

# Chess College: Pawn Play

**Efstratios Grivas**

A step-by-step guide  
to chess excellence



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# Introduction

Every chess-player who wishes to improve his level in the difficult subject of chess is obliged, first of all, to study methodically and understand the existing principles that govern the theory of the opening, middlegame and endgame.

Most chess-players focus more on the study of opening theory than other aspects of the game. The reasons are probably clear: opening theory is easier to learn and can provide immediate results, although this is based more on the opponent's ignorance than our own abilities. Even for a chess trainer, it is easier to teach some variations from this or that opening or a set of simple tactical motifs than to engross himself in the exposition of middlegame and endgame theory.

Yes, middlegame and endgame theory does exist. The great difficulty in approaching it lies in the fact that it does not follow absolute and clear-cut paths, but rather involves deep research in the ideas and logic by which specific types of positions are treated. Moreover, unlike opening theory, the theory of the middlegame and the endgame does not change rapidly based on modern developments and remains almost intact through the years.

In view of the above, any chess-player who wishes to follow a chess career or simply become a better player must refrain from the commonplace and assume a different approach. He must develop a good understanding of middlegame and endgame theory, so as to be able in his games to proceed in a proper way after his chosen opening has reached its conclusion. The chess-player can differentiate himself only in the opening; there, each one of us brings forth his own beliefs and convictions, and in general his own experiences and preferences. Objectively, no opening loses – but also no opening wins. The opening is just the beginning of the journey and serves to offer us a comfortable start. But to reach the end of this journey successfully we have to count on our knowledge and experience, as regards middlegame and endgame theory.

Endgame theory teaches us two fundamental issues. First, how to extract the maximum from a basic theoretical position with little material, where the experts (and practice comprising thousands of games) have reached definite conclusions. Second, the way in which we can handle an endgame, depending on the material remaining on the board, and the ideas and plans we should employ. This second issue is significantly more difficult to master because, apart from making full use of the first one (we must be aware of the possible outcomes of the endgame in question) it is greatly influenced by our experience and understanding, which are basically derived from the images and impressions we have from related positions. And, of course, a primary role is played by the effort we have invested in studying.

In middlegame theory, things are even tougher. We are obliged to study various types of positions with specific strategic and tactical attributes, so as to understand the underlying ideas and be able to employ them ourselves in similar situations. Besides, while many chess-players have studied these topics and acquired knowledge, it is the application of this knowledge in practice that helps differentiate between them. True, chess is not a simple activity, but it becomes so much more attractive when we acquire this knowledge...

This is the second of three books that deal with middlegame and general chess theory. The purpose of this series is to introduce the reader to advanced training concepts, using the same methods of presentation and instruction that were taught to me personally by famous trainers that I have worked with. I owe to these people gratitude for their valuable contribution to my progress as a chess-player. Besides, the fact that I succeeded in attaining the grandmaster title is owed first and foremost to the education I received and then to my personal work and effort.

## Volume 2: Pawn Play

In this, the second volume of the series, we focus on pawns and investigate many important aspects of their role in chess, their strengths and weaknesses, and their impact on the battle as a whole.

# Passed Pawn

By definition, a pawn is passed when it can advance to promotion without encountering any opposing pawns in its path.

Possession of a passed pawn and the ability to exploit its potential is a strategic element that can often determine the result of the game.

The passed pawn may prove significant in the middlegame, gaining space and tying down the opponent's pieces, but its true strength comes to the fore in the endgame. In practically all types of endgames, possession of a passed pawn is considered a decisive advantage, particularly when the remaining material is scant. Even if it proves impossible to promote the pawn, its mere presence is enough to restrict the enemy pieces, force material gain or simply to maintain the initiative.

Consequently, this strategic element greatly influences (and is influenced by) the matter of piece exchanges. A passed pawn must be blockaded, so as to have its power restrained as much as possible. The minor pieces (knight or bishop) are ideal for this purpose, as they can rarely be forced to retreat by enemy forces. On the other hand, the major pieces (queen and rook) find it difficult to achieve a stable blockade as they are easily harassed, while one must also consider that, for such valuable pieces, dealing with a mere pawn cannot be an efficient form of employment. Taking the above into account, it becomes clear that the side with the passed pawn should seek to exchange minor pieces and retain the major ones; the opposite applies to the other side.

A factor of crucial importance is the ability of the defending king (i.e. the one facing the passed pawn) to participate in the proceedings. After exchanging the major pieces (and especially the queens), the king can approach the passed pawn and blockade it (or generally stop its advance), thus freeing the other pieces of its army for other duties.

A passed pawn that has been securely blockaded and efficiently neutralized may become a weakness and then this very important element may even lead to the loss of the game.

In general, the side possessing a passed pawn has clearer plans and aims. The other side usually seeks ways to blockade it or, if this proves impossible, obtain counterplay on another part of the board. One good option is 'harassment' of the opponent's king. In practice this option often proves very effective, but unfortunately it is not always employable!

*The most fundamental rule of exploiting this strategic element is: passed pawns must be pushed!*

## Grivas – Kotronias

Athens 1986

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♘c3 ♙g7 4 e4 d6 5 ♙e2 0-0 6 ♙g5

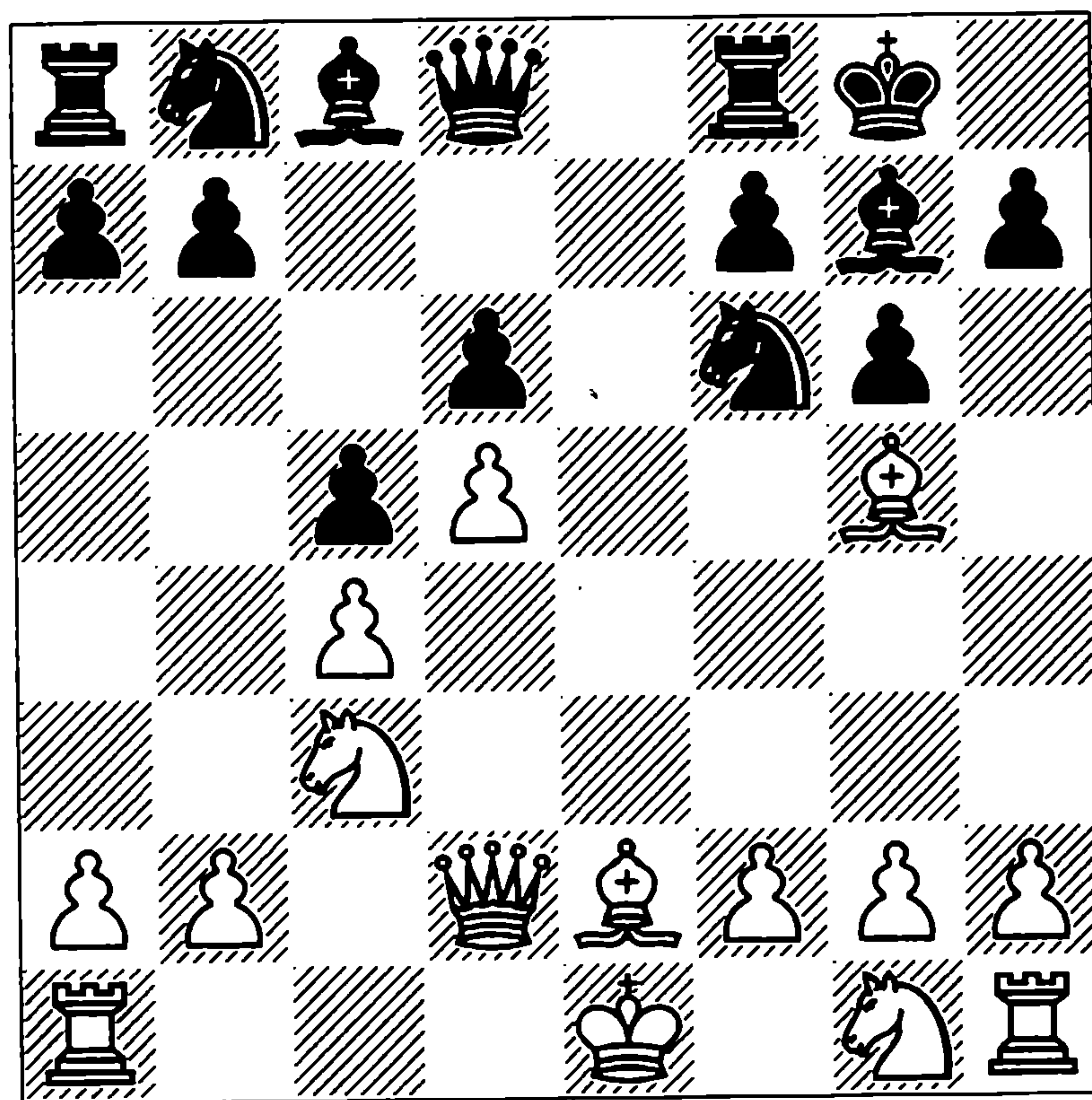
The Averbakh Variation of the King's Indian Defence.

6...c5 7 d5 e6

One of the older lines. Most players prefer to play 7...h6 8 ♙f4 e6!?, with a complicated position.

8 ♙d2! exd5 9 exd5 (D)

B



9...♖b6

An active response. White retains a small plus after 9...♖e8 10 ♘f3 ♙g4 11 0-0.

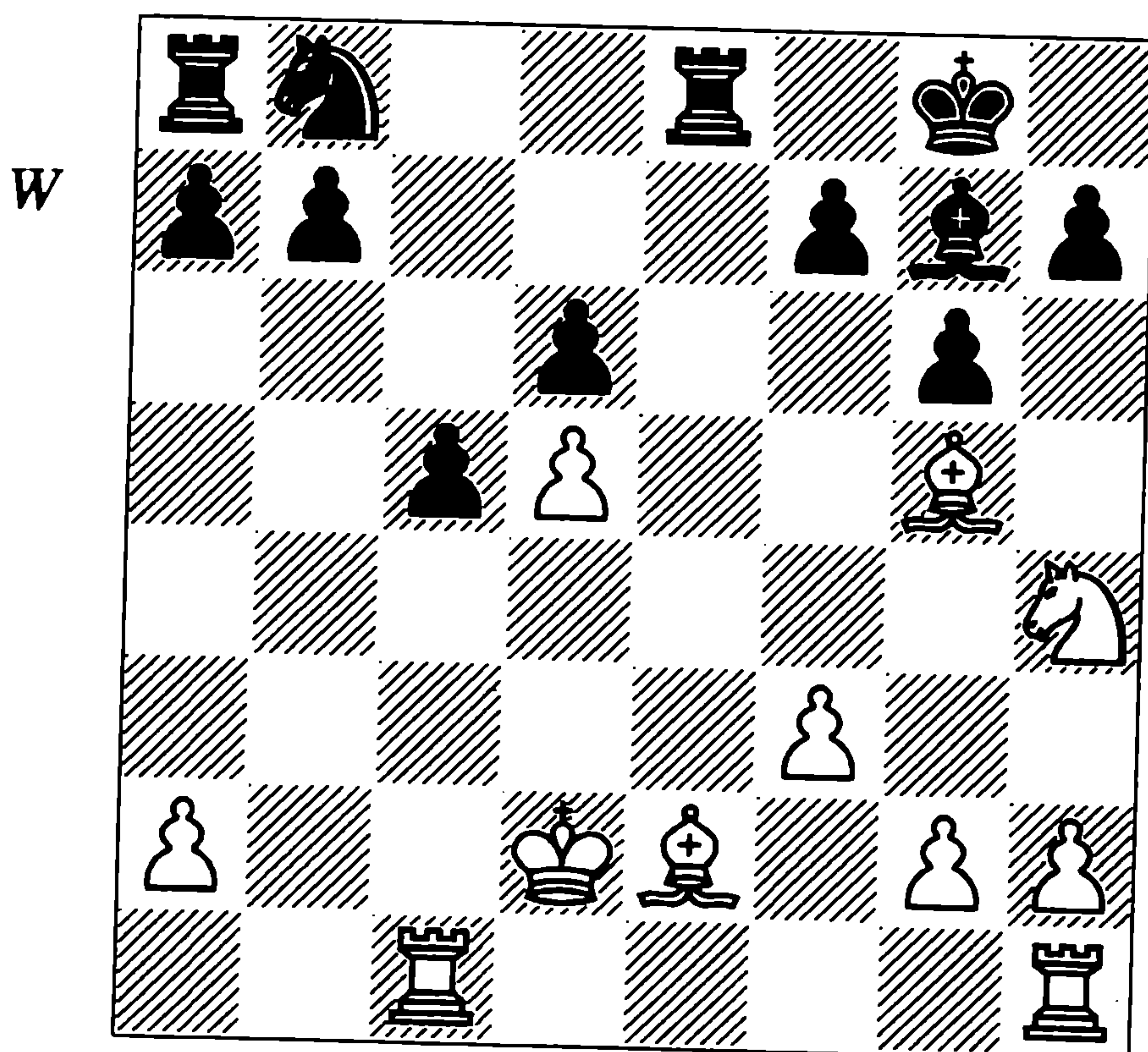
10 ♘f3 ♙f5 11 ♘h4!

Practically forced, as 11 ♖c1 ♘e4 12 ♘xe4 ♙xe4 13 b3 leads to equality, Grivas-Šahović, Athens 1983.

11...♘e4 12 ♘xe4 ♙xe4 13 f3! ♖xb2 14 ♖c1 ♖xd2+ 15 ♙xd2 ♙xd5!

An idea of Yurtaev's, fully in line with Black's general plan. 15...♙f5? 16 ♘xf5 gxf5 17 ♖b1! is significantly inferior.

16 cxd5 ♖e8 (D)



Black's compensation for the piece lies in two pawns and the bad placement of White's king. Moreover, his position looks much more harmonious.

17 ♙f4!?

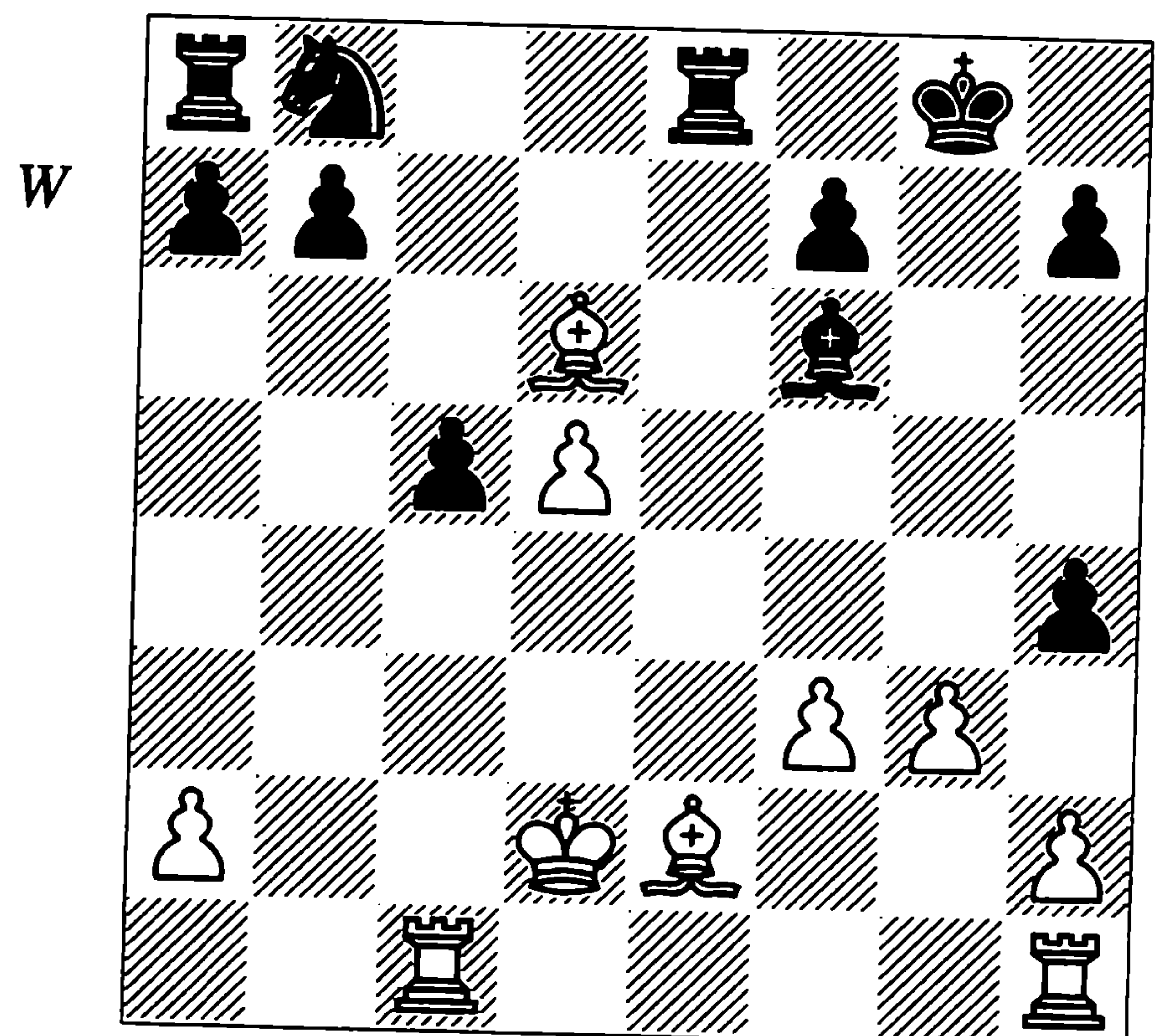
A complicated position is reached after 17 ♖he1 a6 18 ♙d3 (18 ♙f4?! ♙f6 19 g3 g5 20 ♙xd6 gxh4 21 ♙xc5 ♘d7 22 ♙a3 hxg3 23 hxg3 ♖e5 24 ♙c4 b5 25 ♙b3 a5 was slightly better for Black in the game Lerner-Yurtaev, Tallinn 1983) 18...♘d7 19 a4!?, as in Liogky-Yurtaev, USSR 1984.

17...♙f6 18 g3!

A strong novelty. White returns the extra material in return for active piece-play and a dangerous passed pawn. Black took over the initiative after 18 ♙g3 a6 19 f4 ♘d7 20 ♙g4 ♘b6 21 ♙f3 ♘a4 22 ♙f2 b5 in Zaichik-Yurtaev, Volgodonsk 1985.

18...g5 19 ♙xd6 gxh4 (D)

20 ♙c7!

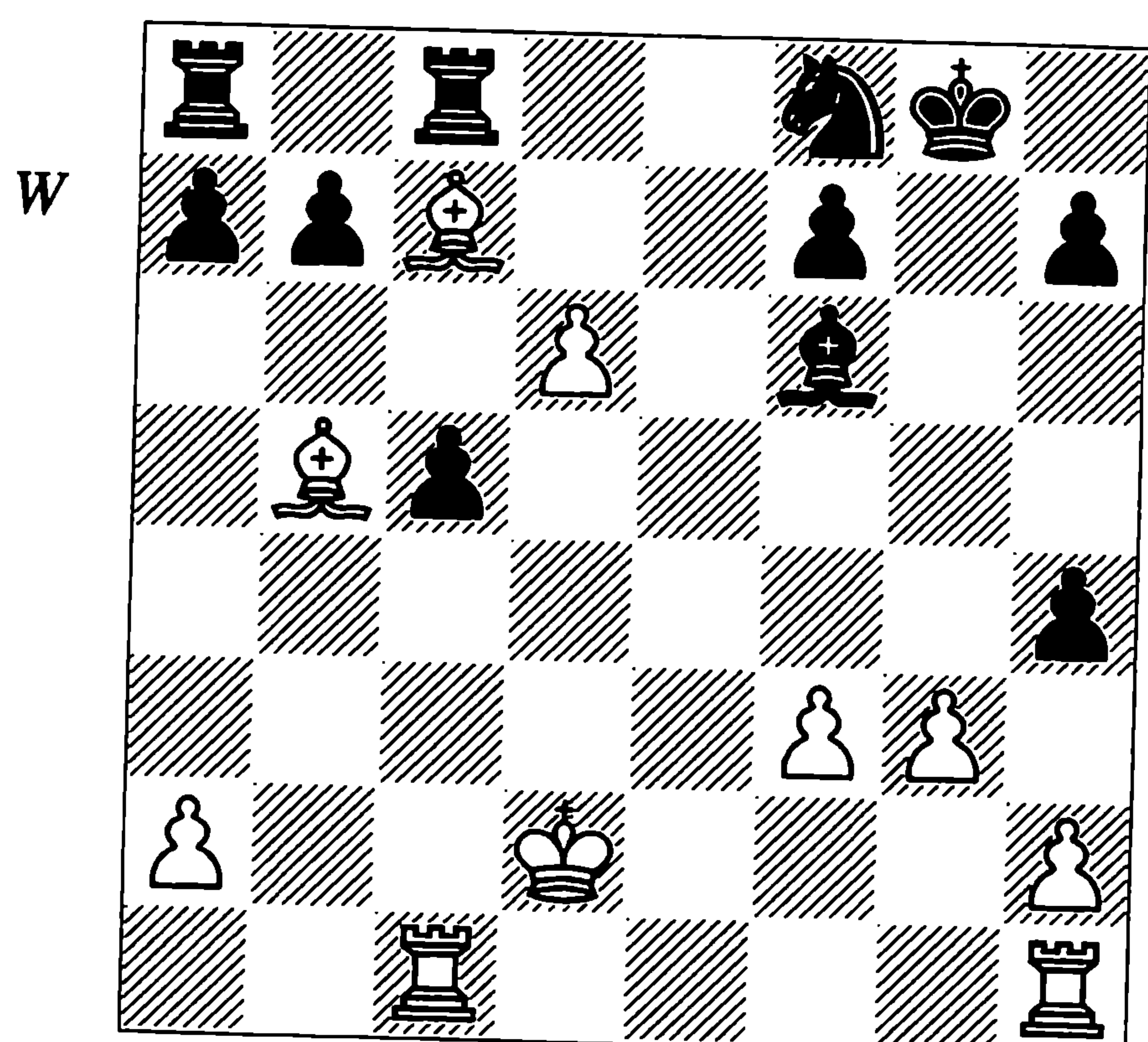


The only way. The alternatives were significantly inferior: 20 ♙xc5?! ♖d8! 21 ♙c4 ♘d7 22 ♙e3 ♘b6 23 ♙xb6 axb6 = or 20 ♖xc5? ♘d7 21 ♖c7 ♘b6 22 ♖xb7 ♖ed8 with the initiative for Black. White must make full use of the position's prevalent strategic element, the passed pawn. The presence of another important element, the bishop-pair, enhances the power of this pawn. However, the position is not a one-sided affair: Black has no obvious weaknesses and should be able to withstand White's assault with correct play.

