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LIFE AND WORK OF IVAN SUPEK

Organizing committee of the Symposium "From Theoretical Physics to Philosophy of Science and Peace"

It was in the year 1990 that Ivan Supek marked 50 years of his work in science, university teaching, literature and peace movement. On that occasion the Faculty of Science and the Rudjer Boskovic Institute in Zagreb organized a modest symposium, named From Theoretical Physics to Philosophy of Science and Peace, held on October 11, 1990, and dedicated to him and his achievements. Proceedings of the Symposium, together with the scientific papers of Professor Supek's pupils, are the subject matter of this number of Fizika A (vol. 1, no. 1) and of Fizika B (also vol. 1, no. 1). The two numbers represent the festschrift edition, which is offered as a small token of gratitude for all Professor Supek did for us during the past half century.

Ivan Supek was born in Zagreb in 1915, studied theoretical physics and philosophy in Zagreb, Zürich, Paris, Leipzig and Cambridge. He got his Ph. D. in physics in 1940 in Heisenberg's seminary in Leipzig. After returning to Zagreb, he promoted the unity of science, and in particular, the impact of the nuclear physics. He founded the Ruđer Bošković Institute, today the largest Croatian multidisciplinary research center. In the same spirit, he created the multidisciplinary periodical Encyclopedia Moderna. As the Rector of the University of Zagreb, he founded the Interuniversity Centre Dubrovnik – a unique institution comprehending more than 250 universities all over the world.

Very early Ivan Supek realized the dangers of nuclear weapons. His first public warning about the possibility of a total nuclear destruction was issued at the Congress of Croatian Writers, Artists and Scientists in Topusko in 1944. At that time of a raging war he had a vision of a new Croatia, that of science and of culture. His idealism and enthusiasm of those early days helped him to bring this vision into reality, working hard and gradually. He actively joined the world Pugwash movement from its very beginning, he brought it to full swing in our intelectual corpus, and intensively fought for peace and disarmament.

At the Faculty of Science and Mathematics of the Zagreb University he created the first Croatian school of theoretical physics by carefully choosing his coworkers and pupils. He had a strong influence in many sectors of life and he used it to promote the fundamental research, barring at the same time the technological primitivism.

Besides the research work in physics, mostly solid state theory, Ivan Supek was also engaged in philosophy and philosophy of science. Having witnessed the rise of the quantum mechanics and in its light of a new picture of the world, Ivan Supek followed the lines of philosophy of N. Bohr and W. Heisenberg. Occasionally he would say he has been sometimes more heisenbergian than Heisenberg himself. The results of these activities are published in numerous papers, books and textbooks.

As a writer, witness of his time, Ivan Supek wrote several plays and novels, expressing in them his concerns, disappointments, fears and hopes. He bridged very successfully the gap between science and literature, brought to our attention many great names of Croatian science from the past times and restored them properly as the history requires.