

## **Will Bobby Fischer Rise Again?**

**by John Larkins**

A match between self-exiled chess champion Bobby Fischer and Yugoslavian grandmaster Svetozar Gligoric was announced at a recent press conference in Belgrade. The event was scheduled to take place in March, 1979, at an unspecified site, for a purse of one million dollars.

If Fischer actually plays, this would end his seven-year absence from competitive chess and raise hopes for a comeback - culminating in a match with would champion Anatoly Karpov. Since the original announcement, however, no further details have been forthcoming. And Fischer-followers have already gone through many such rumoured-but-never-actually-played matches - each announced in a similar way. From Brazil it was announced that Fischer would play Mecking; from the Philippines, Karpov; from Holland, Korchnoi - but none of the scheduled matches ever took place.

It is true that a match with Gligoric would be an ideal way for Fischer to start a comeback. Gligoric is a longtime friend who should not seriously tax the skills of even a rusty ex-world champion. On the other hand, it has been suggested the Bobby never really intended to play, that the announcement was a way of manipulating the media into giving some free publicity to his friend Gligoric, who was hoping to be elected President of FIDE at the Olympiad in Argentina. (If this was the plan, it didn't work. Gligoric came in third in a field of three candidates).

### **Fischer, Jonestown, and Armstrongism**

The chess community has had a great deal of difficulty in understanding Fischer's absence from active participation in the arena of the checkered squares. But those who have been following the almost-incredible details of the recent Jonestown massacre in Guyana and the cult practices of the People's Temple followers of the Reverend Jim Jones may have gained a new basis for understanding Bobby's behavior.

Since 1962, Fischer has been a follower of the Worldwide Church of God, founded by 83-year old fundamentalist minister Herbert W. Armstrong. The Worldwide Church has many of the same characteristic cult practices as the People's Temple, and the story of Fischer's involvement with it sounds startlingly similar to the accounts of the survivors of Jonestown.

In an interview with "Ambassador Report" (a magazine published by Worldwide Church defectors) Bobby told how he was drawn into the cult: "Really, my story is no different than that of any other jerk that was sucked in . . . I had some personal problems, and I started listening to a lot of radio ministers . . . Then I heard Mr. Armstrong, and I said, 'Ah, God has finally shown me the one.' . . . Well, I kind of split my life into two pieces. One was where my chess career lies. There, I kept my sanity, so to speak, and my logic. And the other was my religious life . . . I can remember times coming home from a chess club at four in the morning when I was half asleep and half dead and forcing myself to pray an hour and study (the Bible) an hour. You know, I was half out of my head - stoned almost."

### **From Champion to Zombie**

Fischer gave this telling description of Armstrong converts: "First they get conducted in with a nice, sweet program, no money, everything free, free, free. And then they get sucked in, and suddenly a few lies get mixed in. They are told that their human nature is wicked and these nice people who gave them all these things wouldn't be lying to them, would they? And then I think once you start distrusting your own mind you're finished. Once you think that your own mind is not your friend anymore, then I think you are on your way to insanity. You have been stripped bare. All your defenses are gone. You must trust Armstrongism, his ministers, doctrines and organization . . . and the next thing you know you are really a zombie."

### **The Pawn Who Should Be King**

One of the fullest descriptions of Fischer's life inside the Worldwide Church can be found in a three-page article by John Trechak in the August 14, 1978 issue of "New West" magazine - "Bobby Fischer: the Pawn Who Should Be King." Much of the material included here has been paraphrased from it.

Armstrong devotees are required to give a mandatory 10 to 30 percent of their income to the church. Fischer has turned over an amount that has variously been estimated as from \$60,000 to \$100,000. "They cleaned my pockets out. I have some money left, but not that much."

Since 1972 Fischer has been almost totally under the influence of the Worldwide Church. He is thought to be living in the home of a Worldwide Church minister, Arthur Mokarow, one of Armstrong's top lieutenants. "He sees virtually no visitors and rarely goes out during the day. If he does, it is almost always in the company of Mokarow's wife, Claudia. He spends all his waking hours in his basement room, reading political-conspiracy literature and replaying famous chess games."

The New York Times reported that he was distributing homemade pamphlets on parked cars in Pasadena which said, "You see the courts and the press and just about everything else in this country are being controlled by the Hidden Hand, the Satanic Secret World Government."

### **A Brief Period of Disenchantment**

Fischer's interview in "Ambassador Report" was apparently a brief attempt in late 1976 to disentangle himself from the cult. But by early 1977 the brief period of independence was over and Fischer was desperately trying to prevent the publication of his anti-Armstrong interview, in which he gave the following description of George Herbert Armstrong: "He's the lowest! He's no human being! He's a devil! He's cruel! He's heartless! What a creep, a monster!"

According to Len Zola, who interviewed him, "We've discovered that when the Armstrong people began to suspect that Fischer was slipping out from under their control and was talking to the Report, they applied enough psychological pressure upon him to keep him in check. Deprogrammers refer to that initial period of disenchantment as 'floating' - the individual is openly turned off to the cult, but subconsciously still longs for the fellowship and sense of paternal security it offers. Some are strong enough to break away; some aren't."

### **Solitary, Lonely, and Vulnerable**

When Fischer was playing Spassky for the world championship, he was described by Larry Evans as "the most uncooperative, solitary, self-contained and independent chess master of all time, the loneliest chess champion in the world. He is also the strongest player in the world. In fact, the strongest player who ever lived."

It is a sad and disconcerting lesson for those who have always assumed that Fischer's actions away from the game must have been as profoundly calculated as his moves over the board to realize that Bobby's chess genius was of no use to him when his loneliness was appealed to by the manipulations of an all-embracing religious cult. But it is a lesson that must be learned if any sense at all is to be made of the continuing rumors about the future plans of "the Phantom of Pasadena."

One wonders whether Bobby himself followed the media coverage of the Jonestown massacre and, if so, what thoughts he may have had. Did he see the parallel to his own circumstances? Or did he see merely another manifestation of the Satanic World Government?

Is Fischer going to play again? Perhaps the best answer is Sammy Reshevsky's: "How can I tell you what he will do, when Fischer himself doesn't know?"

[Return to Index](#)

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