20...♘d7! 21 ♙b5?!

White should play 21 d6!, because after the text-move Black has at his disposal the strong tactical sequence 21...a6! 22 ♙xd7 ♖e7 23 d6 ♖xd7 24 ♖he1 (not 24 ♖xc5? ♙e7! 25 ♖d5 ♙xd6! 26 ♙xd6 ♖ad8), equalizing.

21...♖ec8?! 22 d6 ♘f8 (D)



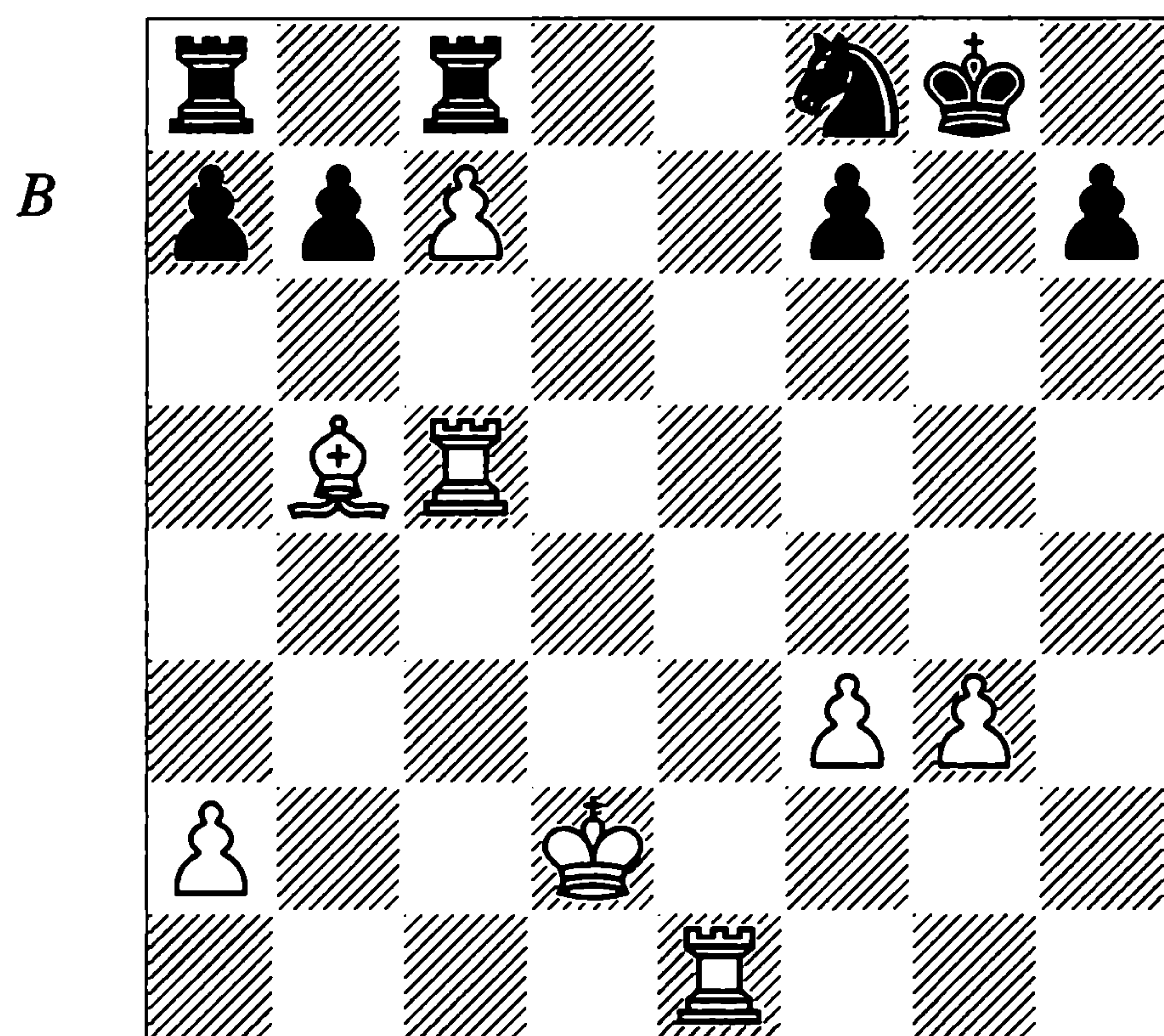
23 ♖he1?

White can retain a slight plus with 23 ♖xc5! ♜e6 24 ♜f5 ♜xc7 25 dxc7 ♙e7 26 ♜c1 ♙d6 27 ♜d5!. In any case this had to be played instead of the text-move.

**23...hxg3 24 hxg3 ♙d8?**

Black commits a significant error. He could instead have equalized with 24...a6! 25 ♙d3 ♙d8 26 ♜xc5 ♜e6 27 ♙f5! ♜xc5 28 ♙xc8 ♜xc8 29 ♜e8+ ♙g7 30 ♜xd8. Now Black's position becomes hopeless.

**25 ♜xc5 ♙xc7 26 dxc7! (D)**



A passed pawn on such an advanced square is a painful thorn in Black's side. Besides, with every piece exchange White's superiority is growing as Black's chances for counterplay diminish.

**26...♜e6 27 ♜xe6! fxe6 28 ♙d7 ♙f7 29 ♙e3 ♙f6**

Weaker resistance is offered by 29...♙e7? 30 ♙xc8 ♜xc8 31 ♜h5! ♜xc7 32 ♜xh7+ ♙d6 33 ♜xc7 ♙xc7 34 ♙d4 with a winning pawn ending, or 29...b6? 30 ♜c6! ♙e7 31 ♙xe6.

**30 g4! h6 31 ♙e4 ♙e7 32 ♙xc8 ♜xc8 33 ♙e5 ♙d7 34 ♜c2! (D)**

Driving Black into zugzwang. Black has no good moves any more.

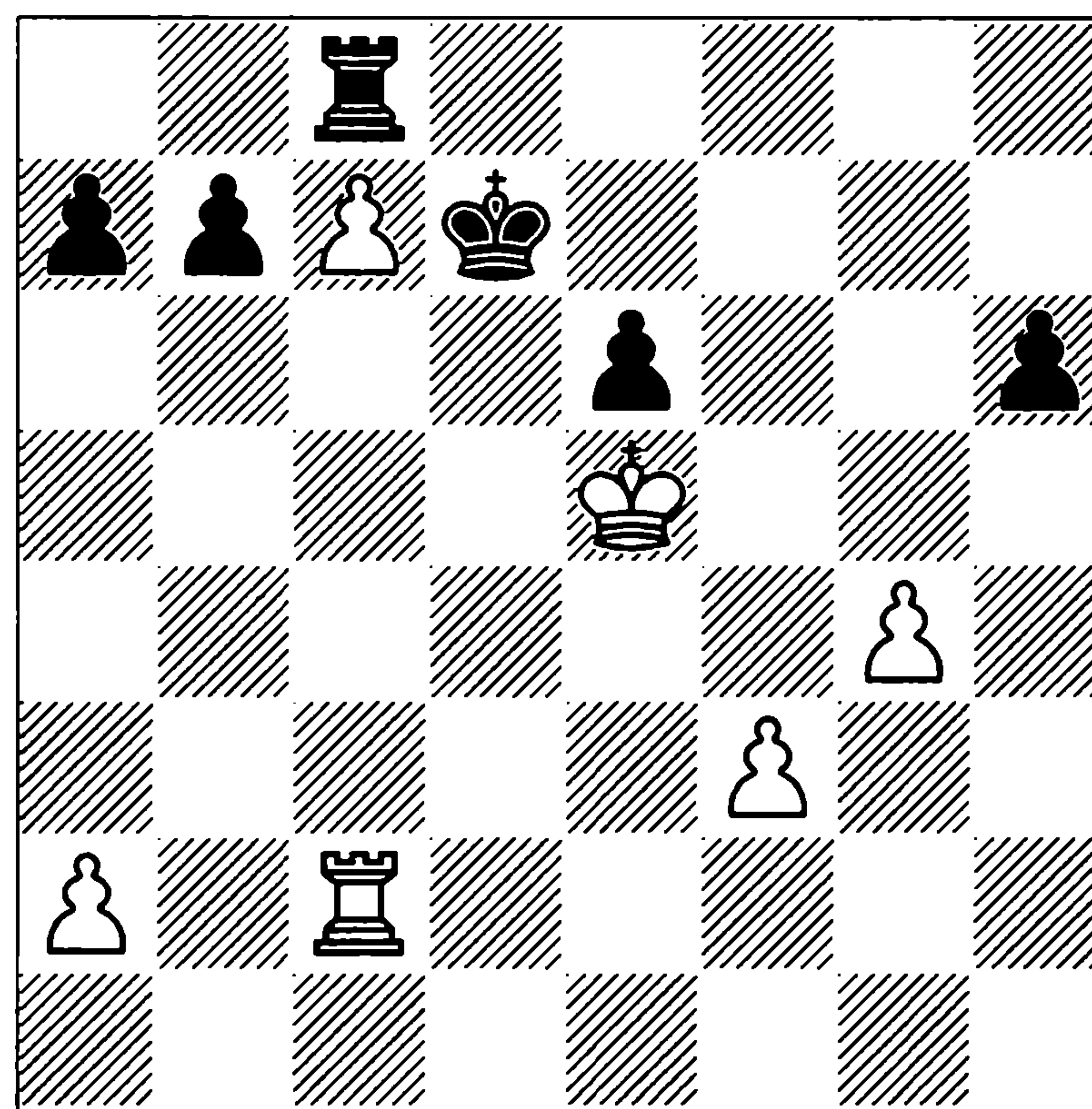
**34...b5**

This leads to material losses, but White would win easily after either 34...♙e7 35 f4 b5 36 g5 hxg5 37 fxg5 a5 38 g6 or 34...♜xc7 35 ♜xc7+ ♙xc7 36 ♙xe6.

**35 ♜d2+ ♙e7 36 ♜d6 ♜xc7**

Or 36...♜f8 37 ♜d8! ♜xd8 38 cxd8♚+ ♙xd8 39 ♙xe6 a5 40 ♙d5 +-.

B



**37 ♜xe6+ ♙f7 38 ♜xh6 ♜c5+ 39 ♙f4 ♜c4+ 40 ♙g5 ♜a4 41 ♜h7+ ♙e6 42 ♜h2 a5 43 f4 ♜e4 44 f5+ ♙d7 45 f6 b4 46 ♜h7+ 1-0**

**Grivas – Colović**

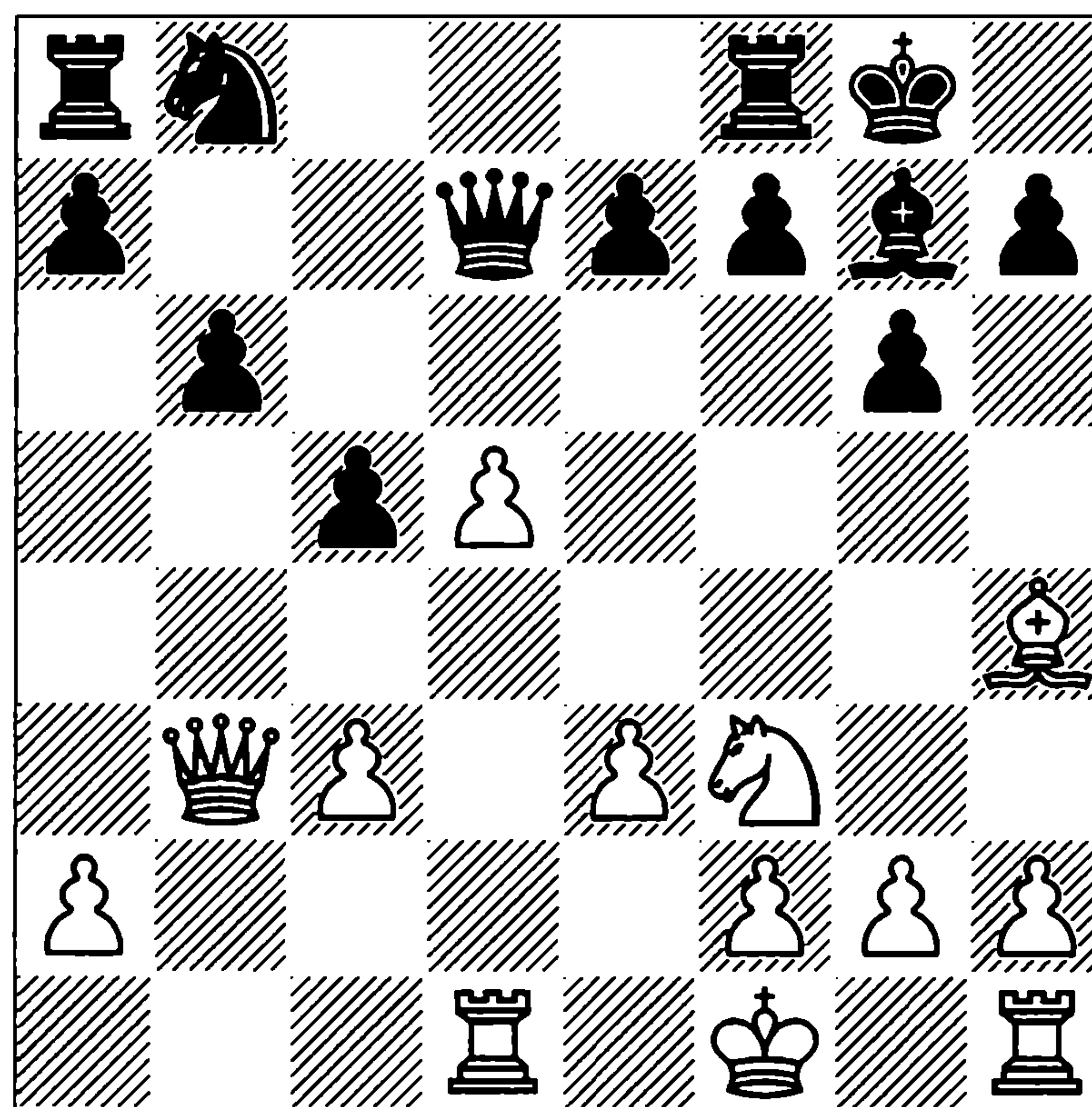
*Budapest 2001*

**1 d4 ♜f6 2 ♜f3 g6 3 c4 ♙g7 4 ♜c3 d5 5 ♙g5 ♜e4 6 ♙h4 ♜xc3 7 bxc3 dxc4 8 ♚a4+ ♚d7 9 ♚xc4 b6 10 ♚b3 ♙a6 11 e3 ♙xf1 12 ♙xf1 c5**

Another possibility is 12...0-0 13 ♙e2 ♜c6.

**13 d5! 0-0 14 ♜d1! (D)**

B



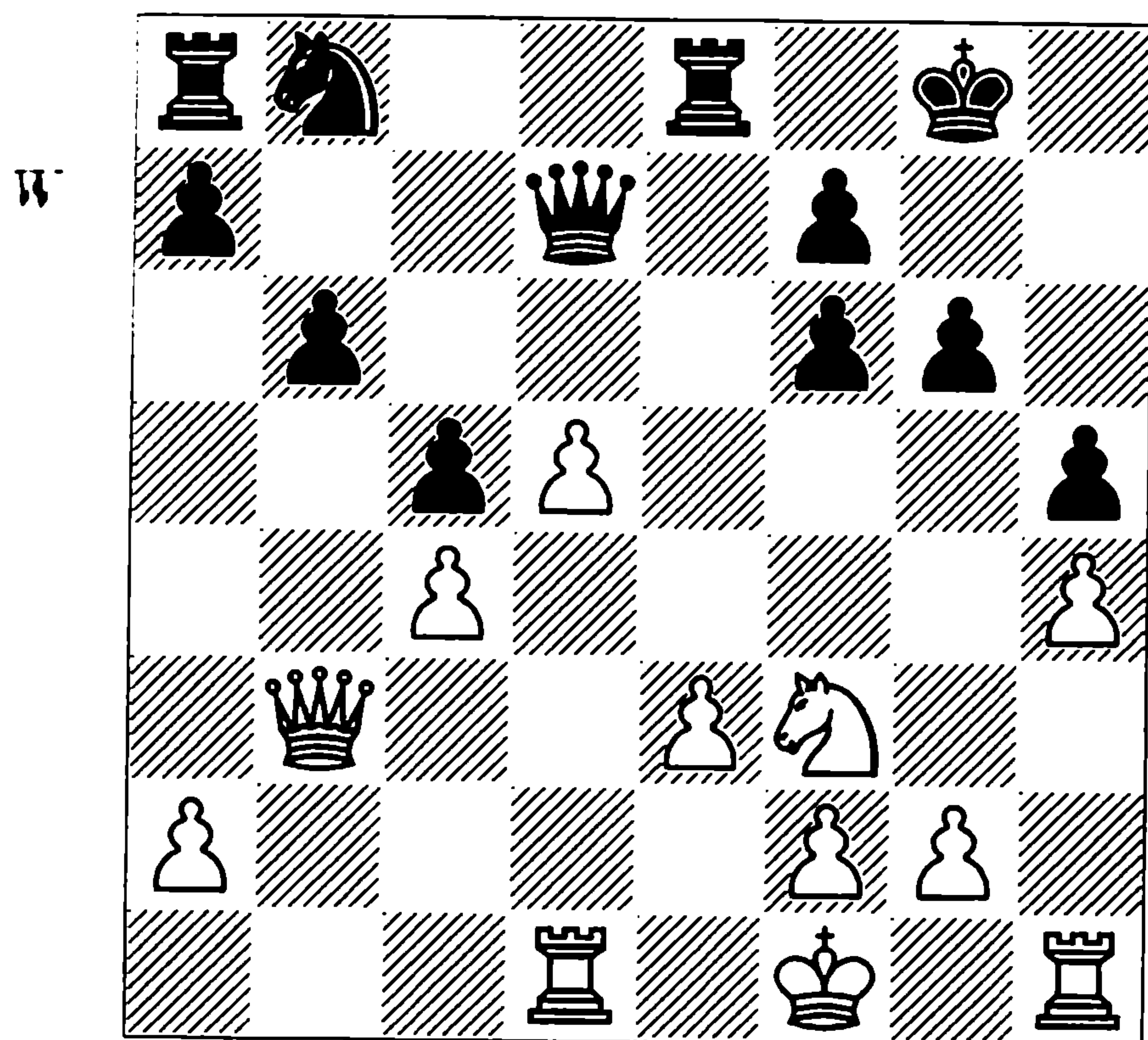
**14...♙f6?**

14...e5 is much better, when 15 dxe6 ♚xe6 16 ♚xe6 fxe6 17 c4! ♜c6 18 ♙e2 gives White only a slight edge, Grivas-Wl.Schmidt, Novi Sad OL 1990. The text-move reduces the pressure on the e7-pawn but hands White a protected passed pawn, while at the same time exchanging minor pieces.

15 ♖xf6 exf6 16 c4!

Now the passed pawn cannot be assaulted. Instead, its advance would have been premature, as White has not completed his development.

16...♖e8 17 h4! h5 (D)



White was threatening to start an attack against the black king by means of the advance h5. Black has prevented this plan, but now his kingside pawn-mass cannot easily advance. Black's main problem in this position is the complete lack of any possibility for counter-play.

18 g3 ♖g4 19 ♔g2 ♘d7 20 a4!

The process of advancing a passed pawn is never a simple matter. White is trying to open a second front on the queenside in order to keep Black's pieces occupied in defensive (and thus generally passive) positions. The combination of queenside initiative and passed pawn will increase White's advantage and lead to victory.

20...♖ab8 21 ♖c2 ♘e5?! (D)

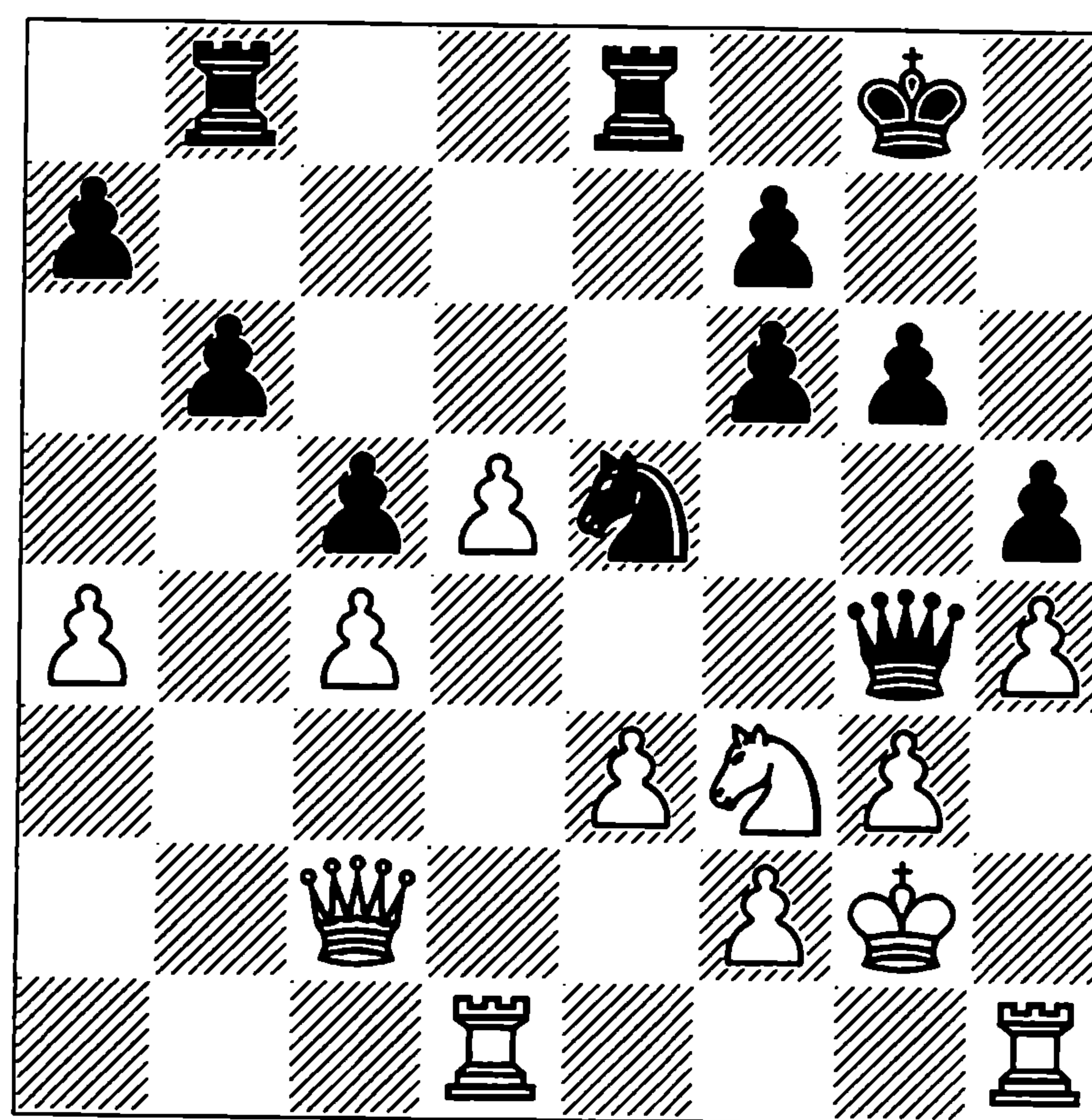
Exchanging the last remaining minor piece cannot possibly be in Black's favour. Lack of a good plan often leads to bad moves. Obviously 21...♖e4 (to exchange major pieces instead) was better, so that the black king could safely come to the centre and contribute to his army's defensive actions.

