

Hodes, the PT Washington man

Versatility is the key word when one describes the PHYSICS TODAY nontechnical reporter Bernard Hodes. His jobs have ranged from operating ships to operating typewriters, his hobbies from sketching to mountain climbing, and his writing from classical music to commodity trading. Around here he is mainly our man in Washington. He doesn't live there, but he keeps in touch by telephone and goes down and back on the shuttle once or twice a month. In fact he wrote every word in last year's "Physics and Government" department, which has now been absorbed in his larger department "State and Society."

Life started for Bernie in Richard Feynman's home town, the Rockaway section of New York City—that portion

that pushes farthest out into the sea from Long Island. The sea has always been dear to him. It called him to a stint in the maritime service, and even now he



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spends most summer weekends teaching his son and daughter to sail. The other sides of his character appeal more to his wife. She was a classics teacher when he married her and became a gourmet cook subsequently. Now that the children are big enough, she is taking up teaching again. Bernie's hobbies don't stop with sports and eating; they include chess, piano, violin, poetry and photography.

Schooling at Columbia included some physics courses, but, as he phrases it, he didn't "get married to it" until he came to PHYSICS TODAY in 1962. Meanwhile he had had writing jobs that applied his talents to antifriction bearings, classical music, commodities and helicopters. From his 1962 beginning (which makes him the "old man" on the staff) Bernie has served as the principal "people" reporter, handling such matters as "Societies and Awards," "Education," "Publications" and "Institute News." One of

his hobbies has made him staff photographer; during the last year he has taken about 150 pictures for PHYSICS TODAY and a dozen or more have appeared in print, for example the picture of Gloria Lubkin in my column last month.

When I interviewed him, I asked him which had been his most interesting stories. "Well," he said, "there have been the interviews with people like Herbert Hollomon, Herman Branson and Norman Ramsey. Then there was one about a congressional delegation and its influence on scientific legislation. That one was hot—too hot, in fact, to print."

Postwar breakthroughs

Our other Washington man, Dwight Gray, was in the other day and looked in, as he always does, at the space under the stairs where I hang my hat and keep my broom. He said that according to John T. Wilson, deputy director of the National Science Foundation, two great breakthroughs (breakthrough?) have happened since the second world war: Science discovered the treasury; then Congress discovered science.

The antilaw of gravity

I have just become a consultant to a legislator. He came in looking for advice, and, as often happens when all the editors are busy, he got sent to old Phimsy.

"We're going to repeal the law of gravity," he says.

"How's that?" I asked.

"It holds things down too much. It makes people feel they can't jump high enough or achieve greatness. We need less gravity and more levity."

"But why would you take it on yourself to repeal it?" I asked him. "Isn't that a job for physicists?"

"In a way, yes. But our state needs a little boost. We thought without gravity a lot of our underachievers would become overachievers, corn would grow tall and tourists would come to watch their stocks go up."

"But I'm afraid the law of gravity is

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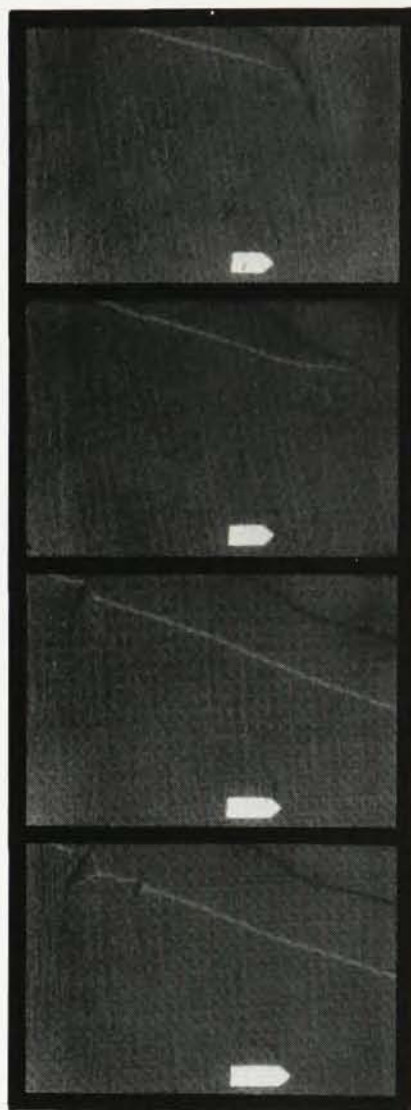
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true. You can't repeal it," I told him.

"Look, young fellow," he said, kind of angry, "discouragement isn't what we need. That kind of attitude we don't have to pay a consultant for. Tennessee, Mississippi and Arkansas have made evolution illegal because it might threaten public morality. The Russians promoted Lysenko because he strengthened Marxism. The leaders made Galileo recant because moons around Jupiter would create disorder. With a tradition like that behind us, why shouldn't we repeal gravity?"

"The Tennessee law said you couldn't *teach* evolution," I said mildly. I didn't want to lose my consultant job before I had shown the editors up by handling it successfully.

"OK. OK. So you don't repeal it; you forbid teaching it," says my legislative friend, looking happier. "That's the kind of advice we need. There's a principle involved here, and we want somebody to tell us how to manipulate the details while we get some purposes accomplished."

"Principle?" I asked.

"Of course," he replied. "Isn't it a principle to make use of science and to do good things for all mankind?"

"Well, yes, but..."

"Well, if you're going to do good things with science, it follows that you want to avoid doing bad things with science. Social engineering, we call it. We remind people of cleanliness to keep disease from spreading, and we want to take their minds off things that might hold 'em back—like gravity. Tennessee has been so successful with this antievolution law that they kept putting it back in force. Just a couple of months ago they gave it a vote of confidence and beat down a bunch of irresponsible upstarts who had started a move to repeal it. Then the upstarts got the upper hand and were successful in their efforts. I'm glad you called my attention to the way their law was worded—against teaching it. That's the kind of advice we need—that and the mathematical formulation."

I told him I'd have to work out the mathematical formulation and he should come back in two weeks. Now I'm waiting to get a little advice from one of the editors. □