

THE EARLY DAYS OF MODERN THEORETICAL PHYSICS IN ZAGREB

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When after the war I took the Chair of Theoretical Physics at the University of Zagreb, nobody was there except a few old books; but, fortunately, some very gifted students attended my lectures on quantum theory, among them Glaser, Jakšić, Alaga, Babić-Gjalski. So in the year 1947 it was possible to create a theoretical seminar in which also Professor Blanuša and assistant of Applied Mathematics Janković took part. The seminar was devoted to problems that had been investigated in Heisenberg's institute in Leipzig until the early 1941, when I was imprisoned by the Gestapo and ceased with my postdoctoral work there. The most mathematically gifted of all, Glaser got the task in general field theory, Jakšić in meson theory, Babić-Gjalski in quantum electrodynamics and Alaga in beta-decay and weak nuclear force. All of them finished their first work in two years and continued research in given directions.

In May 1950 the Federal Government entrusted me with the building of an institute for atomic physics, which I enlarged to chemistry, electronics and molecular biology, and named it after Roger Bosovich. Having now money, I was able to send a lot of young people abroad, and so Alaga went to Professor Niels Bohr in Copenhagen. There he continued to work on the structure of atomic nuclei. Since the experimental physics was underdeveloped, I sent a new generation of theoretical physicists after graduation to distinguished laboratories, and our loss had been awarded by a lot of good experimentalists, such as Ilakovac, Knapp, Petravić, Leontić, Živković, Šlaus, Cindro, who found their theoretical education very useful, and some of them coworked later with Alaga.

When Glaser left for CERN and I passed completely to the literature and philosophy of science, Gaja Alaga took over the Department of Theoretical Physics at the Ruđer Bošković Institute and my chair at the Faculty of Science. His deep knowledge and enthusiasm essentially advanced the development of physics in our country, in spite of less favourable circumstances. He was always prepared to sacrifice the time of his own research to the education of young people and general goals. His mild character saved him from violent confrontations when his firm convictions came in conflict with adherents of ideological dogmatism.

Remembering the first theoretical group in Zagreb, I am particularly touched with the deep friendship and the spirit of collaboration among young people. Alaga contributed much to the young community which searched for the truth in spite of postwar times. I could only wish that this generous spirit would not die with the too early deceased Babić-Gjalski, Glaser and Alaga.