22 ♘xe5 ♖xe5

After 22...fxe5 23 e4 White totally dominates the position; for example: 23...♖d7 24 ♖hf1 f5 25 f4!.

23 ♖d2 ♖be8 24 ♖d3!

W



Strengthening the e3-square, on which Black may have entertained the idea of a sacrifice to complicate matters. Indeed, 24 ♖b1? ♖xe3! would have disrupted White's plans.

24...♖d7

The rook ending arising after 24...♖e4+ 25 ♖xe4 ♖xe4 26 ♖c1 does not offer Black any hope of survival.

25 a5! ♖e4?!

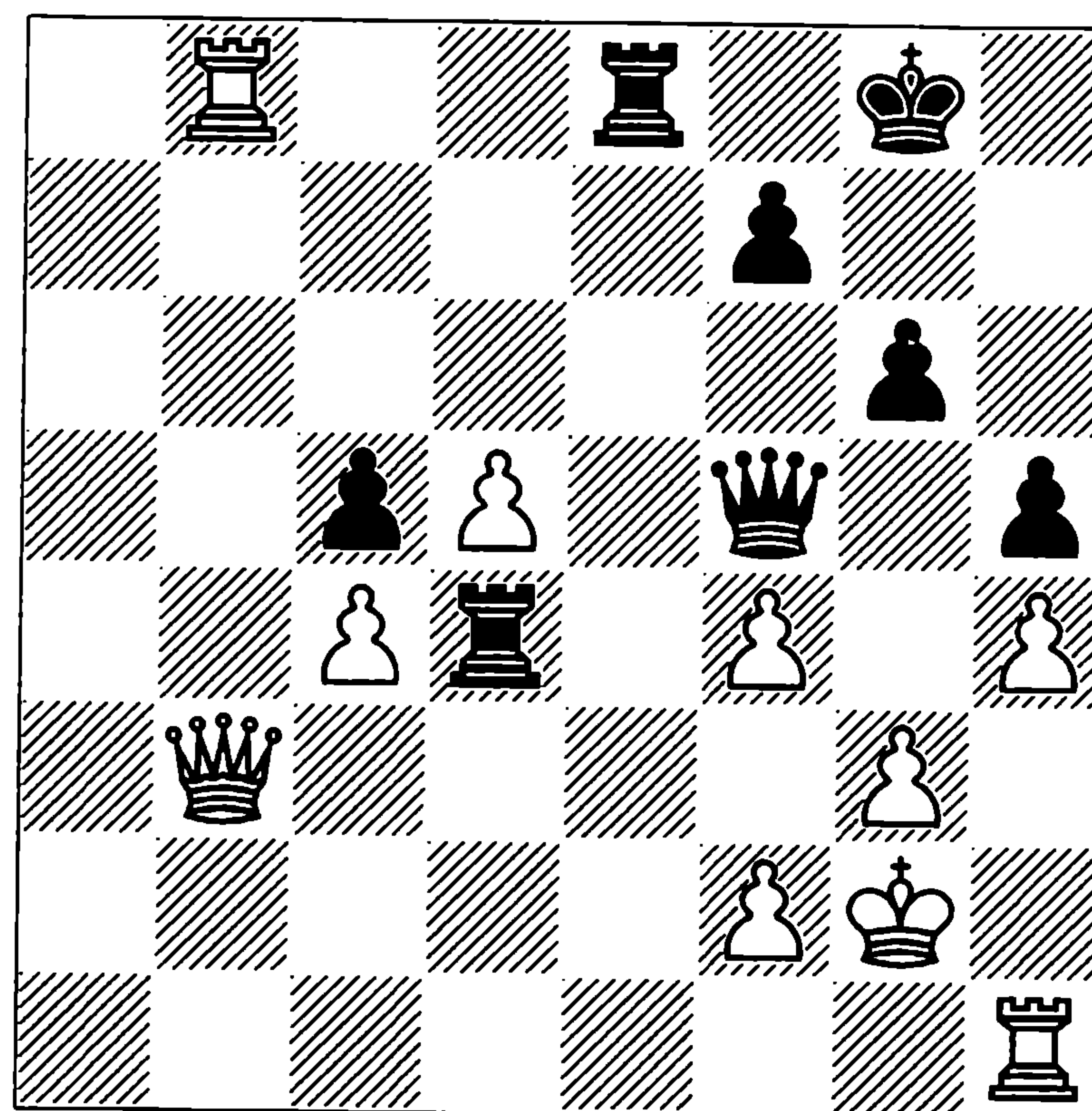
The passive 25...♖d6 offers more chances, although even then White would eventually exploit his significant superiority.

26 axb6 axb6 27 ♖b2! f5

Making an effort for counterplay at any cost, as the b6-pawn was doomed anyway after Black's 25th move (27...♖d6 28 ♖hb1).

28 ♖xb6 f4 29 exf4 ♖d4 30 ♖b3! ♖f5 31 ♖b8! (D)

B



White has a material advantage, so he seeks piece exchanges.

31...♖e4+ 32 ♔h2 ♜xb8 33 ♞xb8+ ♔h7

Or 33...♔g7 34 ♞e5+! ♞xe5 35 fxe5 ♜xc4 36 ♜d1 +-.  
34 ♞c7! ♔g8 35 ♜a1!

At last the h1-rook joins the battle, since its earlier duties (protecting the king) are no longer required.

35...♜d2

35...♜xc4 also loses quickly: 36 ♜a8+ ♔g7 37 ♞d8.

36 ♞xc5 ♜c2 37 d6 ♜xc4 38 ♞e5 ♞f3 39 d7! ♞xf2+ 40 ♔h3 ♔h7 41 d8♞ 1-0

The passed pawn has completed its mission and forces Black's resignation!

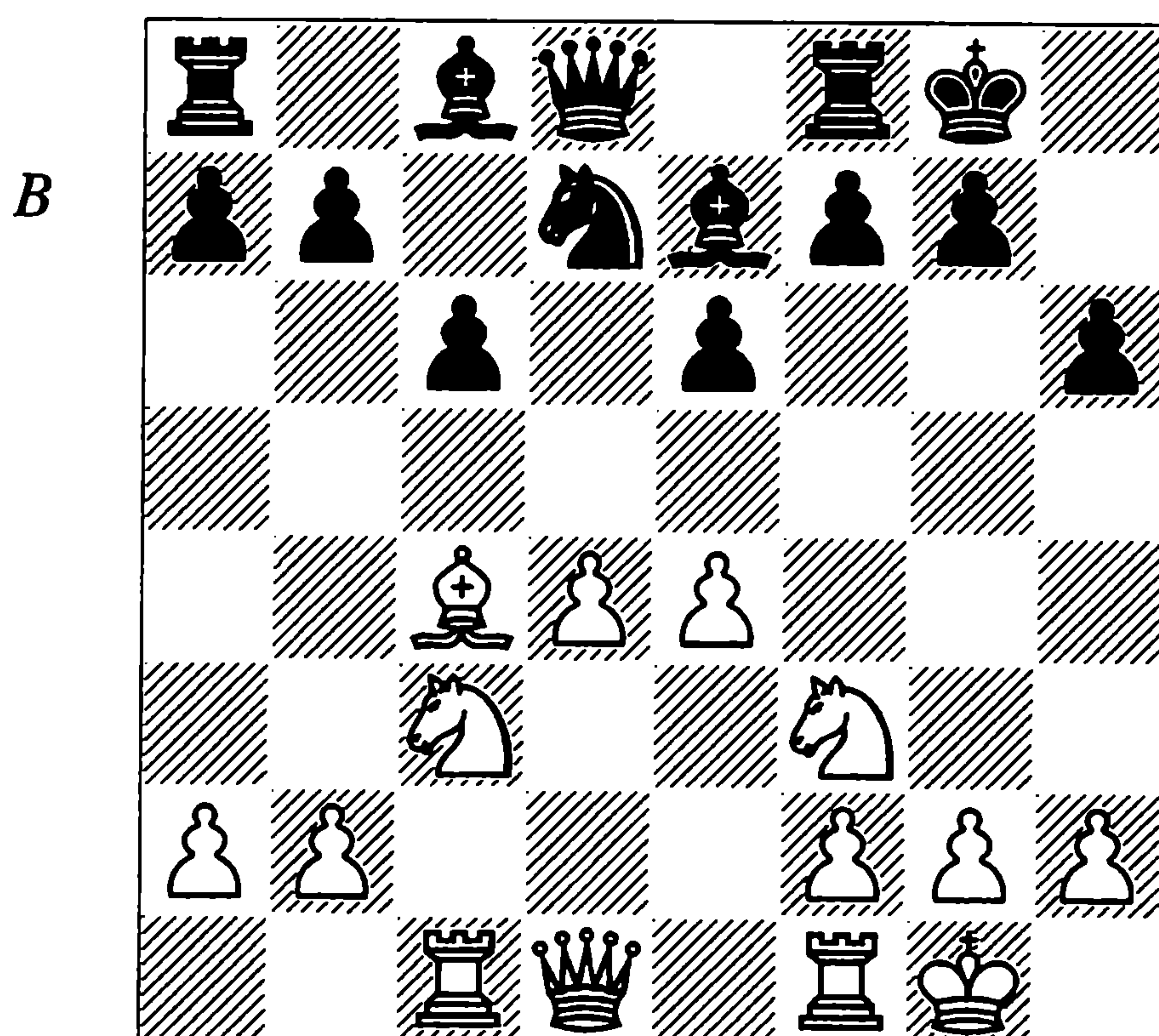
### Grivas – Votruba

Athens 1984

1 d4 e6 2 c4 d5 3 ♘f3 ♘f6 4 ♘c3 c6 5 ♙g5 h6 6 ♙xf6 ♞xf6 7 e3 ♞d8 8 ♙d3

White also obtains a slight advantage after 8 ♞b3 ♘d7 9 ♙d3 ♙e7 10 0-0 0-0 11 ♜ac1, Grivas-Triantafillidis, Iraklion 1983.

8...♙e7 9 0-0 ♘d7 10 e4 dxc4 11 ♙xc4 0-0 12 ♜c1 (D)



12...b5

Better than 12...b6 13 d5! exd5 14 exd5 ♙b7 15 dxc6 ♙xc6 16 ♘d4 ♜c8 (16...♙b7? 17 ♘e6!; 16...♘e5!? 17 ♘xc6 ♘xc6 18 ♙d5 ♜c8 19 ♞a4!) 17 ♙a6 ♜c7 18 ♘xc6 ♜xc6 19 ♘d5 ♜xc1 (19...♜d6? 20 ♜c8! 1-0 Grivas-Ioakimidis, Thessaloniki 1984) 20 ♘xe7+ ♞xe7 21 ♞xc1 with advantage for White.

13 ♙b3 b4 14 ♘a4 ♙a6

14...♙b7!? is interesting, as in Grivas-Kuczynski, Groningen jr Ech 1985/6.

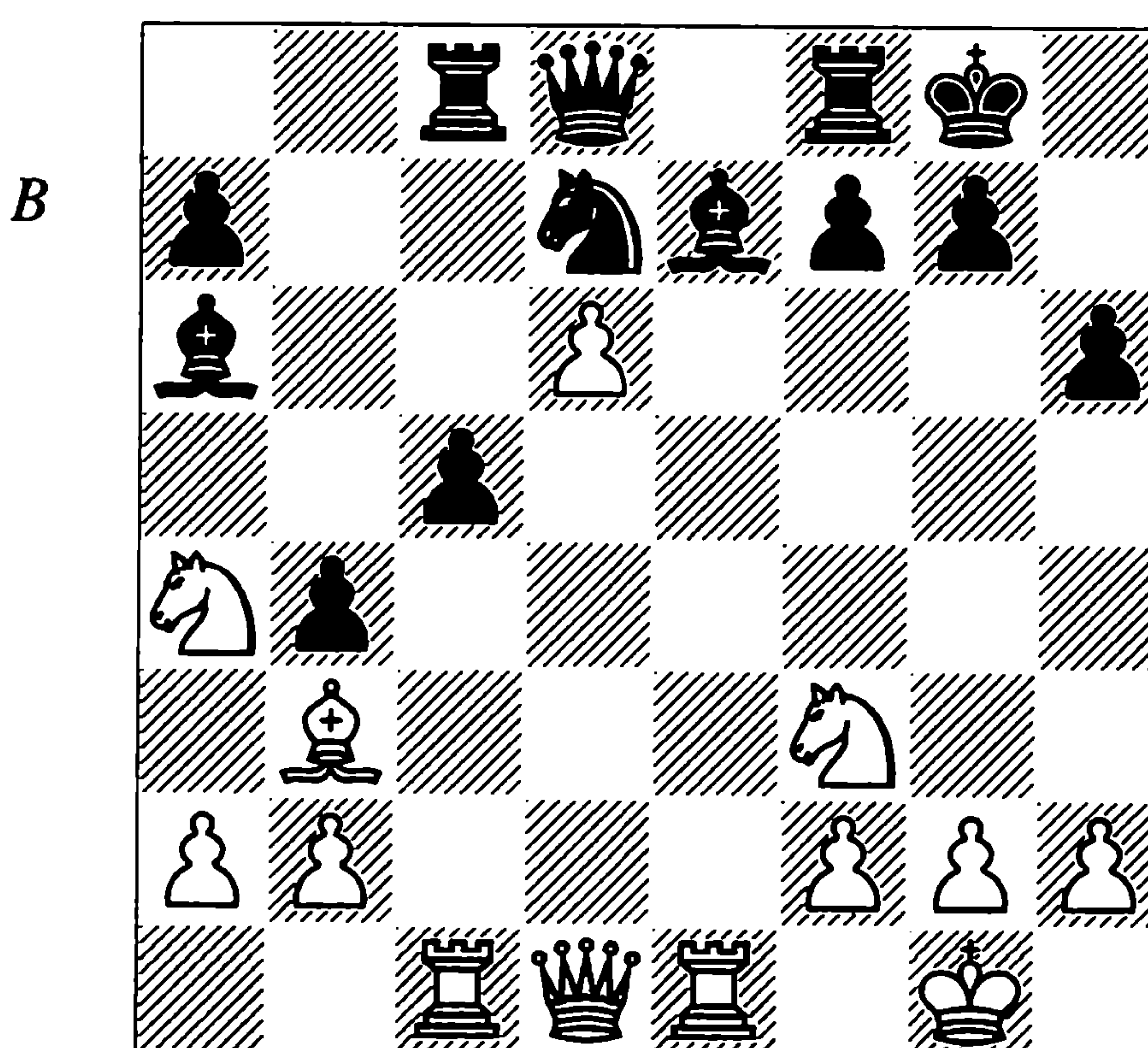
15 ♜e1

15 ♙c4?! ♙b7 is inferior.

15...♜c8 16 d5! exd5 17 exd5 c5?!

Black hands White the positional advantage of a passed pawn. Instead he should have preferred 17...cxd5 18 ♜xc8 ♙xc8 19 ♞xd5 with a slight advantage for White, and then find something other than 19...♘f6?! 20 ♞xd8 ♙xd8 21 ♘e5 ±.

18 d6! (D)



Passed pawns must be pushed!

18...♙f6 19 ♞d5! ♘b6 20 ♘xb6 axb6 21 ♘e5!

As usual, minor-piece exchanges benefit the side with the passed pawn, i.e. White. Consequently White is using tactical threats towards that goal. It should be noted that White could also have chosen the 'tactical shot' 21 d7? ♜c7 22 ♞xf7+ ♜xf7 23 ♜e8+ ♔h7 24 ♜xd8 ♙xd8 25 ♙xf7 ♜xd7 and ended up in a very bad position, having lost his greatest strength (the passed pawn!) in the process.

21...♙xe5 22 ♜xe5 c4!

Black commences a tactical sequence to un-double his queenside pawns. However, this operation involves further exchanges, something that cannot possibly harm White.

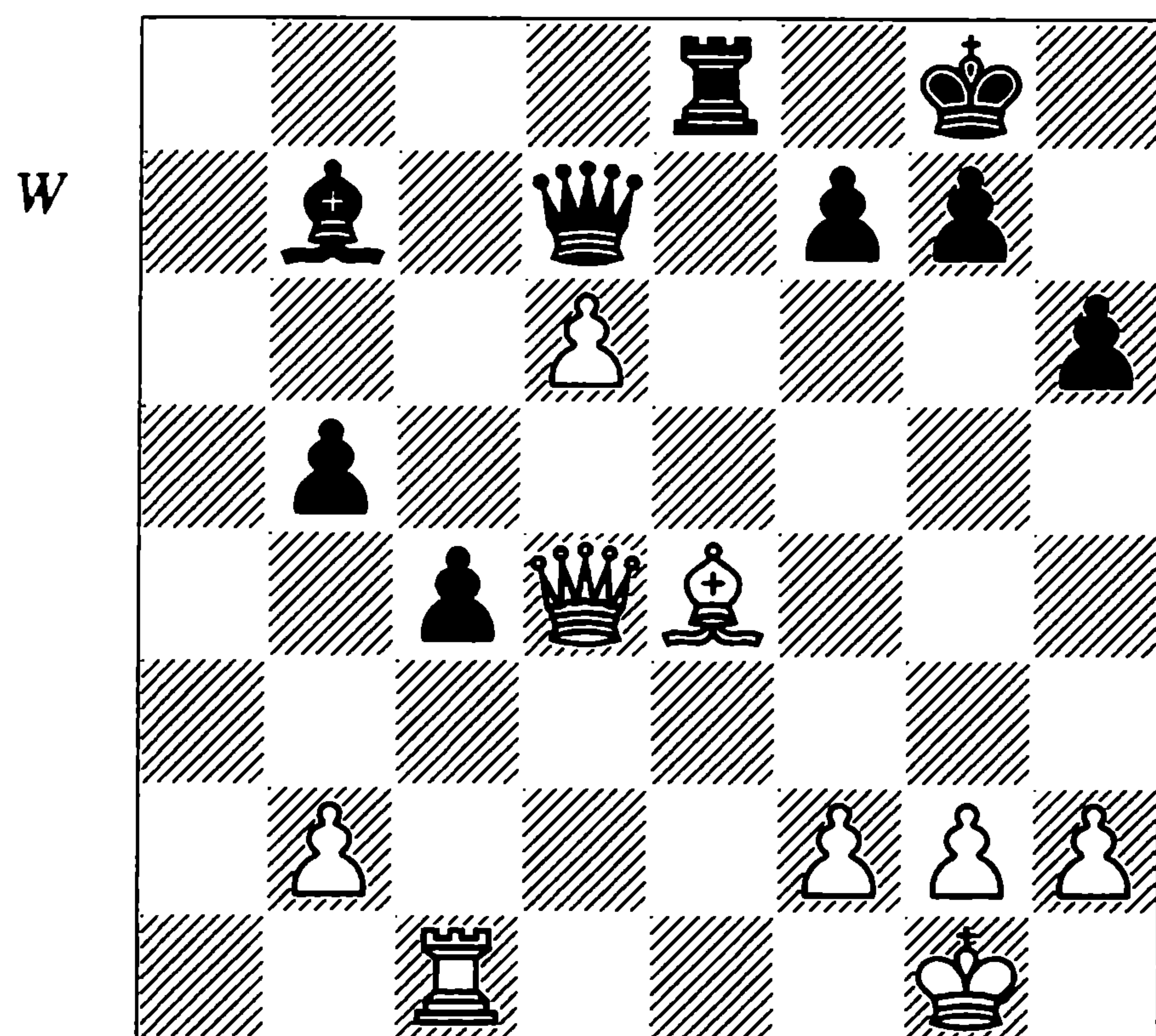
23 ♙c2 b3! 24 ♙b1 bxa2 25 ♙xa2 ♜c5 26 ♞d4 ♜xe5

Exchanging the rooks is much better than 26...♞f6? 27 f4!.

27 ♞xe5 ♜e8 28 ♞d4 b5 29 ♙b1 ♞d7

The pawn must be blockaded, but the queen is not the best piece for the job. Negligent blockading would be disastrous: 29...♙b7?! 30 d7! (30 ♙f5? ♚g5!) 30...♞e7 31 ♙f5! g6 32 ♙h3 f5 33 ♞d1 ♖h7 34 ♚d6, etc.

