THE NEW WINAWER REPORT

'Too Much French Defence Theory?'

John Watson introduces his December column at ChessPublishing.com with the conundrum above. An odd question to ask on a theory website! Perhaps he means that there's so much material that it can't all be covered by one lone column? For it's true that ChessPublishing is now the only one, ever since John Knudsen's *The Winawer Report* last appeared, over ten years ago. So stated, the problem is easy to solve. *The New Winawer Report* will be a (free) monthly newsletter on the theory, practice, and history of the French Winawer. As with John Knudsen's original, reader contributions of articles, analysis, and games are welcome: please email me, and I promise to respond promptly.

To start, here's a look at an old but ever-interesting variation, which Simon Williams has recently attempted to rehabilitate. All in all, though, I don't think he's quite right.

✳   ✳   ✳

Euwe variation, former main line: 15 ♗e2? is bad after all

Simon Williams' recent book *Attacking Chess: the French* has an extended discussion of Euwe's 10 ♔d1 line in the Winawer Poisoned Pawn. This is very rare these days, but undeservedly so: while best play seems to give Black roughly equal chances, you could say the same about the main line.

In Euwe's variation (*1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 ♘c3 ♗b4 4 e5 c5 5 a3 ♗xc3+ 6 bxc3 ♘e7 7 ♕g4 ♕c7 8 ♕xg7 ♖g8 9 ♕xh7 cxd4 10 ♔d1!?*), the former main line ran 10 … ♘bc6 11 ♘f3 dxc3 12 ♘g5 ♘xe5 13 f4 ♖xg5 14 fxg5 ♘5g6 **(1)**. The original games featured 15 ♗d3?, with poor results (after … e5-e4), and 15 ♗e2?, with disaster (see Matulović-Tatai below). Theory now prefers 15 h4!, planning an immediate h-pawn march, when Black is in serious trouble: see for example **Gärtig-Zhikharev, 'Baltic Sea: Sea of Friendship' corr 1980-83**.

It's always good to take such verdicts with a grain of salt, and Williams *p. 190*

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W

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W
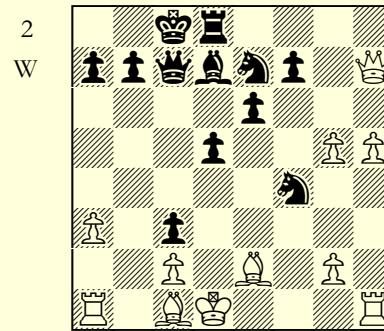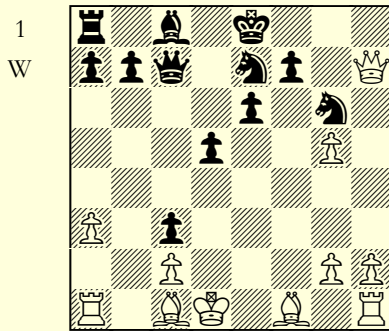
noticed that after 15 h4 ♕g3, the formerly standard 16 h5 is flawed, allowing Black to escape to an immediate draw with 16 … e5!. So he suggests 15 ♗e2 as a refinement, planning to meet the usual 15 … e5 with 16 h4! (instead of *16 ♖f1?!*), transposing to 15 h4 e5 16 ♗e2 but avoiding the awkward 15 … ♕g3.

All quite plausible, and Watson *PtF-4 p. 254* cites this with approval, giving 15 ♗e2 e5 16 h4 as a little better for White.

Well, it's true that 15 ♗e2 isn't the losing proposition it has sometimes been depicted. But it doesn't seem to offer the slightest advantage either, whereas 15 h4! does: White can improve later.

A1: 15 ♗e2 ♗d7!?

After 15 ♗e2, Black has usually played 15 … e5, with great success. But even better results have been achieved with **15 … ♗d7!?**, with the idea of castling as quickly as possible. After 16 h4 0-0-0 17 h5 ♘f4!**(2)**, there are two examples:
Taruffi-Tiller, European Junior Ch, Groningen 1974-75: 18 ♗f3 ♘f5 19 g4 ♘d4 (*19 … ♕e5!, e.g. 20 gxf5 ♘d3! 21 ♖f1 ♘b2+ and mate in three*) 20 ♕xf7

e5 21 ♗xf4 ♘xf3 22 g6 exf4 23 h6 ♕c4 24 g7 ♕d4+ (*24 … ♘g1! mates even more quickly*) 25 ♔e2 ♕d2+ 26 ♔xf3 ♕e3+ 27 ♔g2 ♕g3+ 0-1.
Bezler-Weinzettl, Liechtenstein Open, Schellenberg 1989: 18 ♕xf7 ♘f5 19 g4? (but *19 ♕f6 ♘xe2 20 ♔xe2 e5++* is also lost) 19 … ♕e5 20 ♖h2 ♕d4+ 21 ♔e1 ♕g1+ 22 ♗f1 ♕xh2 0-1.

