

1921

1930

## KING AND SKELTON

The election of a Liberal government under William Lyon Mackenzie King in 1921 brought a change in the direction of Canadian foreign policy. Whereas Borden had sought to advance Canadian interests by playing an active role within the British Empire, King, alarmed by the domestic divisions created by the imperial connection during the First World War, was determined to obtain more room to manoeuvre and to seek greater autonomy for Canada.

Suspicious of Christie's close Conservative connections, King froze the legal adviser out of any substantive role in foreign policy

until he resigned in disgust in 1923. King also ignored the aging Joseph Pope, and cast about for someone who could build him a proper foreign ministry. He knew that he had found the right man as early as 1922 when he attended a lecture on "Canada and Foreign Policy" by O.D. Skelton, a political scientist (and Dean of Arts) at Queen's University. After serving as King's adviser at the Imperial Conference of 1923, and as a member of the Canadian delegation to the League of Nations in 1924, Skelton became under-secretary in 1925.

Skelton's first objective was to build a department that could function as a true foreign ministry and support the Prime Minister's priority to seek a more autonomous role for Canada abroad. As well, Skelton came to fill Christie's role as chief adviser on foreign affairs and, indeed, eventually became King's trusted confidant in all areas of government business. Both his capacity and his appetite for work were legendary.



<sup>11</sup> O.D. Skelton joined the Department in 1925 as its second under-secretary and set out to establish a professional foreign service. Here, Skelton (left) is shown en route to Europe in the early 1930s with one of his first recruits, the young Lester B. Pearson. (Source: Library and Archives Canada, PA-117595)

<sup>12</sup> Jean Désy and American George Warren at an International Labour Conference in Geneva, Switzerland. (Source: Library and Archives Canada, PA-182706)