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♙xd5+ exd5 35 ♖e7+ ♗xc6 36
 ♖xe3) 30 ♖xa2 ♗c7 31 ♙d7+ ♗xc6
 32 ♖a4+ ♗c5 33 ♗d2 1-0

Implicit commitments

Almost every move in chess involves some sort of commitment. A pawn move cannot be reversed and with each advance the pawn permanently loses the ability to control certain squares. Even a piece move is a commitment; if the piece turns out to be badly placed on its new square, it may have to go into reverse, with consequent loss of time. However, the degree of commitment is important. A piece sacrifice involves a greater degree of commitment than a natural developing move. We have already discussed the more obvious types of commitment earlier. However, there is a more subtle type of commitment, which we call *implicit commitment*. Very often, a certain type of commitment is bound up in a player's choice of opening. A player as White adopting the Velimirović Attack in the Sicilian (one of the main lines of which runs 1 e4 c5 2 ♗f3 ♗c6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♗xd4 ♗f6 5 ♗c3 d6 6 ♗c4 e6 7 ♗e3 ♗e7 8 ♖e2 a6 9 0-0-0 ♖c7 10 ♗b3 0-0 11 g4) is committing himself to an all-out kingside attack, which may involve sacrifices, and if he is hesitant about giving up material then he has simply chosen the wrong opening. Of course, this is an extreme example – there are few opening variations as one-sided as the Velimirović

Attack, but the same general principle applies in many openings. For example, it is not unusual for a player to seize a long-term strategic advantage in return for piece activity or a lead in development. In this case the player with the better development has taken on an implicit commitment to undertake rapid action. Advantages such as a lead in development are inherently temporary, because when the opponent has brought out all his pieces the advantage disappears. A common mistake is to take on such a position, but not to appreciate that the long-term chances lie with the opponent. The result is a fatal lack of urgency. Here is an example.

J. Nunn – J. Mellado

Leon 1997

French Defence

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 e5 c5 4 c3 ♖b6 5
 ♗f3 ♗d7 6 ♗e2 ♗b5 7 c4 ♗xc4 8
 ♗xc4 dxc4

I had noticed in my database a game won by my opponent with this rather offbeat line (instead of the usual 8...♖b4+). Players are often unduly affected by the result of a game. If a player has won a game with a particular line, he will very often repeat exactly the same line, even if it is rather dubious. After looking at 8...dxc4 before the game, I quite liked the resulting positions for White, so I decided to go down the same variation.

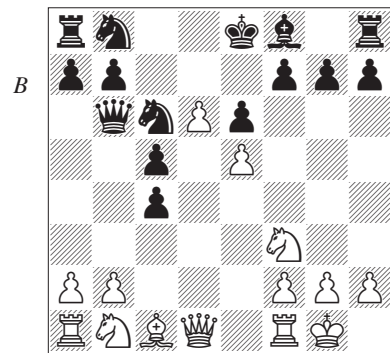
9 d5 ♗e7

Black does not completely equalize after 9...exd5 10 ♖xd5 ♘e7 11 ♖xc4.

10 d6

This is the critical continuation. In Mellado's earlier game White had played 10 ♘c3, which allows Black to swap everything on d5, with a more or less equal position.

10...♗ec6 11 0-0 (D)



This is a typical case of implicit commitment. The extra pawn is not relevant, as White will win back the c4-pawn in a few moves. The key factor is that Black has allowed White to drive a wedge into the middle of his position. The protected passed pawn is not going to promote in the near future – there are simply too many pieces on the board for that – but it is an asset both in the middlegame and in the endgame. In the middlegame it stifles the activity of Black's pieces and cuts communication between the queenside and kingside. This could help White to mount a kingside attack, for Black's queenside pieces would have

trouble feeding across to the other side of the board. In the endgame the pawn is more likely to promote, as there are fewer pieces available to keep it under control. Black would probably have to assign one piece to keep a watchful eye on the pawn, leaving him a man short elsewhere. The only caveat here is that White should not exchange too many pieces in an endgame, since then Black could use his king as the blockading piece.

In return for White's long-term asset, Black's minor pieces can converge to attack the e5-pawn and for some time White will be tied down to its defence. Moreover, Black's development is quite good, especially as White will have to invest some time in regaining the pawn on c4. However, these compensating factors are all temporary, and given time White will complete his development and reorganize his forces to defend e5 efficiently. Black has therefore taken on a heavy implicit commitment either to keep White off-balance or to convert his temporary advantages into something more permanent before White puts his house in order. If Black has not achieved something concrete within the next half-dozen moves, then we can safely predict that he will be in trouble.

White, on the other hand, can content himself with more modest play. All he need do is consolidate his position and bring all his pieces into play and Black will 'automatically' be worse. Of course, this might have been

quite difficult if Black had continued accurately, but nevertheless White's position is easier to play. He has a very clear-cut aim, while Black must try to generate counterplay 'somehow', i.e. he has to formulate a plan from scratch, whereas White's plan is handed to him on a plate. This is a typical situation in such 'long-term advantage vs piece play' situations. The piece-play side has much more work to do, at least to begin with, to find the best plan. If he succeeds, then the other side may also have to think carefully about how to contain his opponent's counterplay, but if he does not succeed the game can be quite easy.

To my surprise, Black spent very little time over the next few moves and only started to think when he was already in considerable difficulties. Evidently he did not appreciate that this is the critical phase of the game and ordinary developing moves will not be enough.

From all this we can learn an important lesson. At the end of the opening, spend a few minutes deciding whether one player has the better long-term chances. This may be obvious simply from the opening variation chosen (for example, in the Exchange Ruy Lopez it is obviously White who has the better long-term chances), but if it is at all unclear then it is worth spending time on this question. The strategy for the two players may then be quite clear: one side must aim to consolidate and contain his opponent;

the other must play to stir up trouble quickly.

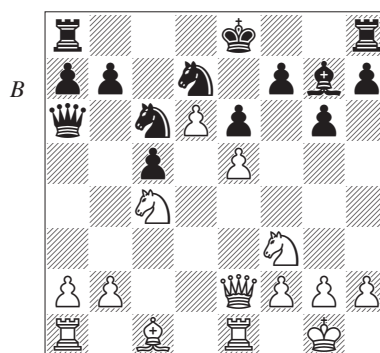
11...♖d7 12 ♜e1 g6 13 ♘a3

The first task is to regain the pawn on c4.

13...♙g7

Black cannot hang on to the pawn by 13...♞a6 14 ♞e2 b5 because 15 b3 breaks up the queenside pawn structure and regains the pawn in a more advantageous way.

14 ♘xc4 ♞a6 15 ♞e2 (D)



15...0-0?

A natural move, but one which allows White to consolidate his central pawns. Black should have continued 15...b5 16 ♘a3 (relatively best, as White must not block in his bishop) 16...♞b8 (after 16...♘xc5 17 ♘xe5 ♙xe5 18 ♘xb5 0-0 19 a4 White has some advantage; Black cannot take on d6 because of the d-file skewer, so White manages to support his dangerous passed pawn) 17 ♙f4 0-0 and White has more difficulties than in the game because his knight is offside at