If instead (*15 ♗e2 ♗d7 16 h4 0-0-0*) 17 ♕xf7 ♖f8 18 ♕g7, Black has 18 … ♕c5 19 h5 ♘f5!! 20 ♕xg6 ♘g3++ (*21 ♖e1 ♘e4!*).

So is 15 … ♗d7 a forced win? No, White's problems arose because the plan of a quick h4-h5, almost always the correct one in this line, is wrong here: after 15 … ♗d7, it's already too late. Instead 16 ♖b1 0-0-0 17 ♕xf7 ♕c5 is ∞/=, e.g. 18 ♖f1 (not *18 ♖b4? e5++*) 18 … ♖xf1+ 19 ♗xf1 ♘f5!? or 19 … e5.

### A21: 15 ♗e2 e5 16 h4!

There are only three examples, each transposing from 15 h4 e5 16 ♗e2. **Boisvert-MacDonald, CCCA corr, Canada 1970** continued **16 … ♘f8?!** 17 ♕g7?! ♘f5 18 ♕f6 ♘g3= (though 0-1, 37); here 17 ♕h8 gives White some advantage. After

the more natural **16 … ♗e6** 17 h5 ♘f8, **von Semmern-Skorna** (which Williams cites) and **Romanowski-Blachmann**, both **E. German corr 1982**, continued 18 ♕d3?! 0-0-0, and White was summarily crushed in each case. Better 17 ♗b5+ ♘c6 18 ♕d3, roughly equal after 18 … a6 19 ♗xc6+ ♕xc6 (*20 g6 fxg6 21 hxg6 ♕a4!*).

A22: 15 ♗e2 e5 16 ♖f1?!

Even the aimed-for lines above appear no better for White, but at least they improve on 16 ♖f1?! ♗e6 17 ♗b5+ ♔d8!**(3)**:
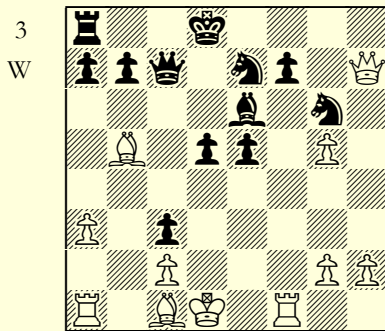
'Still roughly equal, but White has to proceed with extreme caution', Williams. Old opinions varied widely, but all evidence pointed to a Black win:

18 ♗e3? d4 19 ♗g1 ♕c5 20 ♗e2 ♕d5 21 ♖f3 ♔c7 was the stem game **Matulović-Tatai, Venice 1969** *Informator 7/211 (Ivkov)*, where White was massacred (0-1, 41).

18 ♖xf7? ♕c5! Barcza or 18 … ♕b6! Euwe, and **18 h4?** (Ivkov) ♕c5! Gligorić/Uhlmann, are no good.

18 ♖b1 is Williams' suggestion, continuing 18 … ♕c5 19 ♗d3 ♔c7 and 'Black is fine'. The book is generally excellent

but this is a slip: simply 18 … ♕b6 wins (*19 h3 a6; 19 ♖b4 a5*).

18 ♕g7! prepares ♕f6-f2 and restrains … e4. Then 18 … ♕c5 19 a4 ♕d4+ 20 ♗d3 ♕g4+ (*… e4 being impossible*) 21 ♔e1 ♕xg2 22 ♖b1 ♔c7 lets White off the hook via 23 ♗xg6! ♘xg6 24 ♖xf7+=. Best seems 19 … ♔c7∓.

Instead of 17 ♗b5+, Williams prefers **17 h4** (also Ivkov's suggestion in Informator), but finds Black has great attacking chances after 17 … 0-0-0 18 h5 ♘f4! 19 ♗xf4 exf4**(4)**. This was spectacularly borne out by a game that, strangely, appears in no database:
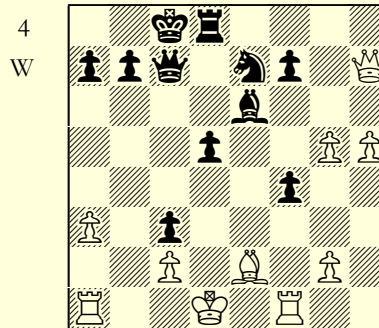