**30 ♙e4 ♙b7?! (D)**



Why exchange minor pieces?

**31 f3?!**

White had a much better option at this point, namely 31 ♙xb7 ♚xb7 32 d7 ♞d8 33 ♞d1 ♚c7 (33...b4?! 34 ♚e5!) 34 ♚e4! with a significant advantage. Note that the black king cannot approach the pawn: 34...♖f8 35 ♚h7! ♞xd7? 36 ♞e1! f6 37 ♚h8+ ♖f7 38 ♚e8#.

**31...♙xe4 32 fxe4 ♚e6?!**

In time-pressure Black could not bring himself to play the necessary 32...f6!, weakening his king but preventing White from connecting his central pawns.

**33 ♞d1 ♞d8 34 e5!**

White is now clearly better. The passed d6-pawn cuts Black's position in two and prevents any possible counterplay.

**34...♖h7 35 ♚b6! ♚d7 36 h3**

Taking the g4-square away from the black queen and threatening ♞d5 with material gain. Black decides to throw caution to the wind as further passive defence would be hopeless.

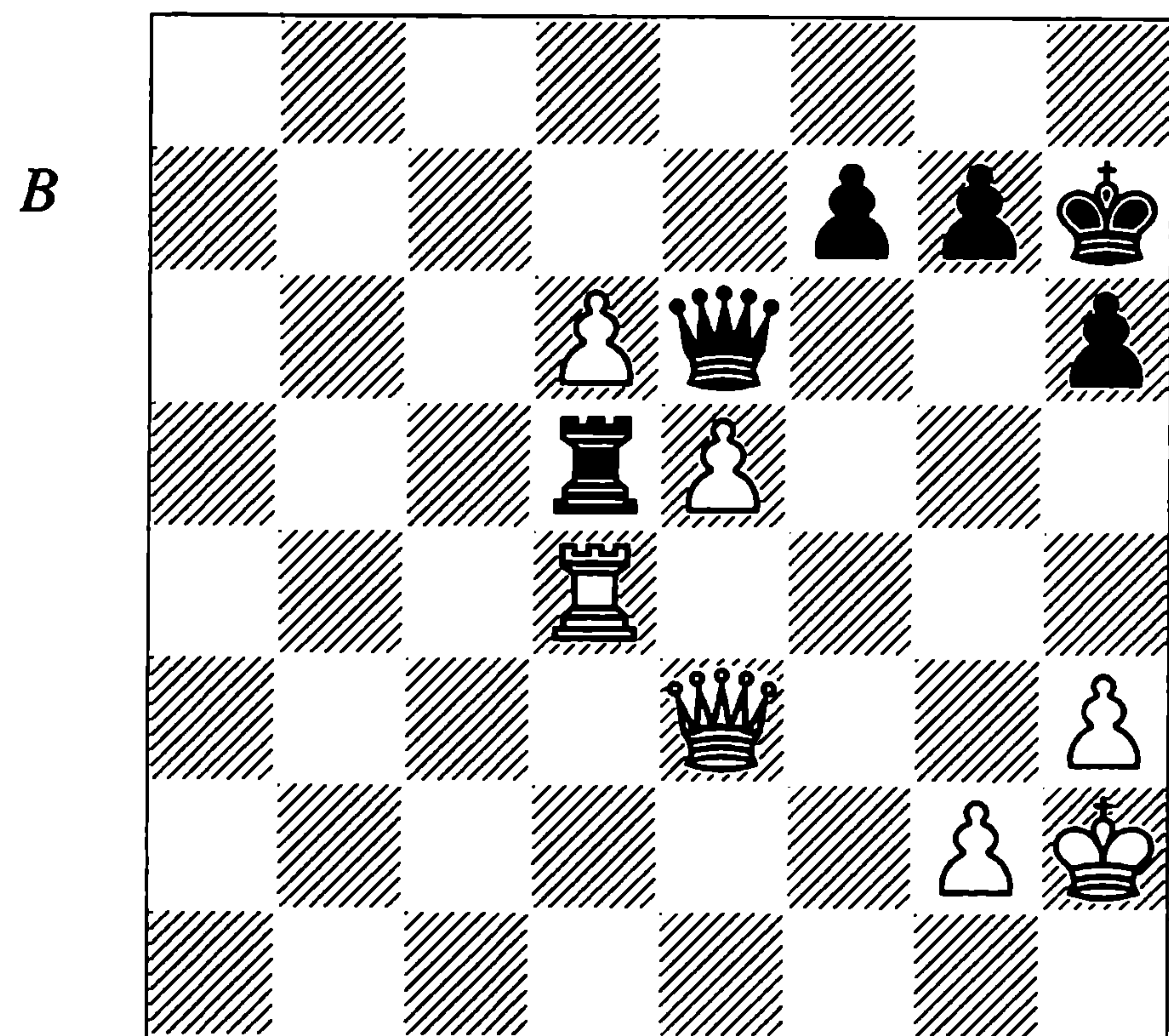
**36...♞c8! 37 ♞d5 c3 38 bxc3 ♞xc3 39 ♞xb5?!**

Time-pressure prompted this inaccuracy. White would win faster with 39 ♚xb5! ♚a7+ (39...♞c1+ 40 ♖h2 ♚f5 41 ♚d3! or 39...♚f5 40 ♚f1!) 40 ♖h2 ♚f2 41 ♞d1!.

**39...♞c1+ 40 ♖h2 ♚f5 41 ♚e3! ♞d1!**

41...♚f1 42 ♞b7! ♚h1+ 43 ♖g3 would not have saved Black.

**42 ♞b4 ♞d5 43 ♞e4 ♚e6 44 ♞d4! (D)**



White wraps up the game with a simple but pretty tactic.

**44...♞xe5?!**

Exchanging the rooks is essential, although the queen ending is clearly hopeless for Black, as the white king can assist the promotion of the d-pawn. The other option was 44...♖g8 45 ♚e4! ♞xe5 46 ♚a8+ ♖h7 47 d7 +-.

**45 ♚d3+ g6 46 d7 ♞e3 47 ♚xe3! 1-0**

Black resigned due to 47...♚xe3 48 ♞d1! (and certainly not 48 d8♚?? ♚e5+ with perpetual check!).

## Grivas – Lalev

Asenovgrad 1985

**1 d4 ♖f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♖f3 ♙b4+ 4 ♙d2 c5 5 ♙xb4 cxb4 6 e3 0-0 7 ♙e2 d6 8 0-0 ♞e8?!**

Theory considers 8...b6 and 8...♖c6 as better moves.

**9 a3 bxa3 10 ♞xa3**

White is also slightly better after 10 b4!? a5! 11 ♞xa3 ♖c6 12 bxa5.

**10...♖c6 11 ♖c3 e5 (D)**

**12 ♖b5!**

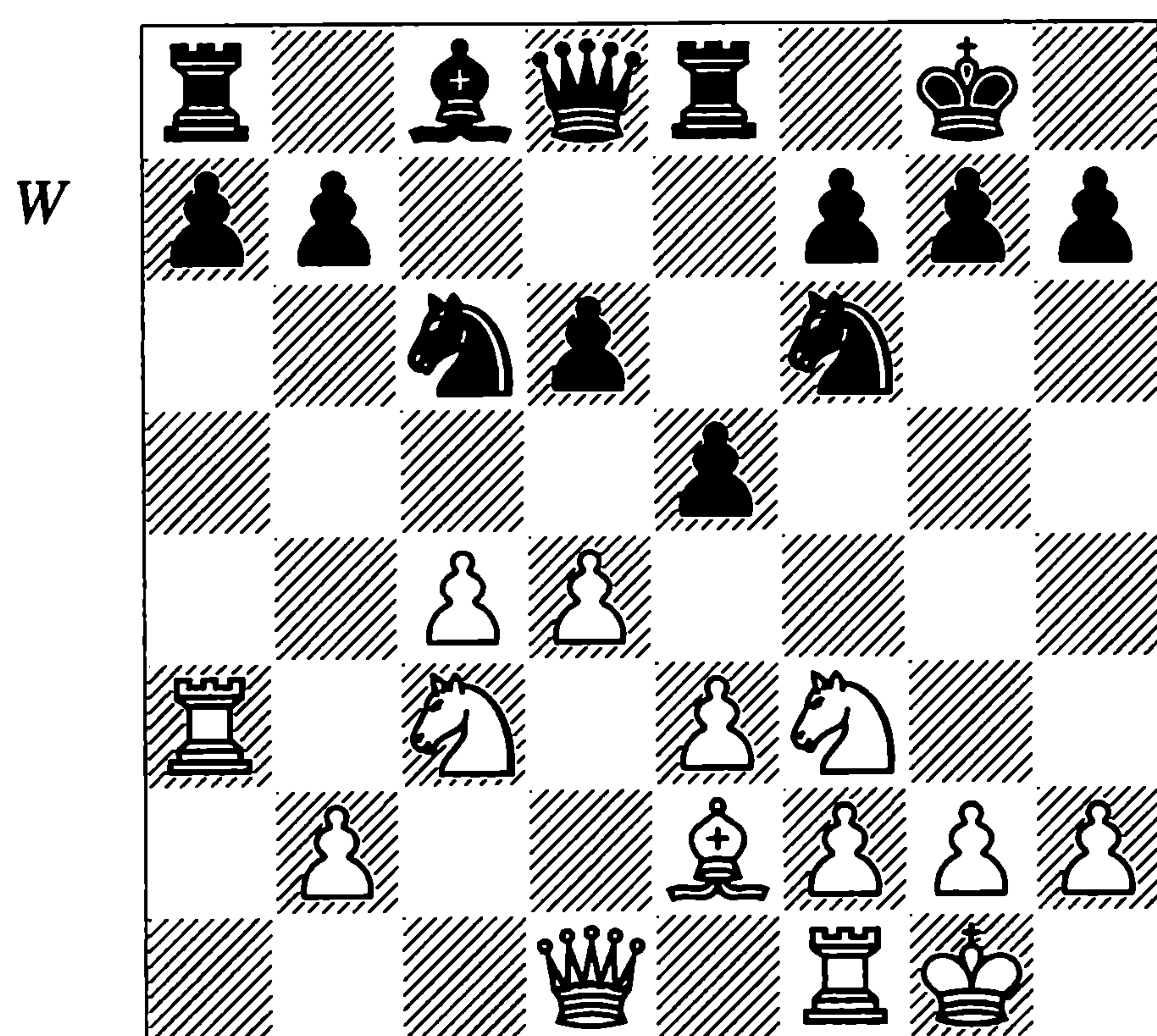
Exerting pressure on a7 and d6.

**12...♙g4**

12...a6 13 dxe5 dxe5 14 ♖d6 ♞e7 15 c5! ±.

**13 h3 ♙h5?**

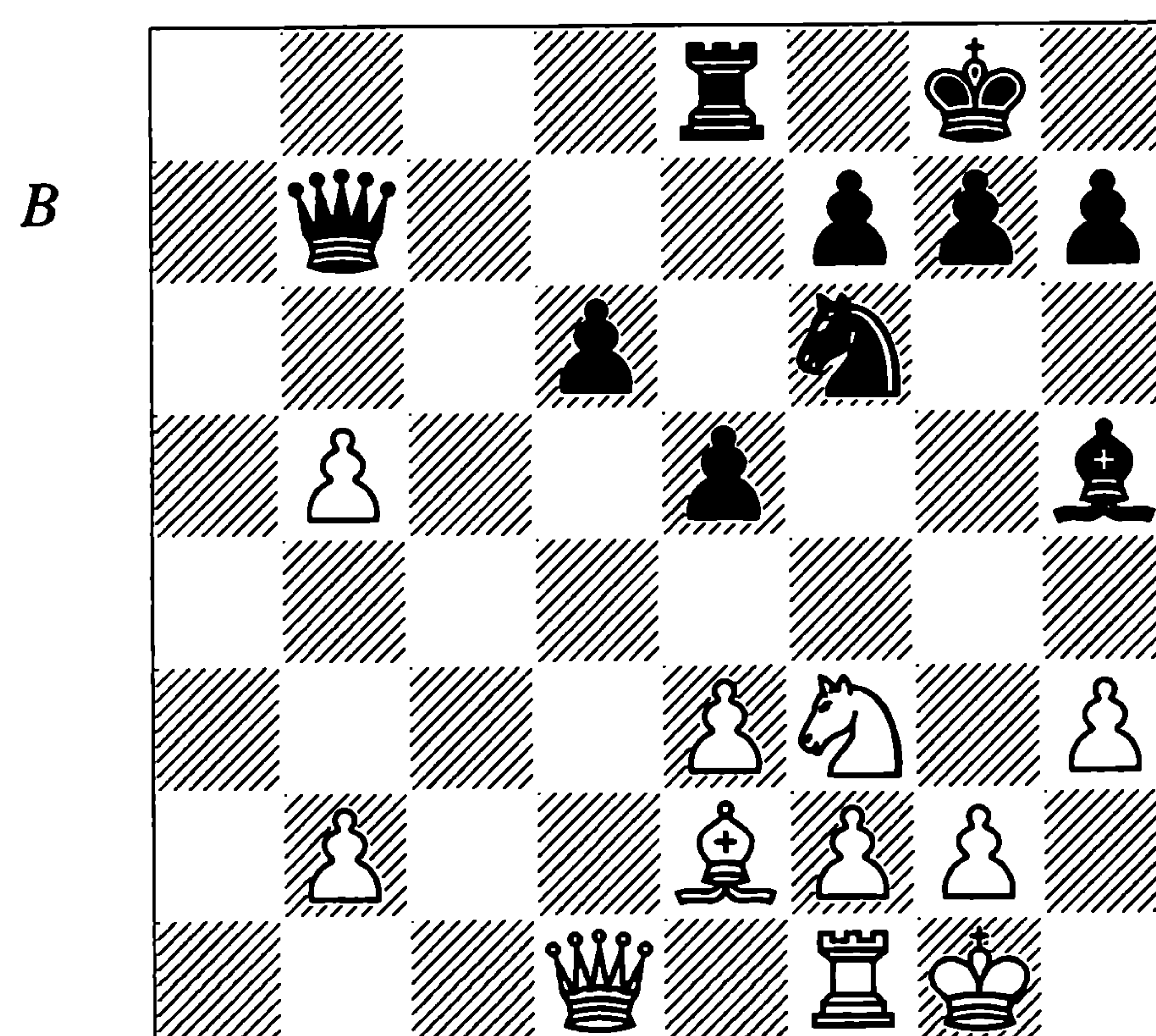
Better is 13...♙xf3 14 ♙xf3 e4 15 ♙e2 ±.



**14 d5! a6! 15 dxc6 axb5 16 ♖xa8?!**

16 cxb7?! ♜xa3 17 bxa3 bxc4 is unclear, but White can obtain a large advantage with 16 cxb5! ♜xa3 17 bxa3 bxc6 18 bxc6.

**16...♜xa8 17 cxb7 ♜xb7 18 cxb5 (D)**



White has obtained a passed pawn on the queenside (the b2-pawn is of no great value) and wishes to make use of it. Black is obliged to create counterplay in the centre and on the kingside, as White is likely to transfer his forces from there to the queenside in order to assist the advance of the passed pawn.

**18...d5! 19 ♜a4 d4**

Black's problems would only increase after 19...♜a8 20 ♜c2! ♜c8 21 ♜f5 e4 22 ♘d4 ♙xe2 23 ♘xe2 ♜c2 24 ♘d4 ♜xb2 25 ♜c1!.

**20 ♜a6! ♜e7**

20...♜xa6? 21 bxa6 is a very difficult ending for Black. If 21...d3?, then 22 ♙xd3 e4 23 ♙b5!. But now the passed pawn is free to advance.

**21 b6 dxe3!**

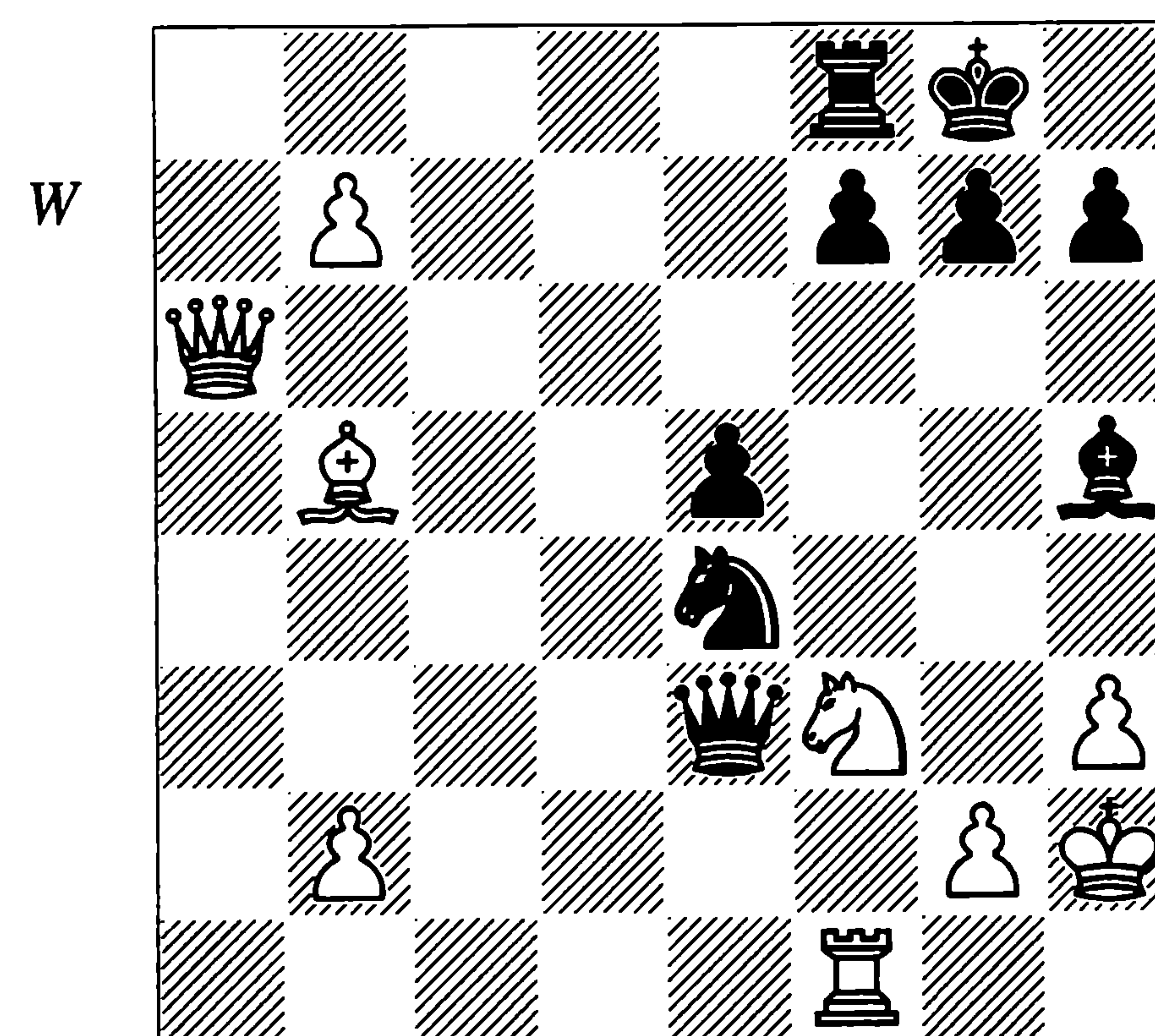
Creating weaknesses around the white king and hoping somehow to drum up counterplay. Meanwhile, 21...d3? was still impossible: 22 ♙xd3 e4 23 ♙b5!.

**22 fxe3 ♜c5 23 ♙b5! ♜f8!**

23...♜xe3+? 24 ♔h2 ♜f8 25 ♙c6! leads to a quick loss for Black, as his knight does not have access to e4.

**24 b7 ♜xe3+ 25 ♔h2 ♘e4? (D)**

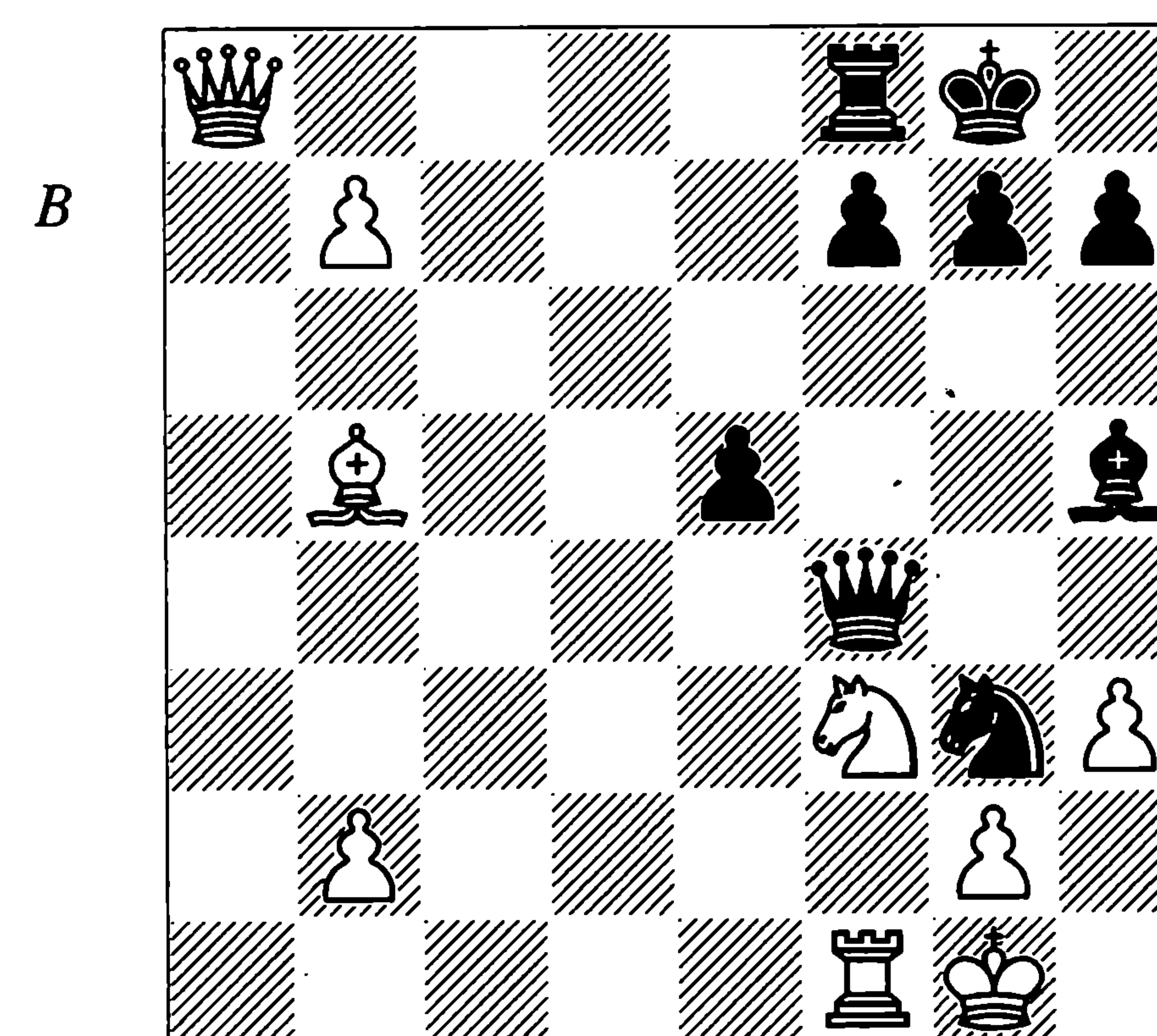
25...♜f4+! would have kept the game within the boundaries of a draw.



