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Bridge

Pastimes; Bridge

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The turmoil in Eastern Europe serves as a reminder that the Czarist regime produced remarkable talent at the bridge table as well as the chess board. Half a century ago London was full of bridge luminaries who were born on the fringes of the Russian Empire or in areas that have since been behind the Iron Curtain.

There was "Skid" Simon, who was born in Manchuria and came to England at an early age. He wrote a bridge classic, "Why You Lose at Bridge," and collaborated with Caryl Brahms in writing a series of hilarious novels before he died at the early age of 44.

Another bridge author of consequence was Richard Lederer, a Czechoslovak who led an English team that came close in 1934 to beating an American squad led by Russian-born Ely Culbertson.

Perhaps best-known to Americans was Victor Mollo, born in Leningrad when it was St. Petersburg. He created the Hideous Hog, the Rueful Rabbit and other denizens of the Griffins Club. Another significant bridge theorist was Polish-born Leo Baron, whose system introduced many ideas that are now regarded as standard bidding practice. His brother, a scientist, the late Dr. Jacob Bronowski, became known in the television series "The Ascent of Man."

Add Pedro Juan, a Rumanian who did much to encourage young talent, and two future world champions, Lithuanian-born Boris Schapiro, and Rumanian-born Rixi Markus and you had a group that could defeat the best of English players.

Fully the equal of the above group as a card player, and perhaps the most consistent tournament performer, was Latvian-born Nico Gardener, who died a month ago in London at the age of 81. He wrote, with Mollo, the classic for intermediate players, "Cardplay Technique." He also conducted England's leading bridge school for more than 30 years.

Nico Gardener's many successes included victories in the World Mixed Teams and two European Championships. He narrowly missed winning at the first World Team Olympiad in 1960, when the British team faltered on the last day. His daughter, Nicola, has won world titles as a member of the British women's team.

The diagramed deal is an example of Gardener's considerable skill. In a rubber bridge game he landed, as shown, in five clubs, clearly the wrong contract. Five diamonds would have been easy, but his partner left him in clubs, apparently thinking that he held more clubs than diamonds.

Hearts were led and continued, forcing a ruff that reduced South to West's trump length. Trumps were drawn, the spade queen was finessed, and the diamond ten was led. East covered with the jack, the king won, and Gardener stopped to work out the distribution.

He knew from the bidding that West had begun with spades and that his last five cards were in that suit. The position was this:

	North	
	♠ A3	
	♥ J9	
	♦ 2	
	♣	
West		East
♠ KJ1065		♠
♥		♥ AQ
♦		♦ Q87
♣		♣
	South	
	♠ 7	
	♥	
	♦ A954	
	♣	

Gardener knew that it was useless to cross to the spade ace and finesse in diamonds. Instead he led the spade seven and when West played the ten, he was allowed to win the trick. He had to play another spade, and his partner was squeezed in the red suits. Gardener had made his game and West was left to realize that he should have played low on the spade seven.