

Robert R. Davis and *Physics Today*



Photo by Heka

This is the last issue for which Robert R. Davis serves as editor of *Physics Today*. This factual statement says much, but leaves unsaid a great deal more. Bob took the helm of PT in November 1950 during very unsettled times. There was reason to ask, "Could *Physics Today* survive?" It was slim in size. A few physicists resented openly the action of the American Institute of Physics in initiating a physics journal which they thought must necessarily be beneath their dignity to read. Financial difficulties intensified their misgivings. Advertising was slow in coming, experiments in obtaining subscription income were not always successful, and the wolf was often at the door. Yet the AIP officers and Governing Board had staunch faith. They knew that if the AIP were to be more than a paper organization, some medium of communication among *all* physicists had to be kept alive.

Such was the situation when Bob Davis took over in 1950. His task was not an easy one. The aim of PT had been set forth clearly by Henry A. Barton in the first issue in May 1948. PT was to be "a readable report and discussion of what concerns physics and physicists—today". It was to assist in achieving for physicists what Gaylord P. Harnwell had called "A More Perfect Union". The problem of the editor was expressed succinctly by John R. Pierce: "*Physics Today* must compete for attention. It will say something to physicists only if the physicist who samples it finds that he enjoys it."

Bob Davis met these challenges squarely with notable skill and devotion. For him, the day began early and lasted until the wee, small hours of the night. Fortunately, he had at that time as his able editorial assistant his wife, Regula, who was affectionately known as "Heka" by their growing circle of physicist friends. Bob brought to PT unusually high standards of clear and precise prose. He would reject anything which did not have solid content, or which was not newsworthy. If a paper was not clearly and interestingly written, it had to be rewritten. In soliciting papers, he had an uncanny ability to pick out physicists who were at the forefront of physics research. It is a real compliment to his skill and tact that these distinguished physicists began writing for PT and submitting with

good grace to the innumerable editorial changes which Bob's keen sense of style required them to make. Their acquiescence soon turned to gratitude as their friends complimented them on their improved writing skill.

Bob's high standards began to pay off. In 1953, the AIP Governing Board was able to undertake to supply *Physics Today* to all members of the physics community at no additional cost either to the member societies or to their members. The attitude of physicists began to change. They looked forward eagerly to each new issue. As the number of physicists increased, the circulation went up. Advertisers found that their ads paid off. Higher advertising rates became justified and financial worries began to ease. Text pages increased in attractiveness and the journal grew thicker. In recent years, a major concern of Bob's was that the ever-increasing demand for advertising space should not swamp the text. In 1964, issues of PT of 140 pages were not uncommon and in that year advertising in PT contributed a net of \$237 000 to AIP for its services to physics. The entire cost of publishing PT over and above subscription income was \$192 000 for that year.

Thus, during the 15 years in which Bob Davis has been editor, *Physics Today* has grown from a small struggling journal to one of high stature, recognized throughout the world. Its circulation of over 45 000 copies exceeds that of any other physics journal. Our hats are off to Bob Davis. He will be greatly missed. We are sorry to see him go, but wish him well in any future undertaking.

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This page was prepared for this issue by Dr. Elmer Hutchisson, Director Emeritus of the American Institute of Physics, and the Editorial Advisory Board of *Physics Today*. Needless to say, it was one page not subject to editorial review.—EAW