**26 ♜a8?**

Black's pressure had driven White into time-trouble, which in turn caused this serious error. White could have won with 26 ♜a3! ♜b6 27 ♙c6! ♙xf3 (27...♘c5 28 ♘xe5 ♘xb7 29 ♜xf8+!) 28 ♜xf3 ♘c5 29 ♙d5!.

**26...♜f4+ 27 ♔g1 ♜e3+ 28 ♔h2 ♜f4+ 29 ♔h1 ♘g3+ 30 ♔g1 (D)**



**30...e4!**

Instead, Black loses after 30...♙e3+? 31 ♜f2 ♙b6 32 ♜xe5! ♙xb5 33 ♙xf8+ ♔xf8 34 b8♙+.

**31 ♙e8 ♜e2+! 32 ♔h1**

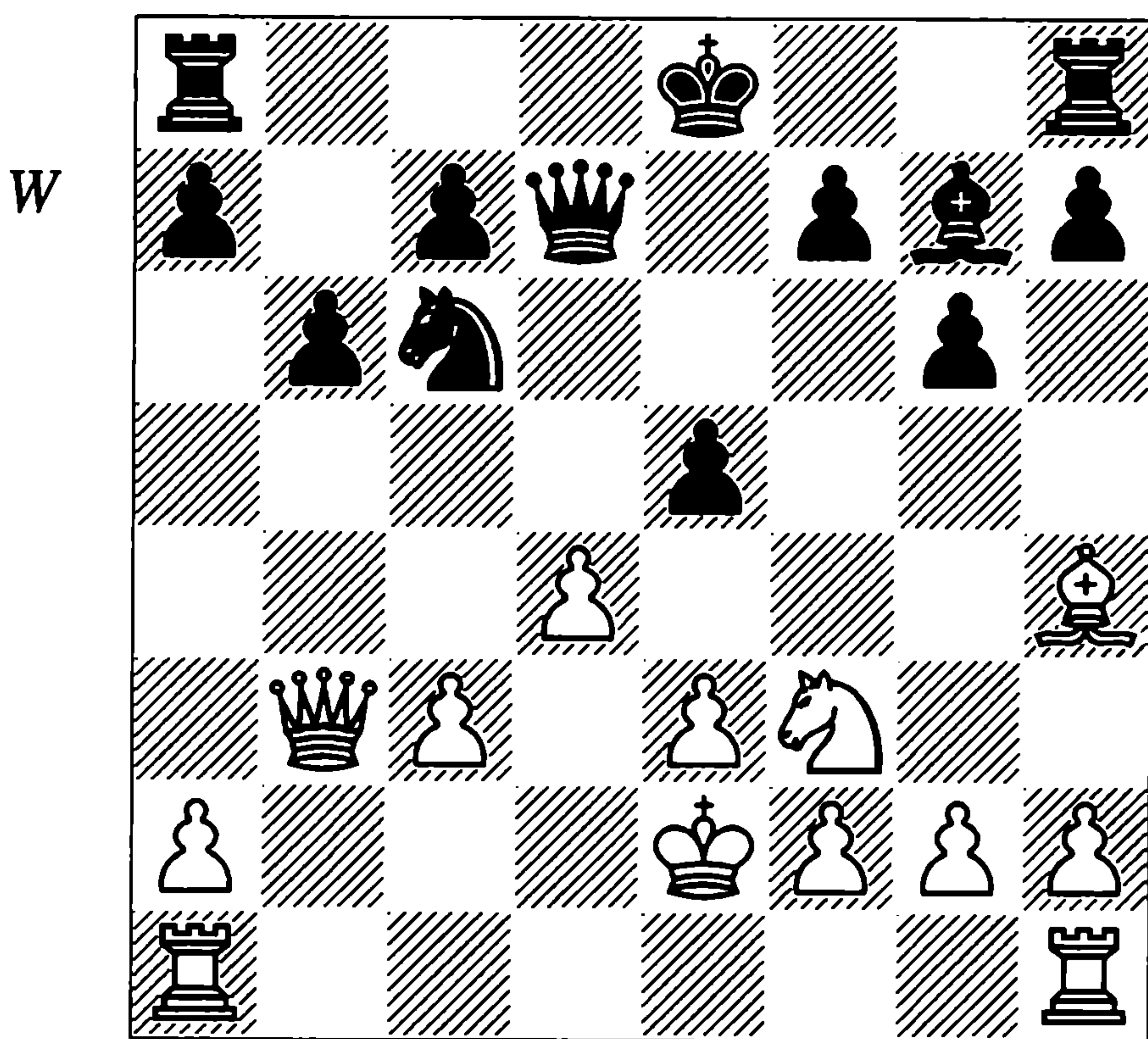
White would even lose after the overambitious 32 ♔f2? ♙g3+ 33 ♔e3 (33 ♔xe2 exf3+ 34 gxf3 ♙e5+!) 33...exf3 34 b8♙ fxg2+ 35 ♙xg3 gxf1♜+!!.

**32...♜g3+ 33 ♔g1 ♜e2+ 34 ♔h1 ♜g3+ 35 ♔g1 1/2-1/2**

### Grivas – Vakhidov

*Khania 2000*

**1 d4 ♜f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♜c3 d5 4 ♜f3 ♙g7 5 ♙g5 ♜e4 6 ♙h4 ♜xc3 7 bxc3 dxc4 8 ♙a4+ ♙d7 9 ♙xc4 b6 10 ♙b3 ♙a6 11 e3 ♙xf1 12 ♔xf1 ♜c6 13 ♔e2 e5 (D)**



**14 ♙g3**

A new move. White seeks to stabilize the centre. If Black now proceeds with 14...exd4?! 15 cxd4 he will face serious problems down the semi-open c-file.

**14...e4 15 ♜d2 ♜a5 16 ♙b2 f5 17 a4 0-0 18 h4!**

Discouraging any ideas of a kingside initiative Black might have had.

**18...♜ac8 19 ♙a2+! ♙f7**

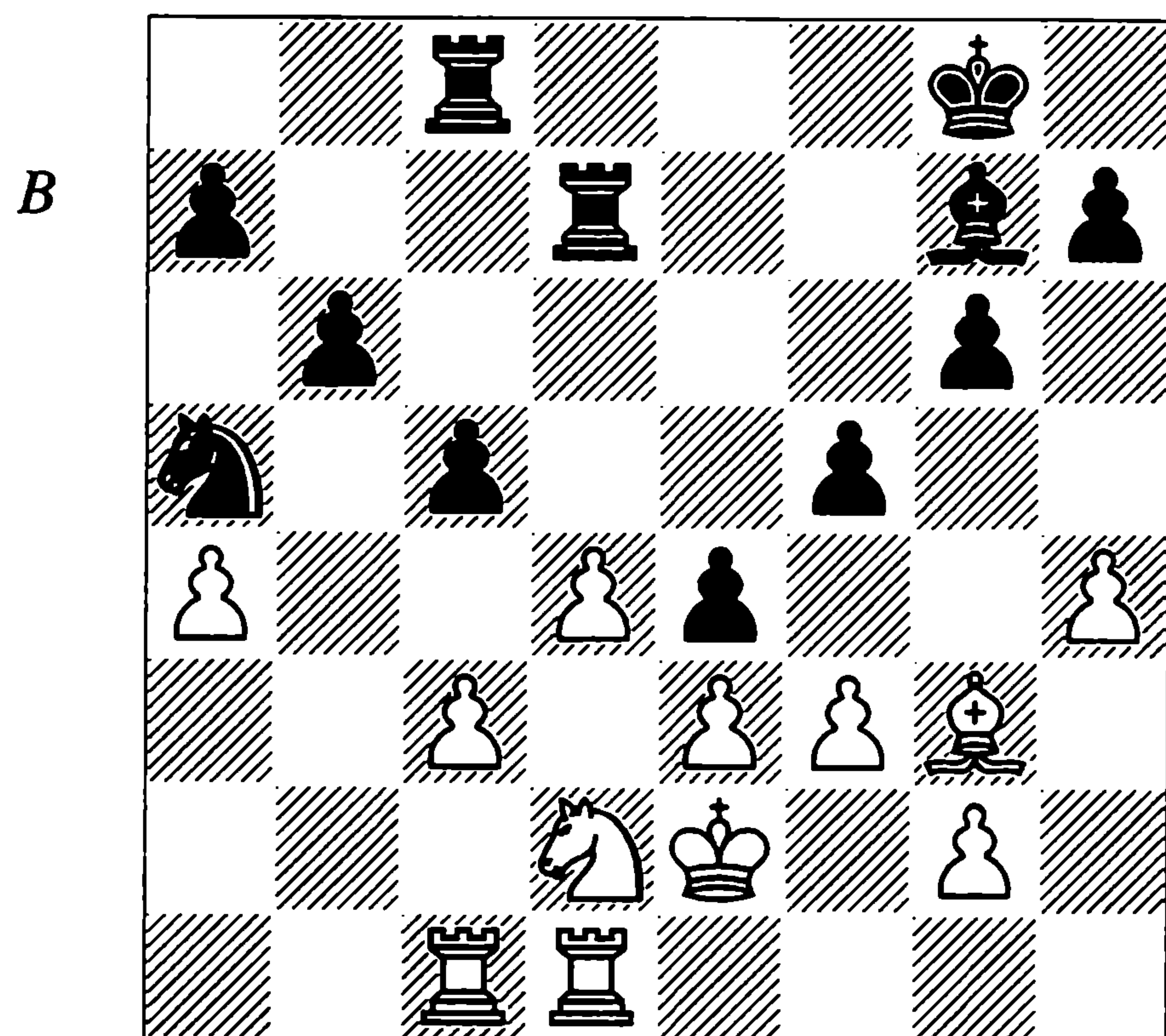
Black is forced to exchange the queens, as after 19...♔h8 20 ♜c4! ♜xc4 21 ♙xc4 (and if 21...c5?! then 22 d5!) White is in full control of the centre and the position in general. He would then be free to develop his queenside play. On

the other hand, the queen exchange allows the white king to reside safely in the centre.

**20 ♙xf7+ ♜xf7 21 ♜ac1 c5**

Despite the fact that this move allows White a passed pawn in the centre, it cannot be blamed, as no other way for Black to develop play is apparent. Had Black continued passively instead, White would have prepared the advance c4-c5 with a strong initiative on the queenside.

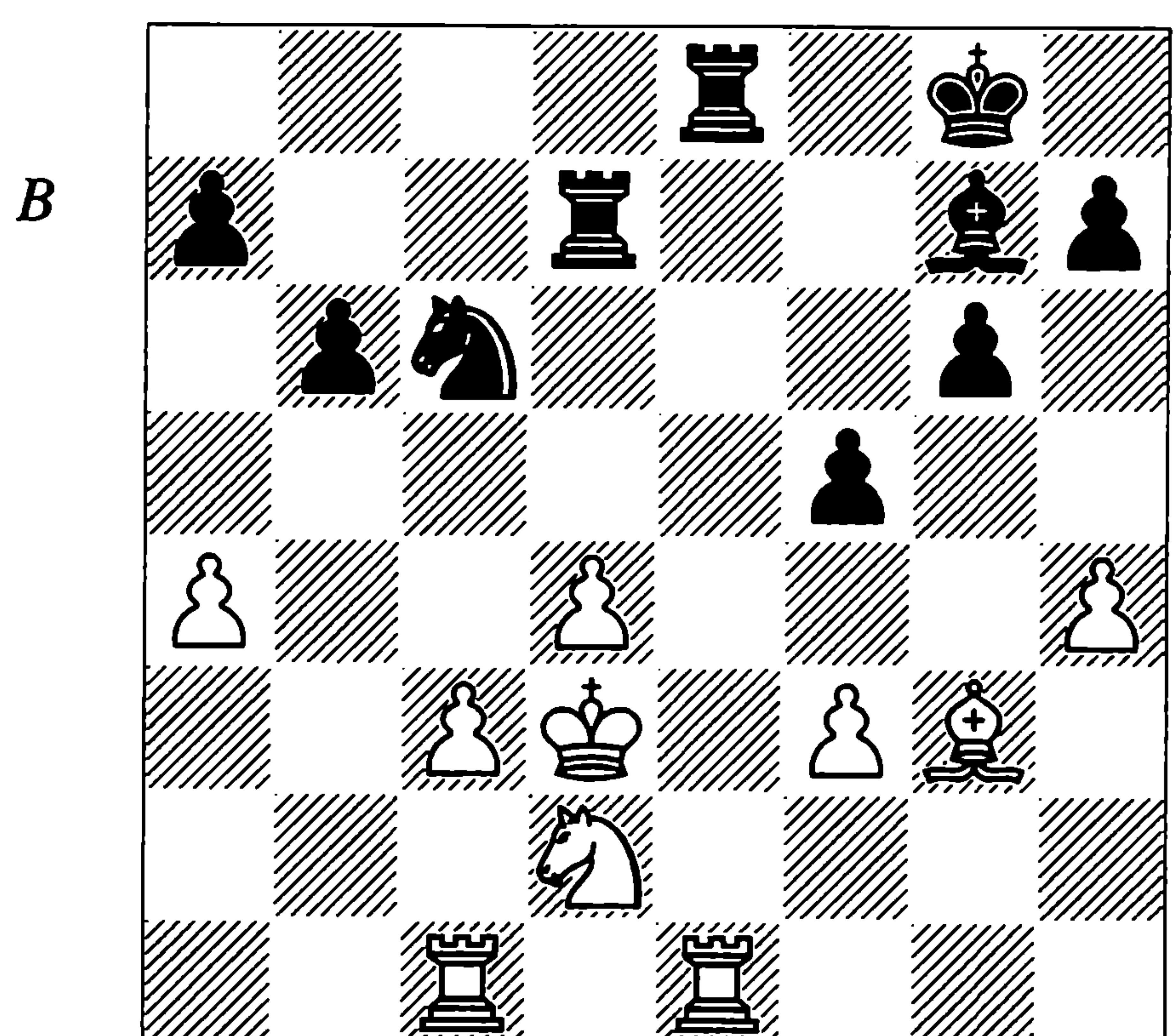
**22 ♜hd1 ♜d7 23 f3! (D)**



White strengthens his centre further and increases the significance of his centralized king.

**23...exf3+ 24 gxf3 ♜e8 25 ♔d3 ♜c6 26 ♜e1 cxd4 27 exd4 (D)**

27 cxd4?! gives Black a golden opportunity to complicate matters by 27...♜xd4!! 28 exd4 ♜xd4+ 29 ♔c2 ♜c8+ 30 ♔d1 ♜cd8 31 ♜c2 ♜xa4.



**27...♜c8 28 ♜b3 ♜e7 29 ♙e5**

As before, tactical reasons forced White to reject 29 c4? ♖c6 30 d5 ♖b4+ 31 ♔d2 ♖a2! with equality. Thus, White decides to reduce the pressure on the d4-pawn by exchanging bishops.

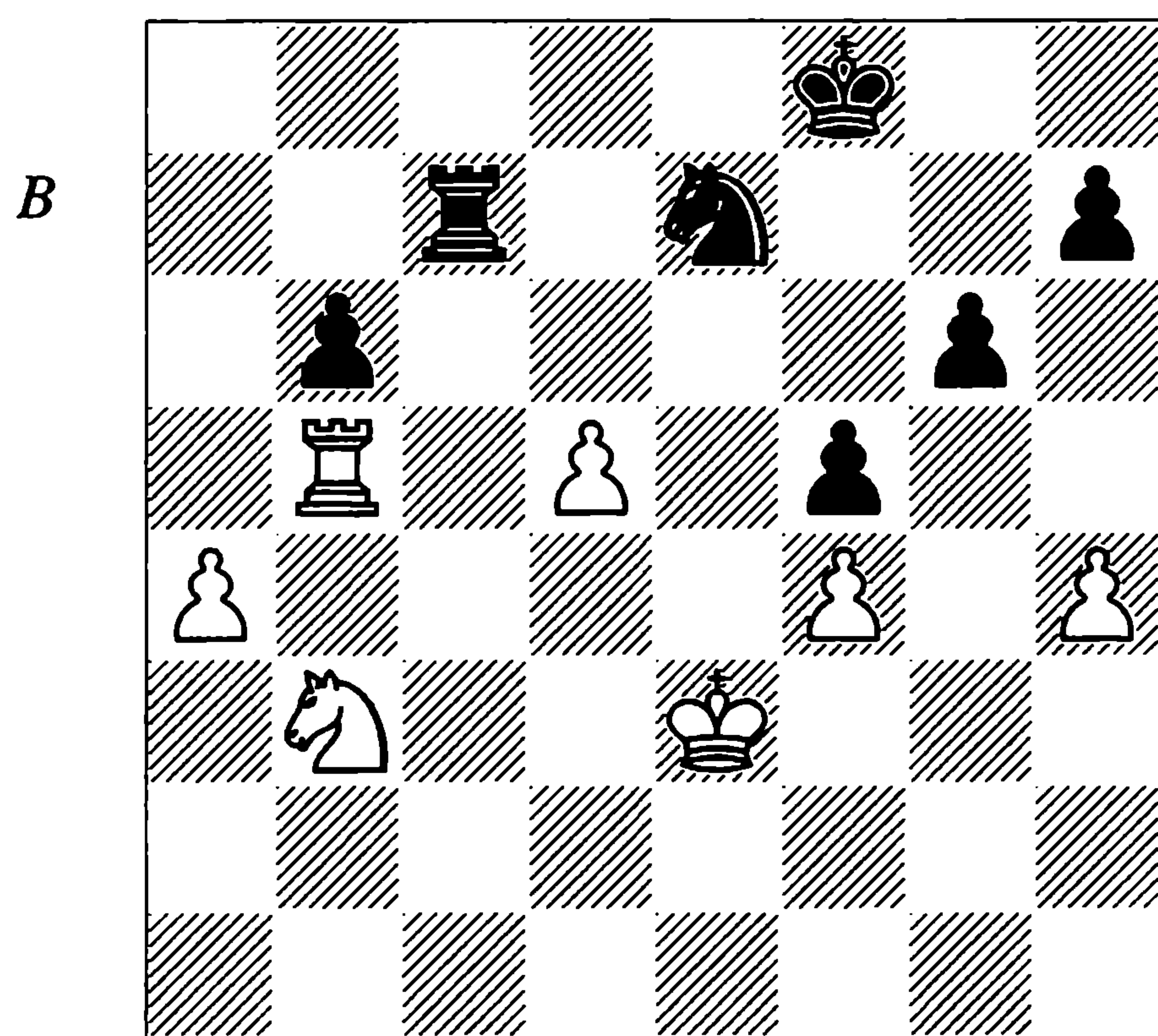
**29...♗xe5 30 ♖xe5 ♖d5 31 c4! ♖b4+ 32 ♔e3 ♖c6 33 ♖e6 ♖d8 34 ♖e5 ♖c6 35 ♖e6 ♔f8**

White has gained a lot of time and would meet 35...♖d8 36 ♖e5 ♖c6 with 37 f4! ♖xe5 38 fxe5, when his impressive mass of central passed pawns would prove decisive.

**36 f4 ♖dc7 37 c5**

Forced because Black was threatening to play 37...♖d8.

**37...♖d8 38 ♖e5 ♖c6 39 ♖e6 ♖d8 40 ♖e5 ♖c6 41 cxb6 axb6 42 ♖b5 ♖e7 43 ♖xc7 ♖xc7 44 d5! (D)**



The passed d-pawn has finally succeeded in advancing!

**44...♖a7 45 a5! bxa5 46 ♖xa5**

Material remains equal but White is better. The passed d-pawn and the active placement of his pieces (especially the king) are sufficient for victory.

**46...♖c8 47 ♖c4 ♖e7+ 48 ♔d3 ♖e8 49 ♖b7 ♖e7 50 ♔d4**

White's position is superb and victory is near. Black decides to sacrifice his knight, hoping to eliminate White's last pawn and reach a drawn ending.

**50...♖xd5 51 ♔xd5 ♖e4 52 ♖e5 ♖xf4 53 ♖xh7 ♔g8 54 ♖h6 ♔g7 55 ♖xg6+ ♔h7 56 h5 ♖h4 57 ♖g5 ♔h6 58 ♖f7+ ♔h7 59 ♖xf5**

The game has been decided. Black prolongs the game, hoping for a tragic mistake by White in the final time-scramble.

