fits right into their basically richer cultural system.

In passing, it may be remarked that this more serious approach to culture and to intellectual life in general constitutes one of the basic advantages of the socialist over the capitalist system, and is a fundamental factor in the growing replacement of capitalism by socialism in all countries.

The interchange of sports and cultural delegations between the countries of socialism and capitalism, of which the Soviet-American chess match is a good example, can become a powerful factor for world peace by bringing about a better understanding among the peoples. The Wall Street government, however, which has a program of war and imperialist conquest, is opposed to such peace-making international cultural exchanges. But it will be balked in this reactionary anti-cultural policy, even as it now is being defeated on a world scale in its warlike political and military policies. The vital and exuberant new culture of the socialist peoples will break through every obstacle placed in its path by reactionary Wall Street imperialism.