A GENERALIZED FRATTINI SUBGROUP OF A FINITE GROUP

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ABSTRACT. For a finite group G and an arbitrary prime p , let $S_p(G)$ denote the intersection of all maximal subgroups M of G such that $[G:M]$ is both composite and not divisible by p ; if no such M exists we set $S_p(G) = G$. Some properties of G are considered involving $S_p(G)$. In particular, we obtain a characterization of G when each M in the definition of $S_p(G)$ is nilpotent.

KEY WORDS AND PHRASES. Solvable group, Nilpotent group, Supersolvable group, Frattini subgroup.

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1. INTRODUCTION.

It is an interesting problem to investigate the relationships between the structure of a finite group G and the properties of the maximal subgroups of G . This has been studied by several people (e.g. [4], [5]). In [2] and [7-8] we have considered the family of maximal subgroups whose indices are composite and co-prime to a given prime. In this note we obtain further results in this direction. All groups considered are finite. A maximal subgroup M of a group G will be sometimes denoted by $M < G$. A maximal subgroup M of G of composite index will be called c-maximal.

2. THE SUBGROUP $S_p(G)$.

Let G be a group and p any prime. Consider the family of subgroups of G :

$$J = \{M : M \text{ is c-maximal, } [G:M]_p = 1\}$$

Define $S_p(G) = \cap \{M : M \in J\}$, if J is empty then set $S_p(G) = G$. This subgroup was introduced by us and several results have been obtained in [2] and [7]. We remark that $S_p(G)$ is a characteristic subgroup containing the Frattini subgroup $\Phi(G)$.

Our first result is motivated by Rose [9] where it was proved that if every non-normal, maximal subgroup of a group is nilpotent then the group is solvable. This result was extended by us ([2, Theorem 1.1]). We now obtain a further result in this direction.

THEOREM 2.1. Let p be the largest prime divisor of the order of a group G . Suppose that each subgroup in the family J (see above for the definition) is nilpotent. Then

(i) either, G is p -nilpotent or, there exists a normal p -subgroup P_0 of G such that G/P_0 is p -nilpotent.

(ii) if $l_p(G)$ denotes the p -length of G then $l_p(G) \leq 2$.

(Note: It follows directly from [2, Theorem 1.1] that G is solvable in this case).

PROOF: (i) we distinguish two cases:

Case 1: G has no normal p -subgroup. Let P be a Sylow p -subgroup of G . Then $N_G(P) \neq G$ and choose $M < G$ such that $N_G(P) \leq M$. If $[G : M]$ is a prime q , say, then it is easy to see that $q > p$, an impossibility, thus $[G : M]$ is composite and clearly $[G : M]_p = 1$. So $M \in J$ implying that M is nilpotent. Therefore $M = N_G(P)$. Let P_0 be a nontrivial characteristic subgroup of P . As G has no normal p -subgroup, $N_G(P_0) = N_G(P) = M$. Consequently M induces only p -automorphism on P_0 and so by Thompson [10] G is p -nilpotent.

Case 2: G has a normal p -subgroup. Let P_0 be a normal p -subgroup of G of the largest possible order. If P_0 is a Sylow p -subgroup of G then trivially G/P_0 is p -nilpotent. So, assume that P_0 is not a Sylow p -subgroup. We use induction on $|G|$. We note that p is the largest prime dividing $|G/P_0|$. It is easy to see that G/P_0 satisfies the hypothesis of the theorem and G/P_0 has no normal p -subgroup. So by induction hypothesis G/P_0 is p -nilpotent. Thus the proof of (i) is complete and (ii) follows now readily.

Our next result illustrates how under certain conditions the supersolvability of a group is controlled by the structure of certain groups of smaller orders.

THEOREM 2.2. For a group G and any prime p , if $|S_p(G)|$ is co-prime to p , then G is supersolvable $\Leftrightarrow G/S_p(G)$ is supersolvable.

PROOF: The case $\Rightarrow$ is trivial and we consider now the $\Leftarrow$ case.

If every maximal subgroup of G is of prime index then G is supersolvable by a well known result of Huppert and so $S_p(G)$ is supersolvable. Now let M be a c -maximal subgroup of G . If M does not contain $S_p(G)$, then $G = MS_p(G)$ and so $[G:M]_p = 1$ since by hypothesis $|S_p(G)|$ is a p' -number. Consequently $M \in J$ and so $S_p(G) \leq M$, a contradiction. Thus $S_p(G)$ is contained in every c -maximal subgroup of G and so $S_p(G)$ is contained in $L(G)$, the intersection of all c -maximal subgroups of G . Now by [1] (see [2] for a published proof) $L(G)$ is supersolvable and so the result now follows.

A group G is called a Sylow tower group of supersolvable type if (i) $p_1 > p_2 > \dots > p_k$ are all the prime divisors of $|G|$ and P_i is a Sylow p_i -subgroup of G and (ii) $P_1 P_2 \dots P_k < G$, $1 \leq i \leq k$.