**59...♖a4 60 ♔e6 ♖a6+ 61 ♔e7 ♖b6 62 ♖e5 ♔h6 63 ♖g4+ ♔g7 64 ♖g5+ ♔h8 65 ♔f7 ♖b7+ 66 ♔g6 ♖b6+ 67 ♖f6 ♖b5 68 ♖g4 ♖b6+ 69 ♔f5 ♔h7 70 ♖f6+ 1-0**

### Koustas – Grivas

Athens 1982

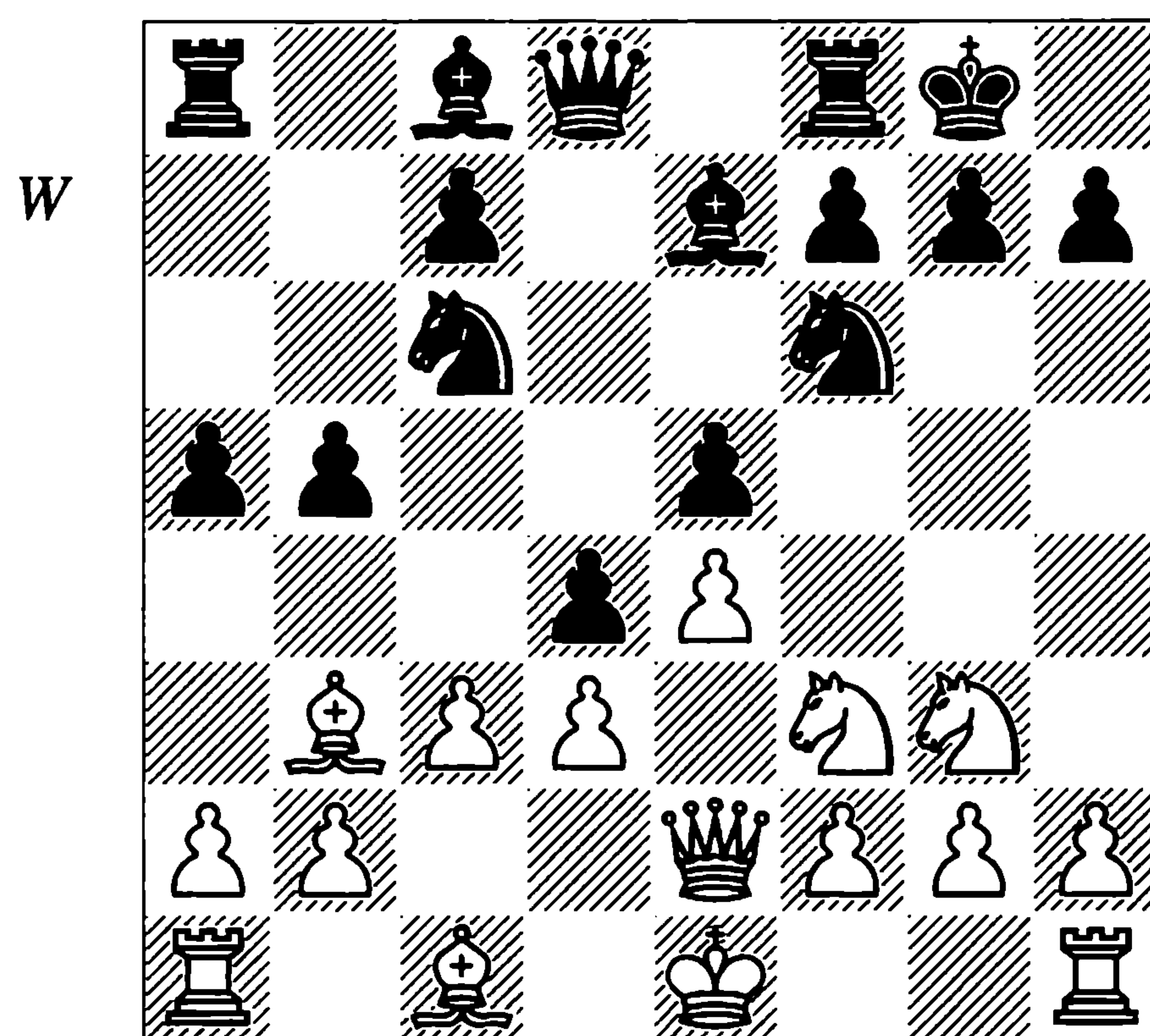
**1 e4 e5 2 ♖f3 ♖c6 3 ♖b5 a6 4 ♖a4 ♖f6 5 d3 d6 6 c3 ♖e7 7 ♖bd2 0-0 8 ♖f1 b5 9 ♖b3**

A better option is 9 ♖c2 d5!? 10 ♖g3 ♖e6 11 0-0 ♖d7!? with unclear play, Barbulescu-Grivas, Sofia 1982.

**9...d5 10 ♖e2**

White had a couple of interesting alternatives: 10 exd5 and 10 ♖g3!?

**10...d4! 11 ♖g3 a5! (D)**



Black assumes the initiative on the queen-side, threatening ...a4-a3.

**12 a3 ♖e6 13 ♖xe6 fxe6 14 a4?!**

A waste of time. White should have preferred 14 0-0 a4, with just a slight advantage for Black.

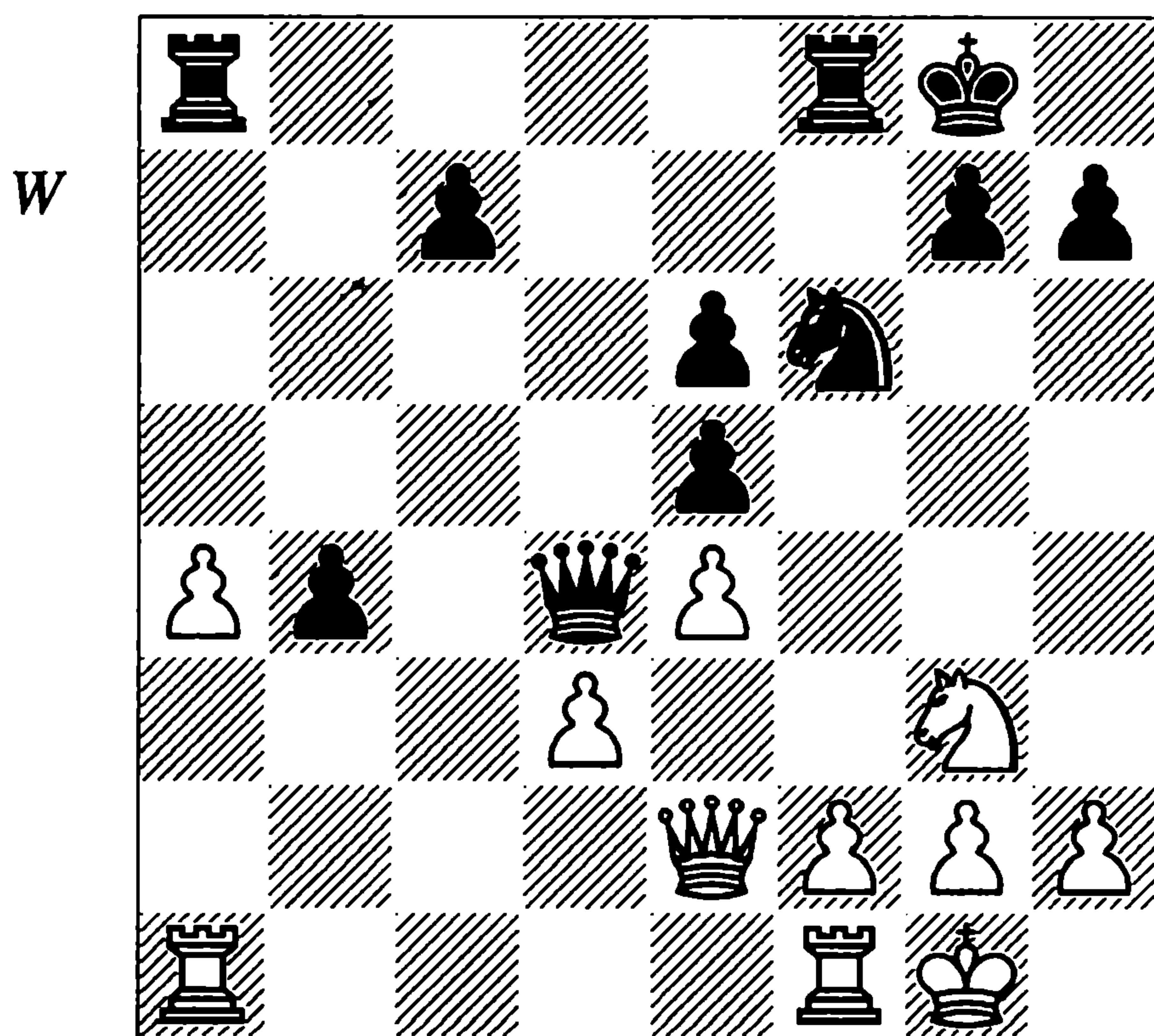
**14...dxc3 15 bxc3**

After 15 axb5 ♖d4 16 ♖xd4 ♖xd4 17 0-0 ♖fd8 18 bxc3 ♖xd3! 19 ♖xd3 ♖xd3 20 ♖g5 a4 Black obtains a dangerous passed a-pawn.

**15...b4! 16 ♖b2 bxc3 17 ♖xc3 ♖b4!**

The best way to defend the e5-pawn. After the forced exchanges that follow, the weaknesses on a4 and d3 are accentuated.

18 ♖xb4 axb4 19 0-0 ♘d4! 20 ♘xd4 ♙xd4!  
(D)

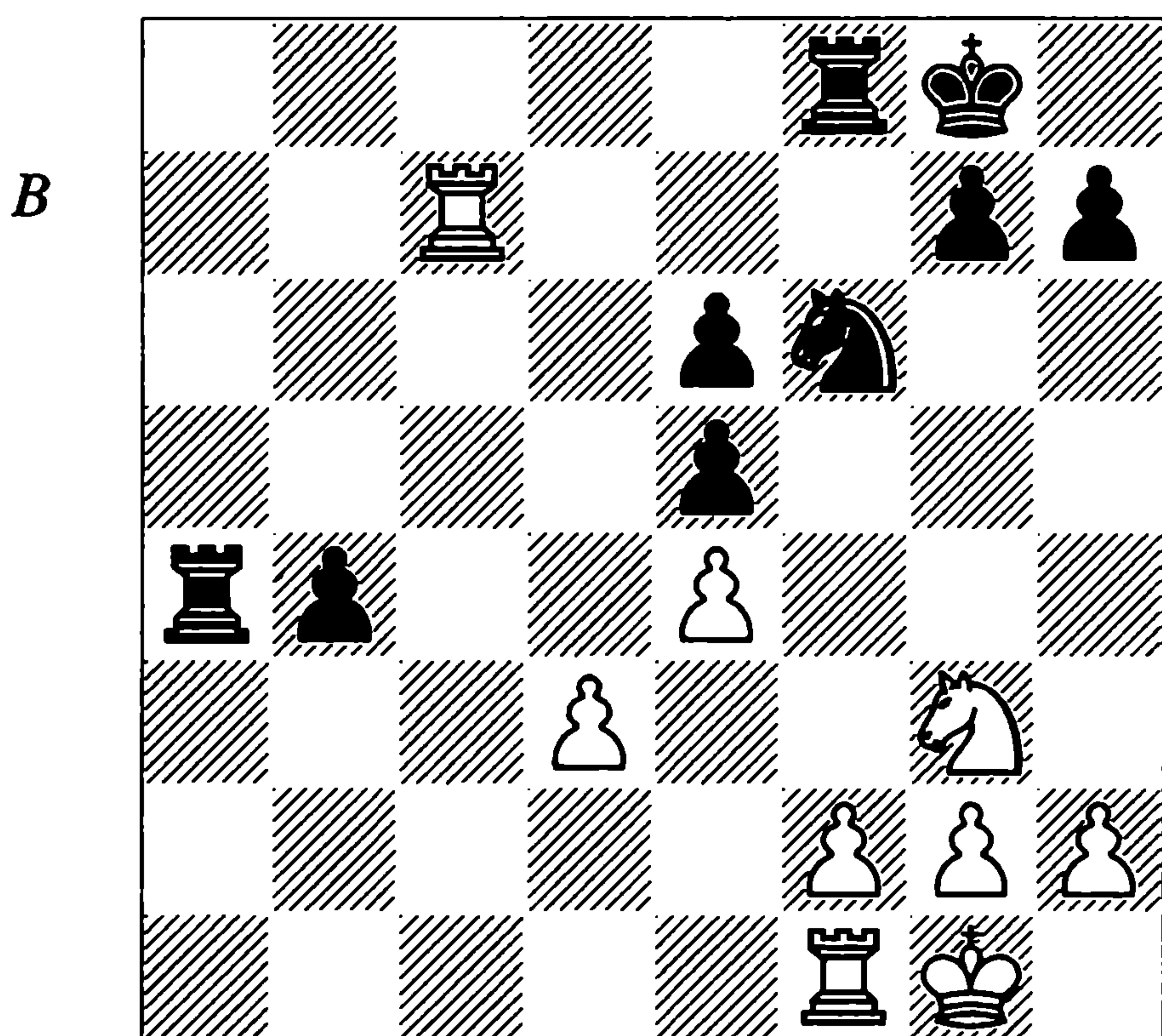


An important move. Black's weak pawns on the e-file cannot be attacked, in sharp contrast to White's weaknesses on a4 and d3. This difference promises Black the advantage.

21 ♙a2! ♖a6! 22 ♖ac1

Black would be better after 22 ♖fc1 c5!, while 22...♙xd3 23 ♖xc7 ♘xe4 24 ♘xe4 ♙xe4 is also good for him, but perhaps not enough to win the game.

22...♙d7 23 ♙c4 ♖xa4 24 ♙xc7 ♙xc7 25 ♖xc7 (D)



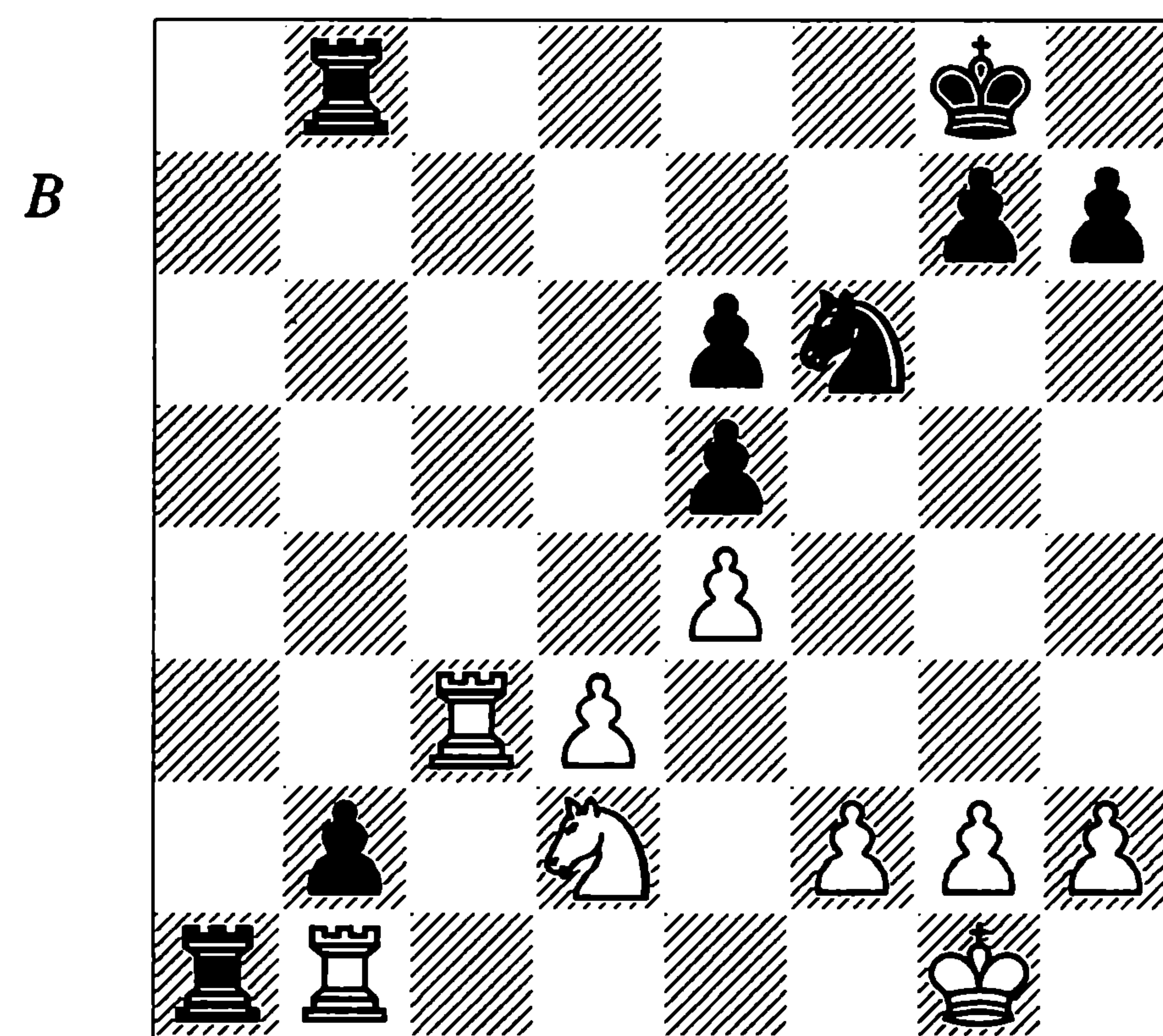
25...♖b8!

After more exchanges Black has obtained a strong passed b-pawn, which the rook rushes to support. The immediate 25...b3?? would be a gross error in view of 26 ♖b7, when Black has lost his advantage.

26 ♖b1 b3 27 ♖c3?!

The last mistake. 27 ♘f1 should have been played.

27...b2 28 ♘f1 ♖a1 29 ♘d2 (D)



White was counting on this to hold the position, as now 29...♖xb1+ 30 ♘xb1 ♖a8 31 ♖c2 is harmless. However, Black's positional advantage gives rise to a spectacular, original and very effective tactical shot.

29...♘xe4!! 30 dxe4 ♖d8 31 ♖f1

There is no salvation, as everything works in Black's favour! One nice line goes 31 ♖c2 ♖xd2 32 ♖cxb2 ♖d1+ 33 ♖xd1 ♖xd1#.

31...♖xd2 32 ♖e1 ♖d8 0-1

### Gavrilakis – Grivas

Athens 1989

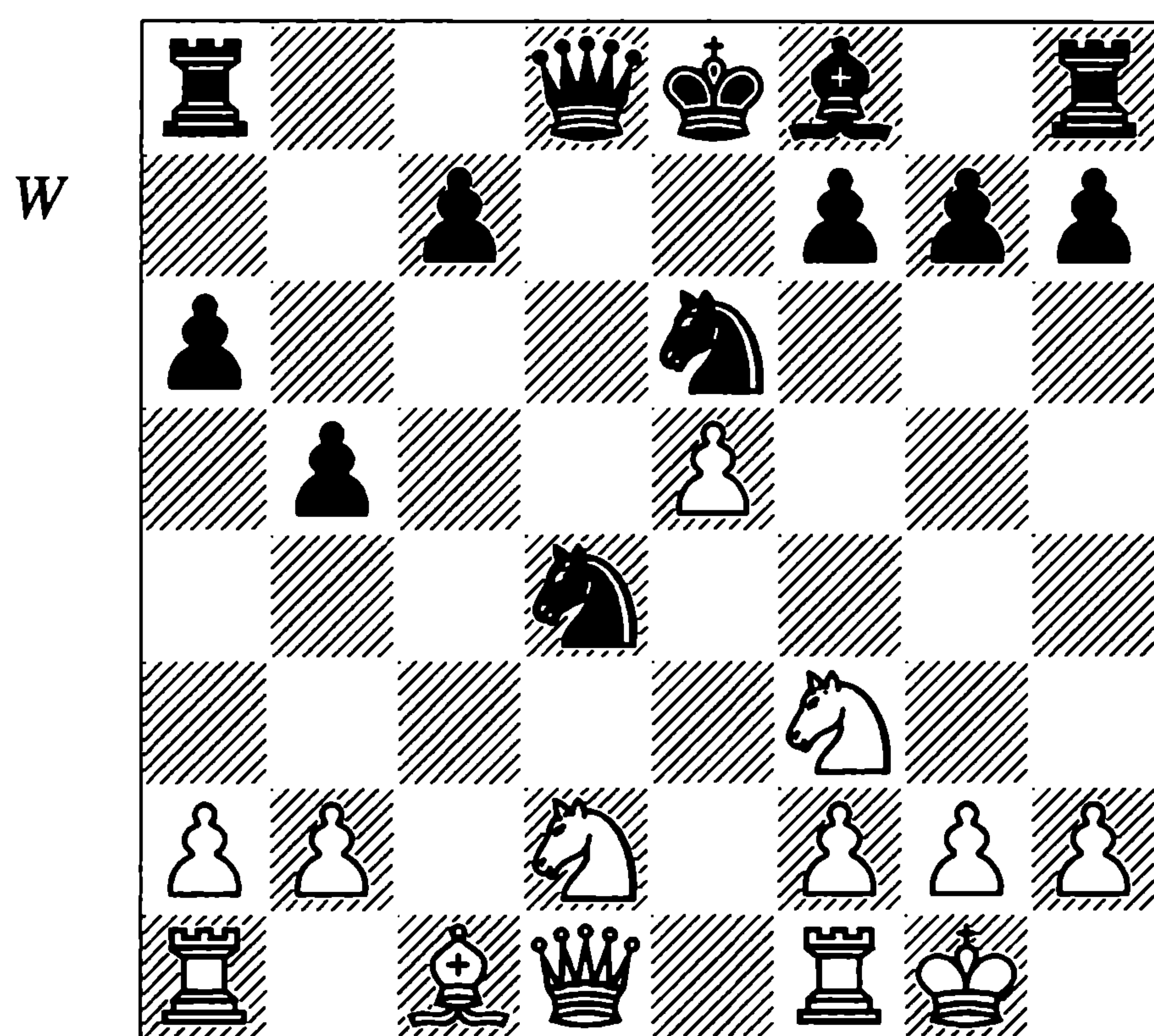
1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 ♖b5 a6 4 ♖a4 ♘f6 5 0-0 ♘xe4 6 d4 b5 7 ♖b3 d5 8 dxe5 ♖e6 9 ♘bd2 ♘c5 10 c3 d4 11 ♖xe6 ♘xe6 12 cxd4 ♘cxd4 (D)

13 a4

A theoretically harmless variation with a dangerous sting in practice. One often sees 13 ♘e4; for example, 13...♖e7 14 ♖e3 ♘f5 15 ♙c2 0-0 16 ♖ad1 ♘xe3 17 fxe3 ♙c8 18 h3!? ♖d8 19 ♘h2 ♖xd1! (19...♙b7?, Geller-Grivas, Athens 1988) 20 ♙xd1 ♙e8! 21 ♖f5? ♘c5? (21...♙c6!) 22 ♘xc5 ♖xc5 = Kotronias-Grivas, Athens 1989.