Met. Life-IBM Research, corr 1971 (telephone consultation) *Chess Life & Review 27/4, Apr. 1972, pp. 243-44 (IBM Research)*: 20 ♕d3 (on *20 g6*, IBM Research's intended *20 … fxg6 21 hxg6 ♕c5* is not best as White survives with *22 ♔e1!* (only thus), e.g. *22 … ♘f5 23 ♖b1 ♗d7 24 g7 ♕e3 25 g8=♕* and Black must take the perpetual; but *20 … ♘f5!* wins, e.g. *21 g7 ♘e3+ 22 ♔c1 ♘xf1 23 g8=♕ ♕e5! 24 ♕gg7 ♕e3+ 25 ♔b1 ♕b6+*, or *21 ♖f3 ♘e3+ 22 ♖xe3 fxe3 23 ♕g7 fxg6!∓∓*) 20 … ♘f5 21 ♖f3 (*21 ♔c1 ♘g3 22 ♖d1 d4∓∓*)

21 … d4 22 ♕e4 ♘e3+ 23 ♖xe3 fxe3 24 ♖b1 d3! 25 ♗xd3 ♖xd3+! 0-1.

B: 15 h4 ♕g3

Since Williams' move order refinement fails to give any advantage, what of **15 h4 ♕g3(5)**, which it seeks to avoid?

5
W
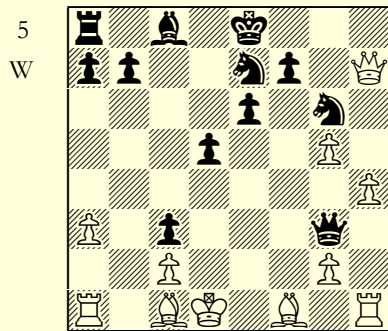
The queen move was recommended (with '!' but no further analysis) in the earliest mention of 15 h4, by Pietzsch *Schach 22/5, May 1968, p. 122*. But it has been under a cloud since its first trial in **Hansen-Wirth, Denmark-Belgium corr 1972-73**, a game that was widely publicised and annotated *Fernschach 34/1, Jan. 1973, pp. 6-7* and *The Chess Player 3/463* (Hansen); *Informator 15/227* (Marić); *RHM game 18*. White won in style after **16 h5 ♘f4** 17 ♕h8+ ♔d7 18 ♗b5+ ♘c6 19 ♗xf4 ♕xf4 20 ♕xc3±± and 1-0, 30. Of 16 … ♘f4 Marić says nothing, Hansen that it is best and forces White to play very precisely, and Gligorić/Uhlmann only that 'this was the point of Black's previous move'. It was left to Williams to point out that **16 … e5!** draws.

Iván Faragó gave **16 ♖h3! ♕g4+ 17 ♖f3 ♘f5 18 h5 '±'** in Informator 39. Williams gives 18 … ♘f8 '!' as leading to excellent play for Black. But 19 ♕h8 appears to favour White, e.g. 19 … ♘d4 20 ♗e2 ♘xf3 (*20 … ♘xe2 21 ♕f6*) 21 ♗xf3 ♕c4±, though it's still complicated.

Also in this line Williams doesn't mention **17 ♔e1!**, which wins: 17 … ♕e4+ 18 ♔f2 ♕xc2+ 19 ♔g1±±.

Watson *PtF-4 p. 254* gives both key moves in one line: 17 ♔e1 ♘f5 18 h5 ♘f8 19 ♕h8! winning. (Williams is cited for 17 ♔e1; a puzzle.)

Conclusion: 15 h4! is still best. ▶

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1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 ♘c3 ♗b4 4 e5 c5 5 a3 ♗xc3+ 6 bxc3 ♘e7 7 ♕g4 ♕c7 8 ♕xg7 ♖g8 9 ♕xh7 cxd4 10 ♔d1 dxc3 11 ♘f3 ♘bc6 12 ♘g5 ♘xe5 13 f4 ♖xg5 14 fxg5 ♘5g6(1)

15		16		17		18	
♗e2?	♗d7!?	16 h4?	0-0-0	17 h5	♘f4!(2)		∓∓
…	…	16 ♖b1	0-0-0	17 ♕xf7	♖f8	18 ♕g7	∞/=
…	e5	16 h4!	♗e6	17 h5	♘f8	18 ♗b5+	=
…	…	16 ♖f1?!	0-0-0	17 ♗b5+	♔d8!(3)	18 ♕g7!	∓
15 h4!	♕g3(5)	16 h5?	e5!				=
…	…	16 ♖h3!	♕g4+	17 ♖f3	♘f5	18 h5	±
…	…	…	…	17 ♔e1!			±±

RHM   GLIGORIĆ, Svetozar, & UHLMANN, Wolfgang, *The French Defence*. New York: RHM Press 1975. ISBN-10: 0-89058-010-3.

PtF-4   WATSON, John L., *Play the French* (4th edition). London: Gloucester (Everyman) 2012. ISBN-13: 978-1-85744-680-7.

AC:tF   WILLIAMS, Simon, *Attacking Chess: The French*. London: Gloucester (Everyman) 2011. ISBN-13: 978-1-85744-646-3.