
NEWS OF THE PROFESSION

CARL BECK, 1930–1979

Carl Beck, who died last year at the age of forty-nine, was a triple-threat political scientist: popular teacher, innovative scholar, and creative academic entrepreneur. Although his credentials were long and impressive, Carl's personality and character were the key to his success.

Carl always opposed stifling convention, social conformity, and authoritarian practice, and his appearance showed it: coatless, lock of hair dangling in his eyes, collar loosened, shirt tail flying as he roamed his administrative domain. He drove around for several years in a converted Checker cab, and in the winter he often wore a woolen Pittsburgh Steelers' stocking cap, black and yellow, with the peak protruding behind. If his appearance suggested a kind of fertile disorderliness, there never was lack of discipline in his personal relations or work. If he had enemies, I never knew one. He was as kind and thoughtful of the secretarial staff and students as he was of his administrative superiors, maybe more so. And he viewed his principal function as one of helping others achieve their academic and personal objectives.

Carl never cared about titles and rank, yet he was a driven man, professionally restless in a way that must have been a kind of personal curse. When he learned that his days might be numbered, Carl beat out ever more voraciously the stream of letters, memos, and proposals that flowed from his typewriter. What I suppose he sought was achievement, its substance not its form, for personal satisfaction and justification. If he had other material or professional ambitions, these were not readily apparent to his associates.

In recent years, Carl taught introductory courses in comparative politics, governments of Eastern Europe, and comparative communism. Often he gave public lectures that were erudite, graceful, and substantive, sandwiched in between meetings, trips, and a hectic workload. Over the years he attracted from his classes a strong following of younger scholars who directed the many projects his imagination spawned.

Carl Beck's scholarship was focused on the study of political elites through new techniques in information sciences. Central to that effort was his Archive of Political Elites in Eastern Europe, which was the basis of an array of monographs, articles, and chapters in books on this general theme. These interests led him in one direction into the study of comparative communism and in the other into new applications of the information sciences in political research. Salient here was the *Political Science Thesaurus* (1975) and the annual volumes of the *United States Political Science Documents* since 1975.

Carl's interest in university administration began in the mid-1960s, when the limited role of college teacher made him restless. The University of Pittsburgh had recently received a large grant in international studies from the Ford Foundation and the then vice chancellor for the disciplines, Charles Peake, picked Associate Professor Beck to lead the development of international studies in the Disciplines. After Wesley W. Posvar was made chancellor and combined the Disciplines and the Professions under the provost, Carl was appointed to head the new University Center for International Studies.

Crucial to Carl's institutional positioning in the earlier years was a two hundred and fifty thousand-dollar grant from the Carnegie Corporation for the study of comparative communism. The grant gave impetus and legitimacy to his various fund-raising activities and led to grants from many public and private agencies. Another

crucial aspect of his directorship was his close personal relations with East European leaders, particularly those in Poland. Many of the research and other projects he led dealt with comparative political themes or computer applications to international and national studies. To this end he founded, funded, and directed several groups at the University of Pittsburgh and elsewhere. And through it all, he was personally involved in hundreds of small grants and projects of university faculty members whose professional commitments were distant from his own.

His international reputation was formed in large measure by his memberships, conference participation, and committee assignments for such organizations as the International Research and Exchanges Board, the American Council on Education, the Foreign Area Fellowship Program, and UNESCO. Most important in this category was his role as executive director of the International Studies Association (1974–79).

Carl's legacy to his university and profession is a long record of achievement in helping others understand Eastern Europe, in devising new methods of identifying and manipulating social science data, and in providing informational and interpretative tools for social science research. Loose, generous, permissive in style, Carl Beck created an aura of excitement, partly because his interests were challenging and partly because he never shied away from risky ventures. Some will miss the teacher, the researcher, and the administrator ; most of all, we shall miss the man.

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