13...♖e7

Black may have a better option in 13...♖c5 14 ♘e4 ♖b6 15 ♘xd4 ♖xd4 16 axb5 axb5 17



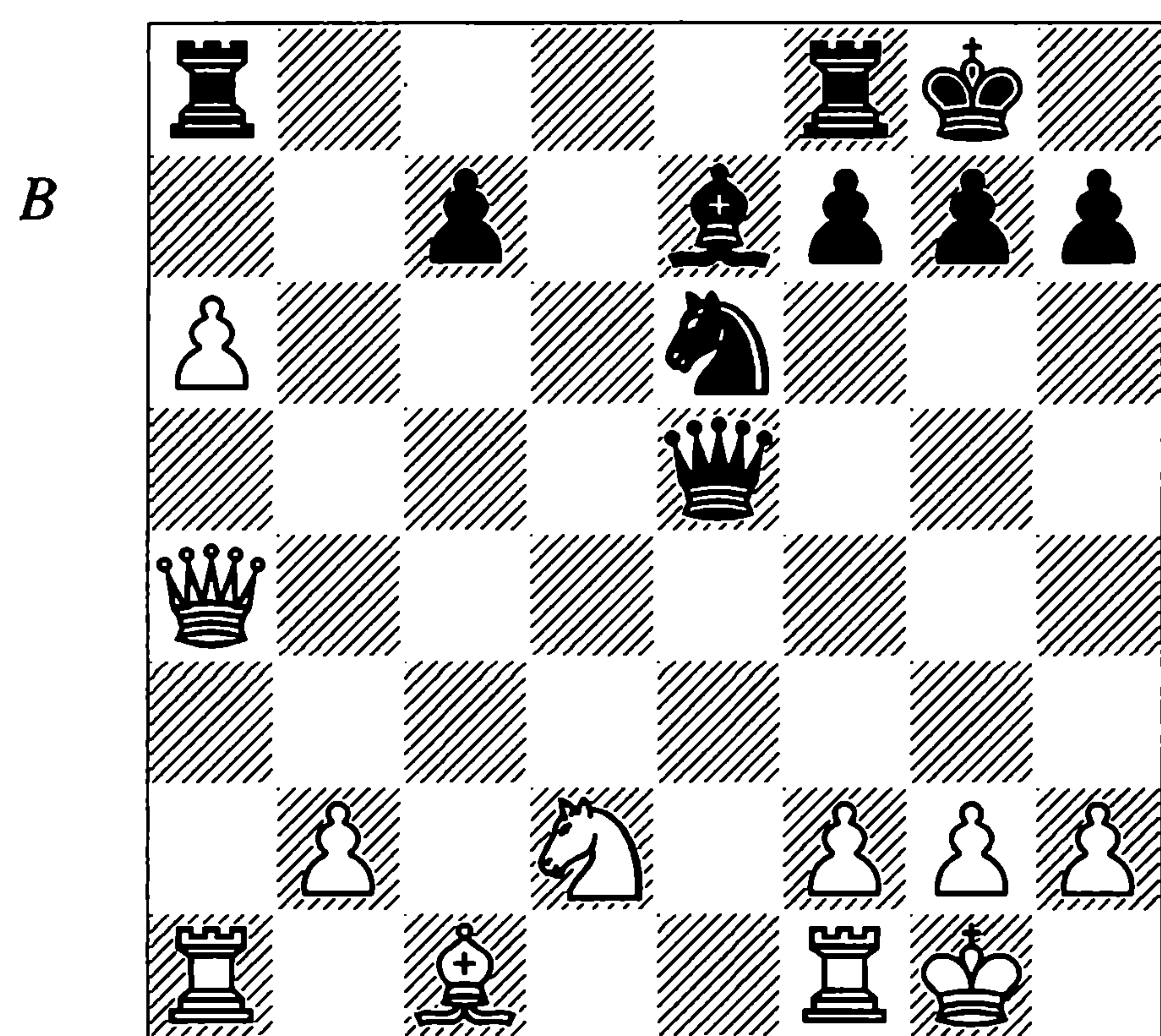
♖xa8 ♜xa8 18 ♘g5 ♞d5 19 ♙e3 ♘xg5 20 ♞xd4 ♞xd4 21 ♙xd4 ♘e6 22 ♙e3 g5! = Kotronias-Flear, Athens 1989.

14 ♘xd4 ♞xd4?

But this is a serious mistake. According to Minev, the correct path is 14...♘xd4 15 ♘e4 ♘e6 16 ♙e3 ♞xd1 17 ♜fxd1 0-0 with equality.

15 axb5 ♞xe5 16 bxa6 0-0 17 ♞a4! (D)

A splendid move. Earlier tries had not troubled Black at all: 17 ♜e1?! ♞b5 18 ♞a4 ♞xa4 19 ♜xa4 ♘c5 20 ♜a3 ♘e6 21 ♜a1 ♜a7! 22 ♘f3 1/2-1/2 P.Popović-Grivas, Dubai OL 1986; 17 ♘f3 ♞b5 18 ♞a4 ♞xa4 19 ♜xa4 ♘c5 20 ♜a5 ♜xa6 21 ♜xa6 ♘xa6 22 ♙d2 ♙f6 23 ♙c3 ♙xc3 24 bxc3 1/2-1/2 Psakhis-Dolmatov, USSR Ch (Frunze) 1981.



17...♘c5

Black also failed to solve his problems after 17...♜fb8 18 a7 ♜b7 19 ♘f3 ♞d5 20 ♙e3 in Ehlvest-Marin, Tallinn 1989.

18 ♞c4!

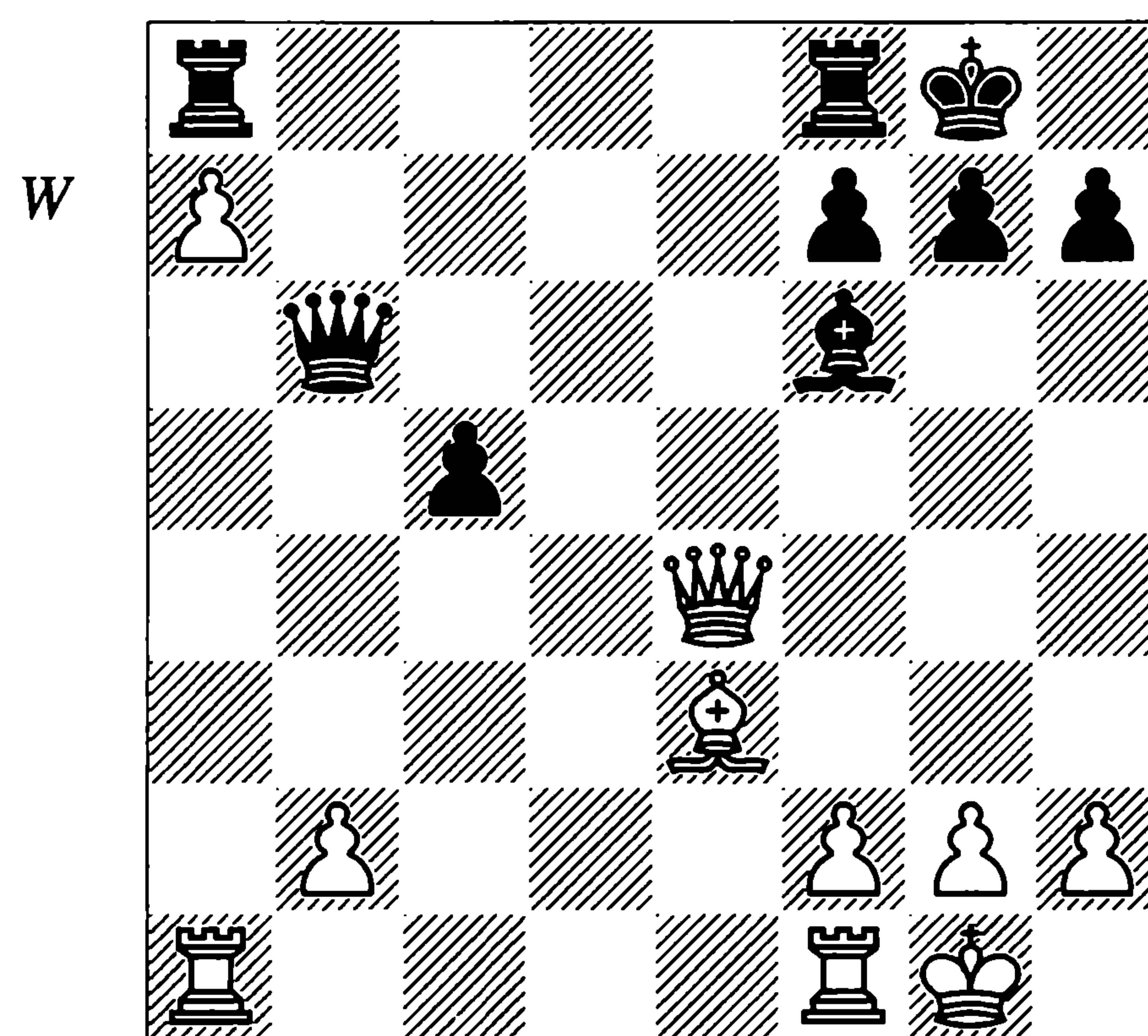
18 ♞c6? ♜a7! 19 ♘f3 ♞d6 20 ♞xd6 ♙xd6 21 b4 ♜xa6! 22 bxc5 ♜xa1 23 cxd6 cxd6 only leads to a drawish ending.

18...♞d6

Black's problems also remain after 18...♞e6 19 ♞xe6 fxe6 20 a7 ♜f4 21 ♘f3! ♜b4 22 ♙e3, since White's passed a-pawn is exceptionally strong.

19 ♘e4! ♘xe4 20 ♞xe4 ♙f6 21 a7 ♞b6 22 ♙e3 c5 (D)

White wins easily after 22...♞xb2 23 ♜ab1 ♞c3 24 ♞xa8! ♜xa8 25 ♜b8+.



23 ♞f5?

This blunder mars an otherwise well-played game. There was a simple route to victory: 23 ♜fc1! ♜xa7 24 ♜xa7 ♞xa7 25 ♙xc5 ♜c8 26 b4.

23...♙d4! 24 ♙xd4 cxd4 25 ♞a5 ♞xb2

Black has regained material parity, but White retains an edge thanks to his more advanced passed pawn. Black must quickly advance his own pawn to distract White's pieces.

26 ♜fb1 ♞c2

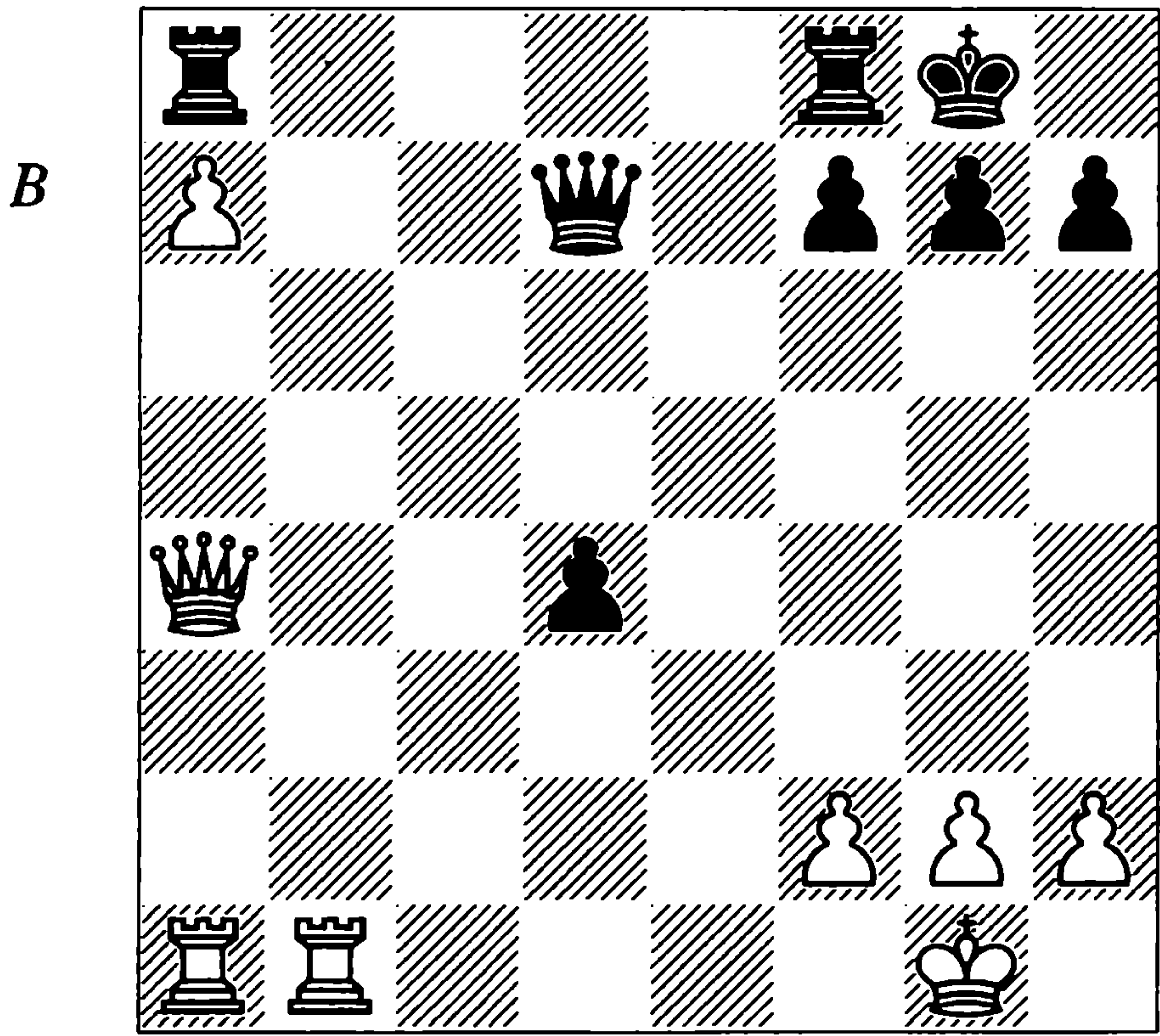
Compulsory. In case of 26...♞c3? White wins with 27 ♞d5!, threatening 28 ♞xa8!. But now Black can defend against the same threat: 27 ♞d5? ♜xa7! 28 ♞xd4 ♜xa1 29 ♜xa1.

27 ♜c1 ♞e4 28 ♜e1 ♞b7 29 ♜eb1 ♞d7?

After 29...♞e4! and ...d3-d2 Black would have no more problems. But after the text-move things get tough.

30 ♞a4! (D)

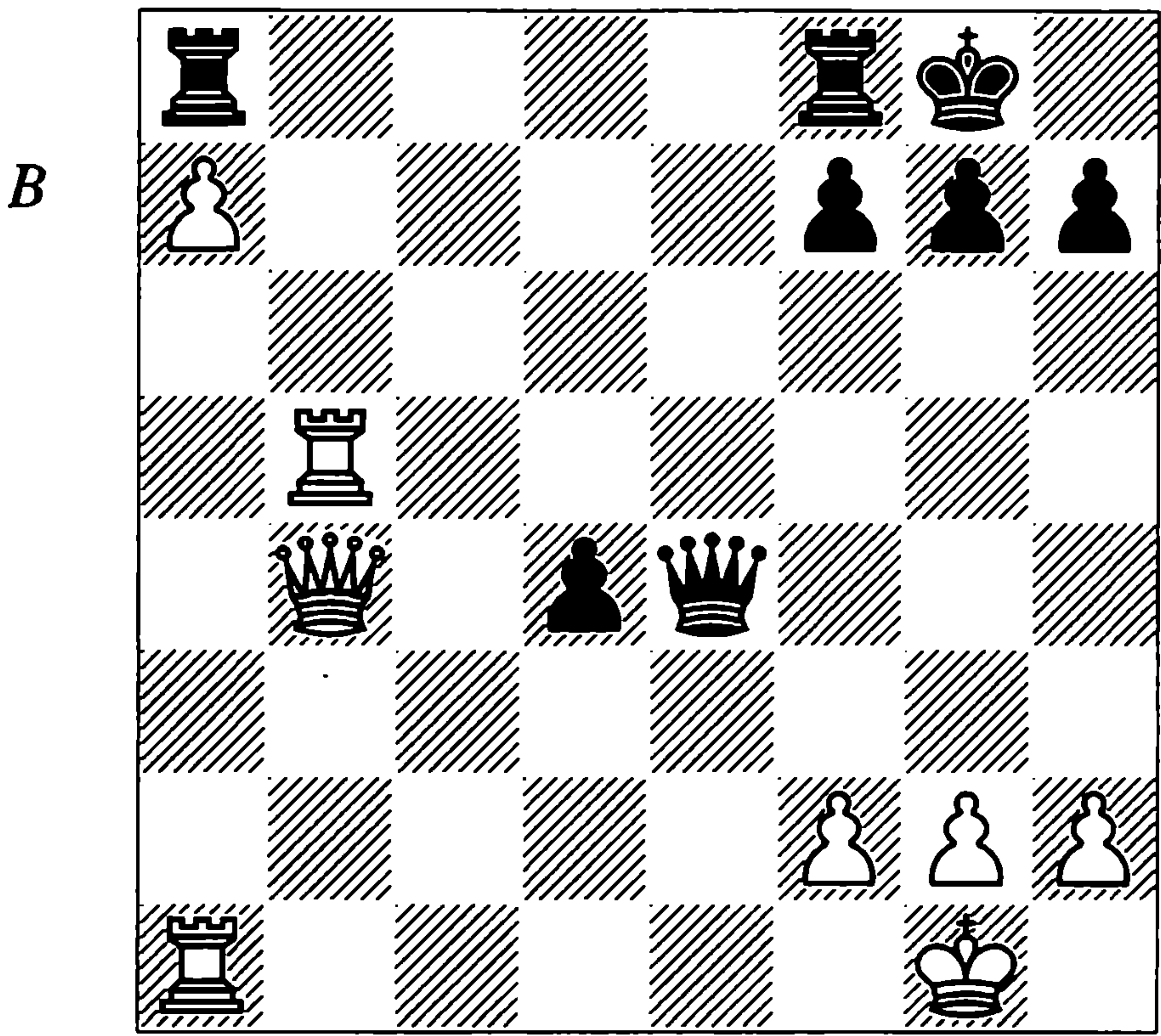
30...♞d5



Other moves lose simply: 30...Qd8 31 Rb7!, 30...Qd6 31 Qb4! Qd5 32 Ra5! or 30...Qxa4 31 Rxa4 Rfd8 32 Qf1, when the white king is close to Black's passed pawn, in contrast to the black king who has no chance ever of approaching the white passer.

31 Rb5! Qe4 32 Qb4 (D)

White's deadly threat of Rb8 seals Black's fate.



32...Rfd8 33 Rb8 Qe8

Black gives up the d-pawn, but there is nothing better: 33...Qd5 34 Qb6! Rf8 (34...d3 35 Qxd8+ Qxd8 36 Rxd8+ Rxd8 37 a8Q) 35 Rxf8+ Qxf8 (35...Rxf8 36 Qb8 Qa8 37 Qxa8 Rxa8 38 Rb1!) 36 Qb8+ Qe7 37 Rb1!.

34 Rxa8 Rxa8 35 Qxd4 h6 36 h4 Qc6 37 g3 Qh7 38 Rb1 Qc2 39 Rb8 Qc1+ 40 Qh2 Qc6 41 Qd3+ 1-0

# Isolated Pawn

A pawn is considered isolated when there are no pawns of the same colour on the neighbouring files. Thus, it has been detached from the rest of its camp's pawn-structure and can be supported only by pieces. Isolated pawns can be classified in two categories, the flank and central isolated pawns.

The first group, flank isolated pawns, generally constitute weaknesses and as a rule should be avoided, as their positive merits are minimal to zero and without theoretical value. Exceptions occur only in case that their owner has obtained other strategic or tactical pluses in exchange for their creation.

The second case is still hotly debated, even to this day. This category will form the basis of our considerations below.

In the opening, the isolated pawn is no cause for concern for its possessor, as it can offer quick development, spatial superiority, control of central squares and the initiative.

In the middlegame, the isolated pawn, along with the advantages stated above, creates the preconditions for a powerful initiative, either in the centre or on either flank. The side with the isolated pawn is compelled to seek activity, as a passive treatment of the position leads as a rule to serious problems and, after appropriate exchanges, to a difficult ending.

Indeed, the weakness of an isolated pawn becomes evident in the endgame. The resulting problems are multiple and revolve both around strategic issues and the protection of the pawn itself, as the reduced material makes this harder.

Thus, an isolated pawn is at the same time a strength and a weakness. A strength, if the dynamic and usually short-term advantages it confers prevail; a weakness, if its static weaknesses come to the fore.

For a better understanding of the concept of the isolated pawn we have to state its strengths and weaknesses.

The fundamental weaknesses of the isolated pawn can be described as follows:

1) The pawn itself can be weak, as it cannot be protected by other pawns but only by pieces. Therefore, should it be attacked by more pieces than it is defended by, its loss is unavoidable.

2) The square in front of the isolated pawn constitutes an outpost for the opponent.

3) Passive handling of the position by its possessor, as it causes disharmony in the placement of the pieces, can have dire consequences, and not just for the pawn itself.

4) In an ending, the pawn's weaknesses become more pronounced, as was already mentioned above.

5) It can exert a negative psychological influence on many chess-players who, affected by the unpleasant prospect of an endgame, seek unjustifiably violent solutions in the middle-game.

