

“That in fixing membership fees, the ECF should narrow the gap between Bronze and Silver so that eventually the two categories can be merged into one”.

Three years ago, in introducing membership fees, it was important to raise funds and to avoid opposition from the 4,000 players whose involvement with chess is only at club level. A uniform subscription rate would have failed on both counts. A Platinum level for those keen to donate to the ECF was desirable. A Gold level for those who played in FIDE rated events was justifiable since they receive an additional benefit and involve the ECF in extra administration. The remaining six thousand players were divided into two categories, Bronze and Silver depending on whether or not they played in congresses. The motion I am proposing arises from my inability to justify this difference in fee levels.

Apart from being involved in a Grand Prix system (if you play sufficiently well), the average Silver member receives no special benefit from the ECF. He or she makes no extra demand on the ECF. Congresses could not function without arbiters but this would also be true of the final stages of club or county championships. Grading their games is no more onerous than grading the games from a chess league. The only significant difference between congress players and league players is that regular congress players are probably more committed to playing chess than the average club player. The ECF is exploiting their enthusiasm by charging them higher subscriptions. This is particularly true for those who prefer congresses and do not play (or play only occasionally) in league chess. Why impose a tax on enthusiasm? Or for a preference for week-end chess?

At this first adjustment of fees since the membership scheme was started, we can continue to treat congress players unfairly and even increase the unfairness by widening the gap between Bronze and Silver, or we can start a gradual process of narrowing the gap so that eventually we will have only three levels of membership.

Platinum for generous donors

Gold for those who play in FIDE rated events

Silver for all other chess players

The positive advantages would be a simplified membership structure and therefore simpler administration, the ability to sell membership as allowing members cheaper congress entry fees, and the encouragement of congresses. A barrier which discourages an ordinary chess player from trying a congress cannot be good for the health of chess in this country.

Please note this is not a plea for immediate change but for a decision that we should move in the direction of merging the Bronze and Silver categories rather than widening a gap when there is little justification for its creation three years ago - apart from the ECF need for funding and a belief that congress players were an easily exploited source of funds.

Bill Armstrong.