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Biography of Sergio De Benedetti

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Bio – **SERGIO DEBENEDETTI**

Sergio DeBenedetti was born in Florence, Italy and obtained his PhD in physics there in 1933. When the Fascist government expelled Jewish citizens from university positions (and from all government positions), he left Italy and went to Paris. There he obtained a fellowship to work at the Curie Labs. As the Nazis entered Paris in 1940, he left the city on a bicycle, eventually reaching the US by way of Portugal.

In the US, DeBenedetti found work as a physicist with the assistance of colleagues who had known him in Italy and through his research and publications on cosmic rays. He first worked at the Bartol Labs in Philadelphia and then as a teacher for Army Air Force recruits at Kenyon College (Ohio). He worked briefly on the Manhattan Project in Dayton, Ohio assisting with work to develop the trigger apparatus for the atomic bomb.

After the war, DeBenedetti joined the faculty of Carnegie Institute of Technology (now Carnegie Mellon University) and taught and conducted experimental research there until his retirement in 1984. Dr. DeBenedetti taught graduate courses in quantum mechanics and published extensively on the results of his experiments in particle physics. He wrote the textbook *Nuclear Interactions*. In addition to teaching physics, DeBenedetti was active in university affairs, becoming the first president of the Faculty Senate at Carnegie Mellon. He also re-organized and revived the local chapter of the Federation of Atomic Scientists and served as its president.

Politically, DeBenedetti believed that scientists had a responsibility to see that their products were used for the betterment of society. Thus, he had second thoughts about his work on the atomic bomb, a weapon "which we thought could defend democracy and which we now know can destroy the world." He was actively opposed to the wartime use of nuclear power and he was instrumental in the formation of the Pittsburgh Chapter of the Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy. He wrote and lobbied extensively on the subject of arms control.

On a more positive note, he was interested in promoting science and the scientific outlook. For instance, he organized the public showing of "The Ascent of Man," a film series based on the Bronowski book by the same name, and brought together panels of speakers for discussions following each showing.

DeBenedetti was married to Emma Falco, also a refugee from the Italian racial laws. The couple had three children. DeBenedetti died at his winter home in Florida in 1994.