The positive sides of the isolated pawn can be determined as follows:

1) It offers greater control of central squares.

2) It offers the possibility of a central strike by its advance.

3) It offers a space advantage.

4) It offers better and quicker development, especially in the opening.

5) It offers opportunities of exploiting the open and semi-open files it creates with its presence.

6) It offers the initiative in the opening and middlegame.

One very sensitive issue that both sides must attend to with great care is the matter of piece exchanges. The question to be asked is: which piece exchange is favourable for each side, and consequently undesirable for the other? In general, the possessor of the isolated pawn should avoid unnecessary piece exchanges without

gaining anything substantial in return. If he must accede to some exchange and has a choice, then it is best to avoid exchanges of the minor pieces (bishops and knights) and prefer those of the major pieces (queens and rooks). In an end-game with minor pieces the chances of survival are especially high, while in a major-piece ending these chances are virtually nil.

Finally, the player with the isolated pawn should avoid the creation of further weaknesses in his pawn-structure, as then he will have to face additional problems. However, as nothing is absolute, the solutions to these problems depend on each specific position, as well as the sum of the strategic and tactical elements that govern it.

## A. Exploitation of Negative Aspects

**Makridis – Grivas**

*Patra 1981*

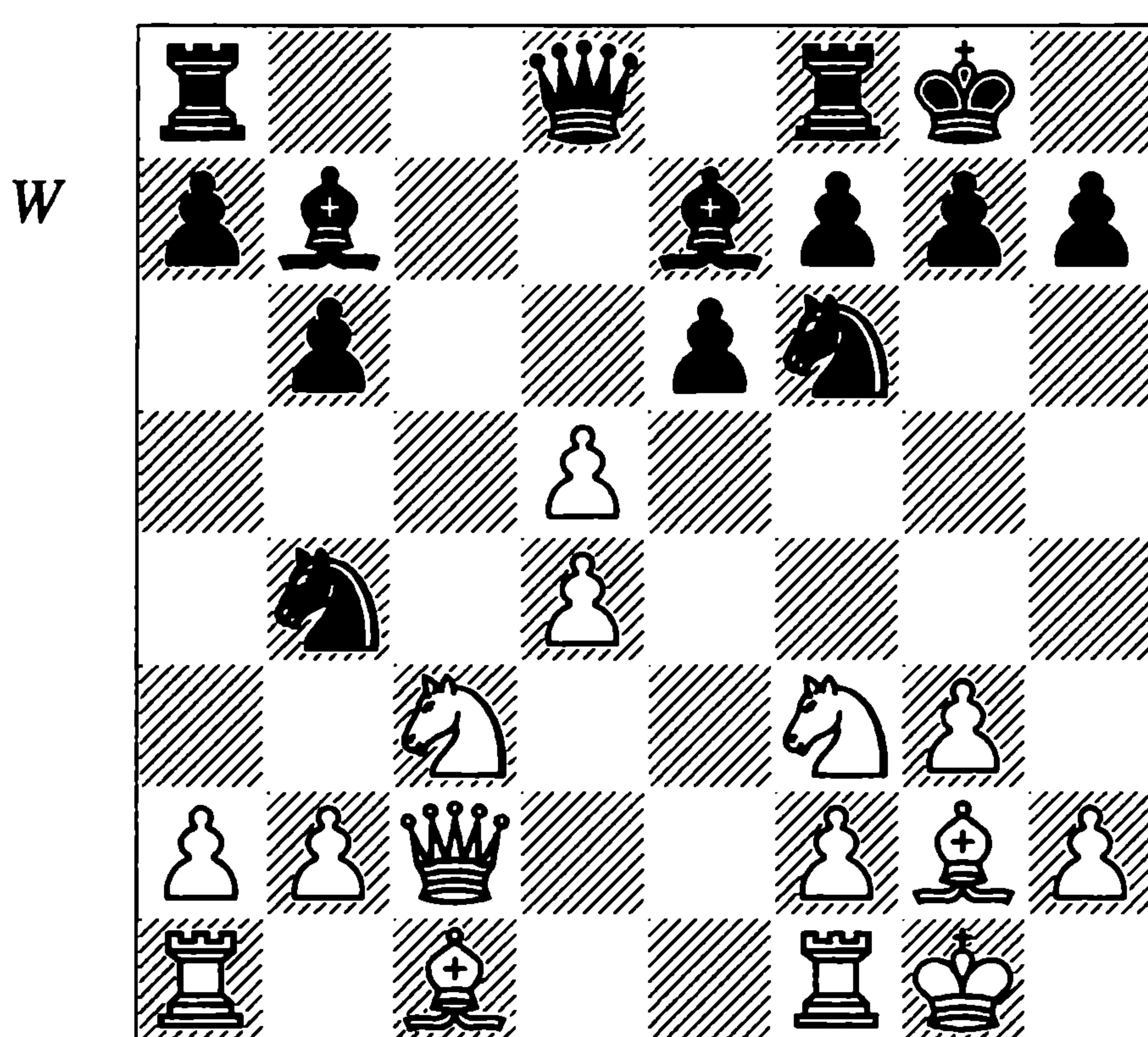
1  $\text{d}f3$   $\text{d}f6$  2  $g3$   $b6$  3  $\text{g}2$   $\text{b}7$  4  $c4$   $e6$  5  $\text{d}c3$   $c5$  6 0-0  $\text{e}7$  7  $\text{c}2$ ?!

The white queen is unsatisfactorily placed on c2, as the future opening of the c-file will leave it exposed. The theoretical move 7 d4 and even 7  $\text{e}1$  are considered (and must be) better.

7...0-0 8  $e3$   $\text{c}6$  9  $d4$

Perhaps 9  $\text{d}1$  is more accurate.

9...cxd4 10  $\text{exd}4$   $d5$ ! 11  $\text{cxd}5$   $\text{b}4$ ! (D)



The consequence of White's inaccurate 7th move.

12  $\text{b}3$   $\text{bxd}5$  13  $\text{g}5$   $h6$  14  $\text{xf}6$ ?!

White has been left with an isolated pawn on d4 and should therefore avoid any exchanges that would allow Black to head towards an ending; White's weaknesses would then be predominant. 14  $\text{d}2$  is better.

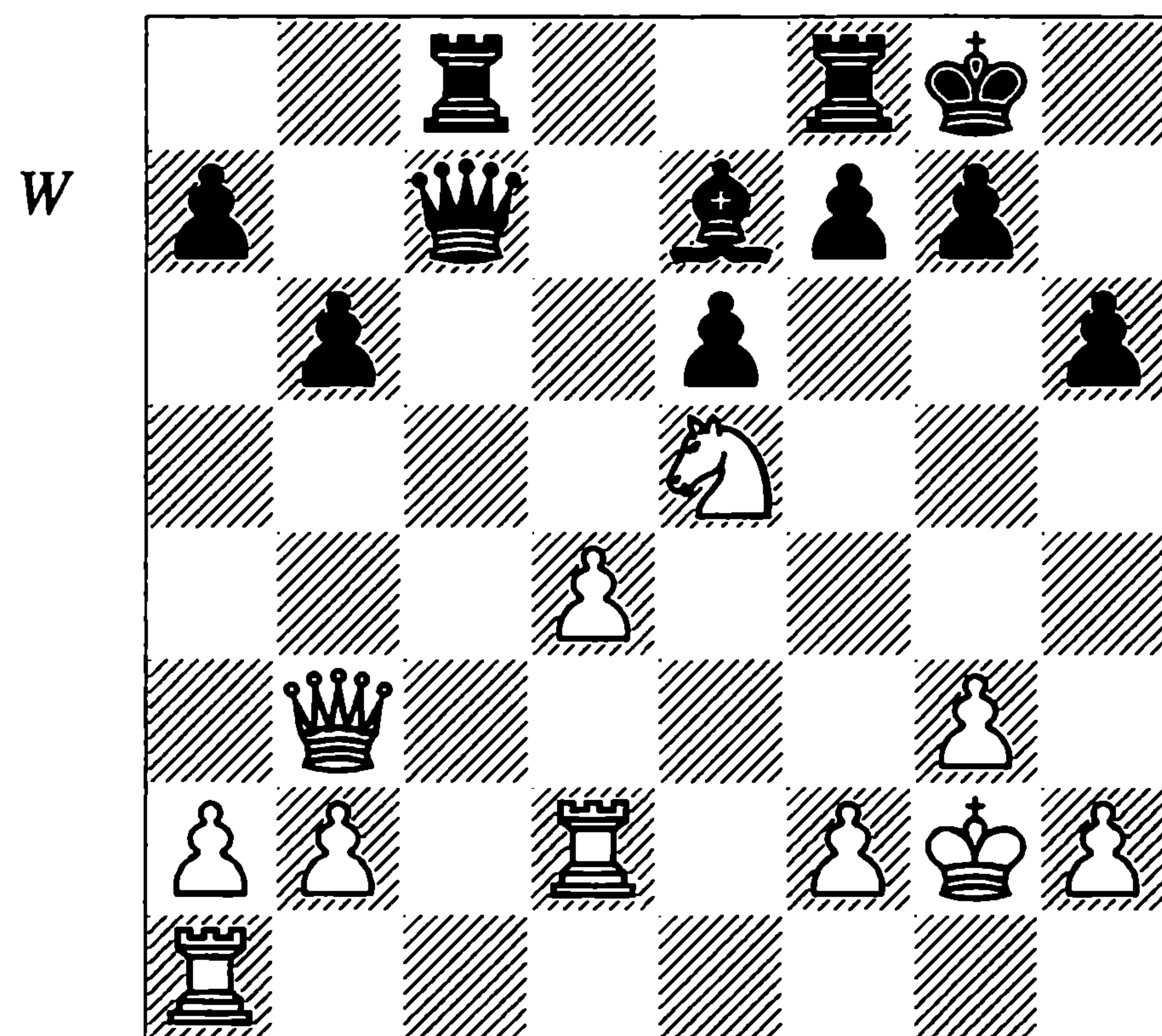
14... $\text{xf}6$

The careless 14... $\text{xf}6$ ?! 15  $\text{d}e4$ !  $\text{e}7$  16  $\text{d}e5$  would allow White to equalize.

15  $\text{fd}1$   $\text{c}8$  16  $\text{d}2$   $\text{d}e4$ !

Exchanges favour Black!

17  $\text{dxe}4$   $\text{xe}4$  18  $\text{d}e5$   $\text{xg}2$  19  $\text{xg}2$   $\text{c}7$ ! (D)



Black must prevent White from advancing d5 at all costs, as then his advantage would be significantly reduced.

20  $\text{ad}1$   $\text{f}6$  21  $\text{d}g4$   $\text{g}5$  22  $\text{d}e3$

After 22 f4  $\text{e}7$  23  $d5$   $\text{exd}5$  24  $\text{fxd}5$  White has got rid of his weakness on d4 but is still at a disadvantage due to his exposed king and worse minor piece (knight vs bishop in an open position with pawns on both flanks).

22... $\text{c}6$ +?!

A rather mediocre move. 22... $\text{xe}3$ ! 23  $\text{cxe}3$   $\text{c}4$ ! 24  $b3$   $\text{d}5$ + is much better.

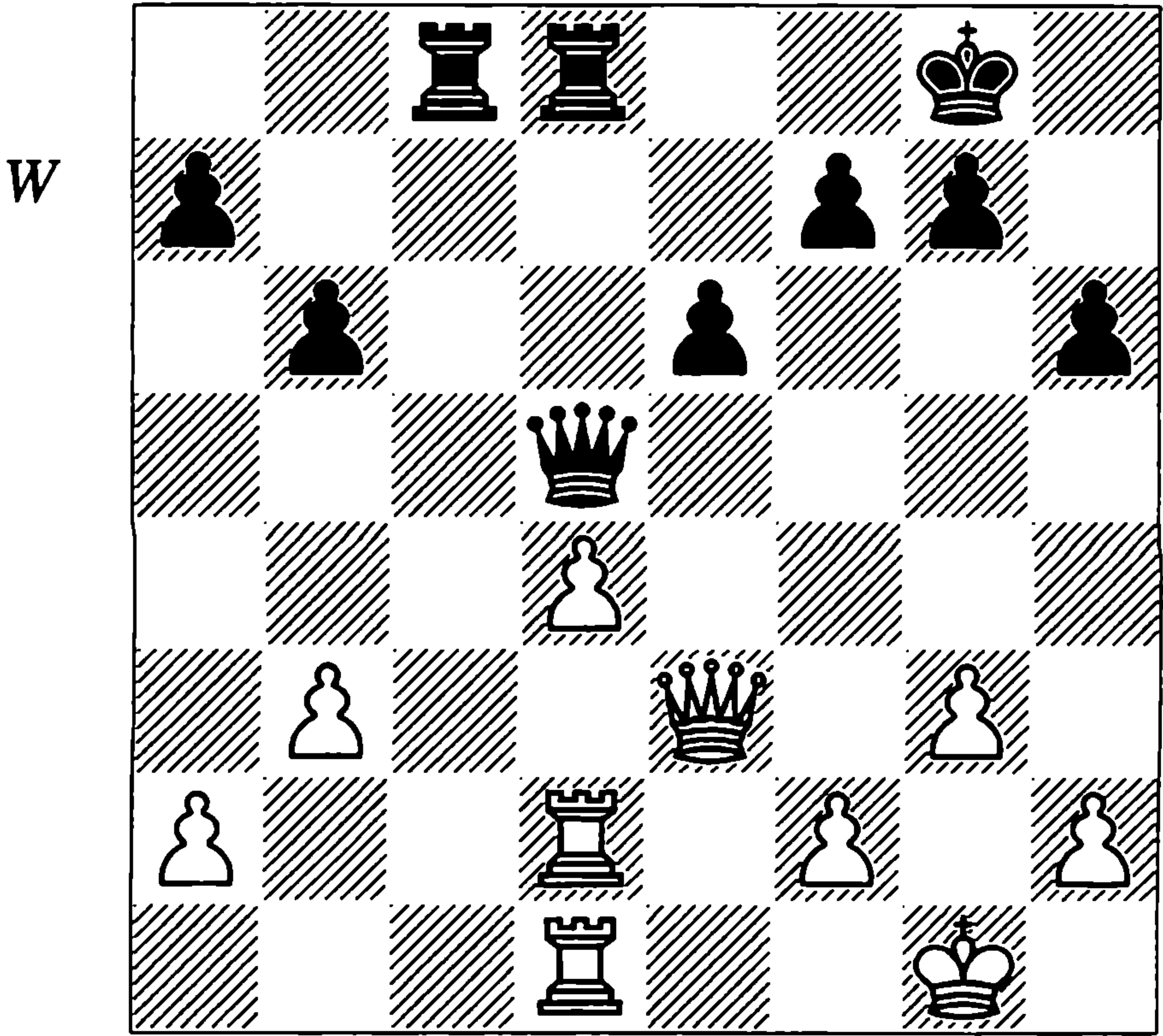
23  $\text{g}1$ ?!

White should have taken up the chance for 23  $d5$ !  $\text{exd}5$  24  $\text{fxd}5$  (24  $\text{fxd}5$ !?) 24... $\text{fxd}5$ + 25  $\text{fxd}5$ , leaving Black only slightly better thanks to his superior minor piece.

23... $\text{xe}3$ ! 24  $\text{cxe}3$

After 24  $\text{fxe}3$   $\text{fd}8$  Black would retain his advantage, in view of the weak hanging central pawns on d4 and e3.

24...♚d5 25 b3 ♜fd8 (D)



Black has the upper hand as he has a clear target (the isolated white pawn on d4). His strategy has so far been crowned with success, as he has managed to exchange all the white minor pieces. The next step is to triple the major pieces on the d-file and then push ...e5, winning the target pawn. A characteristic example of this standard procedure is the game Korchnoi-Karpov, Merano Wch (9) 1981: 1 c4 e6 2 ♘c3 d5 3 d4 ♙e7 4 ♘f3 ♘f6 5 ♙g5 h6 6 ♙h4 0-0 7 ♜c1 dxc4 8 e3 c5 9 ♙xc4 cxd4 10 exd4 ♘c6 11 0-0 ♘h5 12 ♙xe7 ♘xe7 13 ♙b3 ♘f6 14 ♘e5 ♙d7 15 ♚e2 ♜c8 16 ♘e4 ♘xe4 17 ♚xe4 ♙c6 18 ♘xc6 ♜xc6 19 ♜c3 ♚d6 20 g3 ♜d8 21 ♜d1 ♜b6 22 ♚e1 ♚d7 23 ♜cd3 ♜d6 24 ♚e4 ♚c6 25 ♚f4 ♘d5 26 ♚d2 ♚b6 27 ♙xd5 ♜xd5 28 ♜b3 ♚c6 29 ♚c3 ♚d7 30 f4 b6 31 ♜b4 b5 32 a4 bxa4 33 ♚a3 a5 34 ♜xa4 ♚b5 35 ♜d2 e5 36 fxe5 ♜xe5 37 ♚a1 ♚e8 38 dxe5 ♜xd2 39 ♜xa5 ♚c6 40 ♜a8+ ♙h7 41 ♚b1+ g6 42 ♚f1 ♚c5+ 43 ♙h1 ♚d5+ 0-1.

26 ♚e5

A correct reaction, preventing the aforementioned plan, as after the exchange of queens the white king can come to the rescue of the d4-pawn. Naturally, Black is still better as his own king can also freely participate in the battle.

26...♜c6 27 ♚xd5 ♜xd5 28 ♙f1 g5!

Gaining space and preparing the approach of the black king.

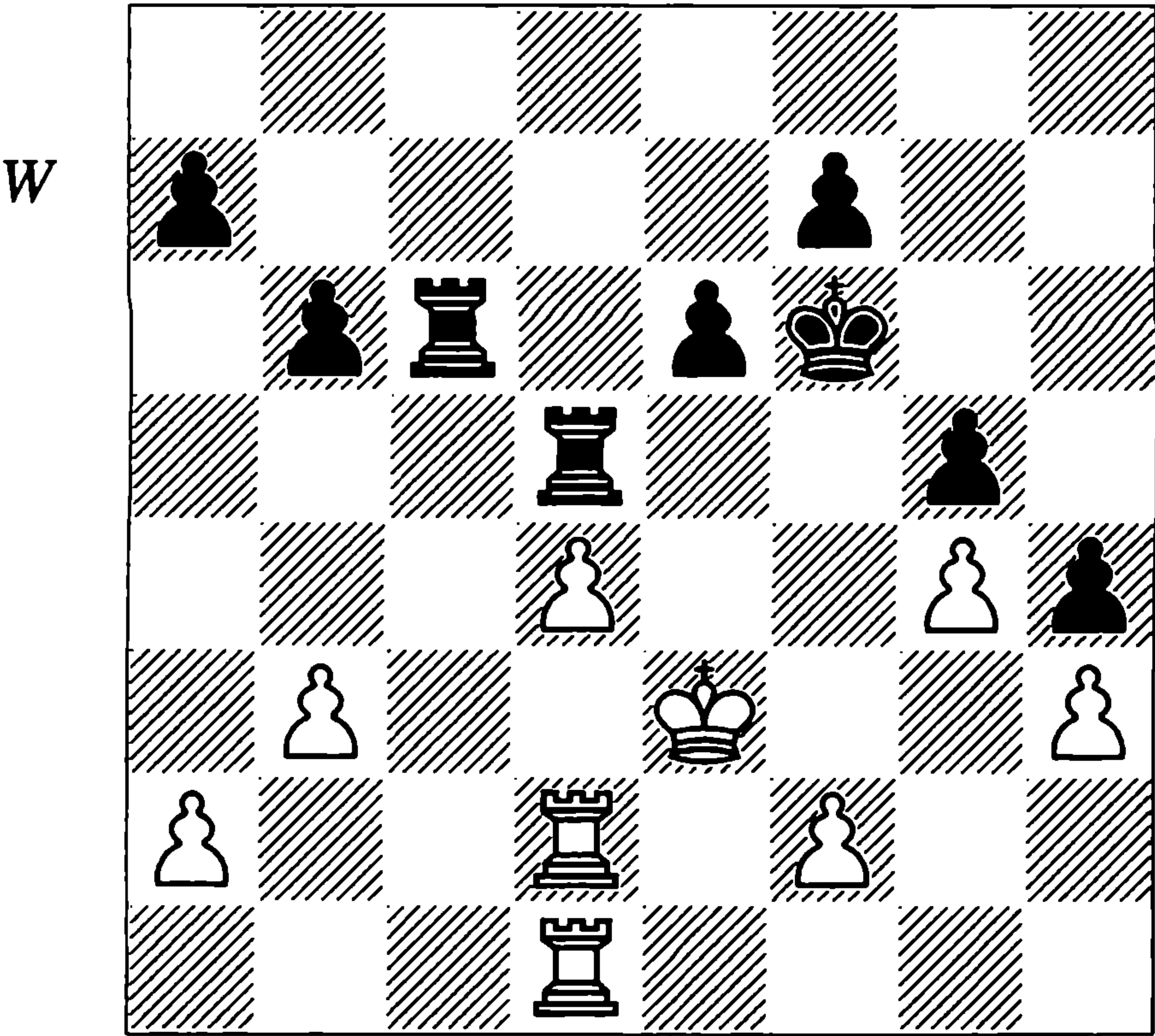
29 h3 ♙g7 30 ♙e2 ♙f6 31 g4?!

White must try to avoid the creation of new weaknesses. The passive 31 ♙d3 was necessary.

31...h5! 32 ♙e3

32 gxh5? ♜c8 and ...♜h8xh5 would have been even worse.

32...h4! (D)



Fixing a second weakness on h3 (the first one being the d4-pawn).

33 ♙e2 b5!

Black endeavours to fix a third weakness on a2. Black obtains a *won position* by following the well-known *rule of the three weaknesses* (1 weakness = advantage, 2 weaknesses = significant advantage, 3 weaknesses = winning advantage). White is unable to react as his pieces are tied to the defence of his weak pawns.

34 ♜d3 b4 35 ♜1d2 ♜a5 36 d5? (D)

Accelerating the end. White should have tried to defend with 36 ♜b2 ♙e7 37 ♜dd2 ♙d6 38 ♜d3 ♙d5 39 ♙e3 ♜c1!, although it seems unlikely that he would have managed to save himself.

