

Snow Returns to Writing

London. Lord Snow's experience of ministerial-level politics in Britain is proving to be brief. Snow dealt himself out of the modest reshuffle Harold Wilson carried out after the solid Labour election victory of 31 March, so that he could get back to writing novels.

Snow, who had earlier been knighted for his service as a British civil service commissioner, was made a peer and deputy to Frank Cousins in the Ministry of Technology, which was created when the Wilson government first won office in October 1964.

The appointment of Snow was intended to symbolize the Wilson government's determination to emphasize technological advance and its willingness to use unconventional outsiders to give the government new vigor.

Snow's career as a spokesman in the House of Lords started auspiciously. His speeches were impressive, as were those of Lord Bowden, another Laborite recently elevated to the peerage, who left the Manchester College of Science and Technology to assume responsibility for higher education and research in the Department of Education and Science. They both made full use of their new platform to stress the need for a better climate for applied science and the modernization of industry.

But then, Lord Snow made a little mistake. There was a discussion in the House of Lords about secondary education. The main item being discussed was the Labour government's plan to abandon rigorous selection of children according to performance in tests administered at age 11 and to merge most secondary schools into general high schools called "comprehensives."

While Lord Snow defended this policy, a Tory peer interrupted to point

out that Lord Snow was sending his own son to Eton.

"In reply to your somewhat personal remarks," Lord Snow said, "it is perfectly simple. It seems to me that if you are living in a fairly prosperous home it is a mistake to educate your child differently from the mass of people you know socially."

This was frank, but not good politics. For one reason or another, very little was heard from Lord Snow after this exchange, although he made an excellent impression during his recent visit to the United States.

Lord Snow's departure was only one of several changes of personnel in technical departments of the British government announced by Prime Minister Wilson on 5 April.

The other deputy to Frank Cousins in the Ministry of Technology, Richard W. Marsh, left to become, at the age of 38, the youngest member of Wilson's cabinet. Marsh was named Minister of Power, which means that he will have responsibility not only for Labour's announced goal of nationalizing and streamlining the steel industry but also for the national energy policy. The excitement of this latter task was symbolized on the day the reshuffle was announced by the news that a second commercial source of natural gas had been found in the North Sea, this time by Shell Oil Company.

Assisting Marsh at the Ministry of Power will be one of the members of parliament most interested in science and technology—Jeremy Bray, 35. Bray has been an economic planner for both the chemical and the electronic industries, and has been chairman of the Labour Party committee on science, technology, and atomic energy.

Replacing Snow and Marsh at the Ministry of Technology will be two younger Labour members of the House of Commons. Economist Peter Shore, 41, was parliamentary private secretary to Wilson during the last parliament and also directed the research department of the Labour Party. Edmund Dell, 44, was active on the sales side of Imperial Chemical Industries and in Manchester city politics.

Like Cousins in Technology, most ministers with major roles in science and technology are keeping their jobs: Anthony Crosland in Education and Science, Denis Healey in Defence, and Fred Mulley in Aviation. Mulley replaced the much-respected Roy Jenkins when the latter moved up to Home Secretary earlier this year.

But lower down in the Department of Education and Science there is more movement. Reginald Prentice, 42, who took over responsibility for universities and research councils from Lord Bowden only last fall, has been named Minister of Public Building and Works. Prentice had moved up to Bowden's job from his earlier job as overseer of primary and secondary education after Bowden went back to Manchester College following differences with Crosland. To succeed Prentice, Edward moved up from supervision of primary and secondary education, which he had taken over from Prentice last fall. Taking Redhead's former post was Gordonwy Roberts.

The rapid turnover of political figures responsible for higher education and research means that no strong guide has been provided for them, since the minister, Crosland, has been preoccupied with planning for the comprehensive high schools. Although budgets for the Research Councils have been expanded handsomely, there has been a complete freeze on new university building contracts. Nonetheless, the postelection reshuffle is impressive: it has placed an important group of younger men in working-level government policy jobs affecting science and technology.

—V.K.McE.