THEOREM 2.3. Let q be the largest prime divisor of a group G and assume that $S_q(G) = G$. (In other words, the family J in the definition of $S_q(G)$ is empty). Then G is a Sylow tower group of supersolvable type.

PROOF. We use induction on $|G|$. If Q is a Sylow q -subgroup of $S_q(G)$ then by [7, Proposition 5] $Q < G$. Consider the following two families of subgroups:

$$J = \{M : M \text{ is } c\text{-maximal in } G, [G : M]_q = 1\}$$

$$J_1 = \{M/Q : M/Q \text{ is } c\text{-maximal in } G/Q, [G/Q : M/Q]_q = 1\}$$

Since $S_q(G) = G$, J is empty. This implies that J_1 is also empty. For, if J_1 is nonempty and M/Q belongs to J_1 then clearly $M \in J$, contradicting the fact that J is empty. Hence $S_q(G/Q) = G/Q$. This implies that if M/Q is an arbitrary maximal subgroup of G/Q then clearly $[G/Q : M/Q]_q = 1$ and $[G/Q : M/Q]$ must be a prime. Thus every maximal subgroup of G/Q is of prime index. So, by a well known result of Huppert G/Q is supersolvable. Hence G is a Sylow tower group of supersolvable type.

If G is supersolvable then every maximal subgroup of G is of prime index by a well known result of Huppert, and so $S_p(G) = G$. Thus, if G is supersolvable then for $H \leq G$, we have that $S_p(G) \cap H = S_p(H)$. A simple example will show that the converse is not always true. (Take $G = A_4$ and $p = 2$. Here $S_2(H) = H$ for every subgroup H but A_4 is not supersolvable). However, we have the following partial converse:

PROPOSITION 2.4. Let p be the largest prime dividing the order of a group G . Suppose that $S_p(G) \cap H = S_p(H)$ for every subgroup H of G . Then G is a Sylow tower group of supersolvable type.

PROOF: Let Q be any Sylow q -subgroup of G where q is any prime dividing $|G|$. By hypothesis, $S_p(G) \cap Q = S_p(Q)$. Further since any maximal subgroup of Q is of prime index in Q , $S_p(Q) = Q$ irrespective of the fact that p may or may not be equal to q . Thus $S_p(G)$ contains every Sylow q -subgroup of G for every prime q dividing $|G|$. Therefore $S_p(G) = G$. The result now follows by applying Theorem 2.3.

We omit the proof of the following standard result:

LEMMA 2.5. Let G be a supersolvable group in which for every maximal subgroup M , $[G:M] = p$ where p is a fixed prime. Then G is a p -group.

We now prove:

PROPOSITION 2.6. Let p be the largest prime dividing the order of a group G .
 (i) Assume that $[G:M]_p = 1$ implies that $[G:M]$ is a prime for any $M < G$. Then G is a Sylow-tower group of supersolvable type. Further if P is a Sylow p -subgroup of G then $P < G$ and G/P is supersolvable.
 (ii) Let q be any prime such that q is not equal to p . Assume that $[G:M]_p = 1$ implies that $[G:M] = q$ for any $M < G$ and furthermore $[G:M_1]_q = 1$ implies that $[G:M_1] = p$ for any $M_1 < G$. Then G is supersolvable.

PROOF: We omit the proof of (i) which is a direct consequence of Theorem 2.3. Now consider (ii). If P is a Sylow p -subgroup of G then by (i), $P < G$ and G/P is supersolvable. Now q divides $|G/P|$. Suppose if possible $M/P < G/P$ such that $[G/P : M/P]_q = 1$. Then $[G:M]_q = 1$ and so by hypothesis $[G:M] = p$ which is impossible since M contains P . Thus no maximal subgroup of G/P has index co-prime to q and since G/P is supersolvable, this gives, by using a well known result of Huppert, that every maximal subgroup of G/P is of prime index, and so has index q . By Lemma 2.5 it now follows that G/P is a q -group and so $|G|$ is of

the form $p^\alpha q^\beta$. By using a well-known result of Burnside, G is solvable. We now show that G is supersolvable. Suppose if possible that there exists a maximal subgroup M such that $[G:M]$ is divisible by both p and q . Then $G = P M$ and it follows that $[G:M] = |P|/|P \cap M|$ is a power of p , a contradiction. Therefore, for any $M < G$, we have that the index of M in G is either co-prime to p , or co-prime to q . Consequently, by the hypothesis it follows that every maximal subgroup of G is of prime index and hence G is supersolvable by using a well-known result of Huppert.

REMARK: Under the hypothesis of Theorem 2.6 (ii) it might be tempting to conjecture that G is nilpotent. However, S_3 satisfies the hypothesis but is not nilpotent.

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