

SOSKICE, FRANK, Baron Stow Hill of Newport (1902-1979), barrister and Labour politician

Name: Frank Soskice
Date of birth: 1902
Date of death: 1979
Gender: Male
Occupation: barrister and Labour politician
Area of activity: Law; Politics, Government and Political Movements
Author: John Graham Jones

He was born on 23 July 1902, the son of the exiled Russian revolutionary journalist David Soskice who had emigrated to England in the 1890s. His father was one of the early Mensheviks who had hurried back to Russia in 1917 to join the revolution, but, when the Bolsheviks won, had had to escape back to Britain. His mother Juliet was the grand-daughter of the artist Ford Maddox Brown, the niece of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and the sister of Ford Maddox Ford. He was educated at St Paul's School and Balliol College, Oxford, where he graduated in classics and also studied Politics, Philosophy and Economics (MA, Oxon.). He studied law and was called to the bar from the Inner Temple in 1926. At the bar he became known as a respected authority on hire purchase law. He served in Africa and the Middle East in the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry throughout World War II. He was the Labour MP for Birkenhead East, 1945-50, previously considered a safe Liberal division, but his constituency was abolished before the February 1950 election. He then represented the Neepsend division of Sheffield, April 1950 (after the sitting MP Harry Morris had stood down in order to make way for Soskice) until 1955, when the Neepsend constituency was again abolished in a further re-distribution of parliamentary constituencies. Soskice then represented Newport, Monmouthshire, 1956 (by-election held on the death of Peter Freeman) until he retired from parliament in 1966. On his retirement from the House of Commons he was created Baron Stow Hill (life peerage). He had unsuccessfully contested the Bebington division in the general election of February 1950 and had unsuccessfully sought the Labour nomination for the Gorton division of Manchester for the general election of 1955. He was knighted and became a KC in 1945 and was sworn of the Privy Council in 1947.

He was Solicitor-General during the post-war Attlee administrations, August 1945-April 1951, and Attorney-General, April-October 1951. As Solicitor-General, Soskice was seen as an important advocate for the government within the House of Commons and his legal expertise proved to be invaluable. He knew well how to steer controversial legislation through stormy all-night sittings of the House of Commons. He was also briefly UK delegate to the United Nations General Assembly in 1950. He joined the shadow cabinet in 1952. He was a member of the PLP Parliamentary Committee, 1952-55 and 1956-64, and was opposition spokesman on Legal Affairs, 1957-64. His prospects had improved dramatically in 1955 with the election of his close friend Hugh Gaitskell to be the leader of the Labour Party in succession to Attlee, although Soskice did continue his legal practice as well. Soskice aligned himself closely with Gaitskell on Clause IV and the defence issues. The Conservative opposition had such a regard for him that in 1959 they intimated that Soskice, and he alone of the Labour MPs, could, if he wished, have the Speakership. But he turned down the offer. When Gaitskell died in 1963, some within the Labour Party wished to draft in Soskice as a compromise candidate for the party leadership. But Soskice, who was a strong supporter of George Brown, demurred.

He served as Home Secretary under Harold Wilson, October 1964-December 1965, and (relieved of his Home Office responsibilities) as Lord Privy Seal, December 1965-April 1966. As Home Secretary Soskice did not generally impress Harold Wilson - he was in poor health, and he botched the response to an electoral boundary change dispute in Northamptonshire and accepted weakening amendments to the Race Relations Act of 1965. He had, however, been responsible for the legislation which finally abolished the death penalty in the United Kingdom (except for treason), which is sometimes erroneously included with the **Roy Jenkins** reforms which followed. He was appointed treasurer of the Inner Temple in 1968. He had married in 1940 Susan Isabella, the daughter of William Cloudsley Hunter, and they had two sons. He practised from Harcourt Buildings, Temple, London. He died on 1 January 1979 and left an estate valued at £131,700.

Author

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Sources

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The Times, 16 November 1979

Further Reading

Wikipedia Article: "[Frank Soskice](#)"

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