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THE RETURN OF KING

King and Skelton quickly re-established their harmonious relationship when the Liberals returned to office in 1935. Despite his loyal service to Bennett, Skelton's own views on international affairs were closer to King's, though the Prime Minister, ever attuned to public opinion and his own predilections, drew back from the more extreme neutralist and anti-imperialist attitude of his under-secretary. As the spectre of war in Europe loomed larger with each of Hitler's triumphs, King never doubted that if war came, Canada would again be "at Britain's side."

Within the Department, Skelton's neutralism was shared by some, though not all, of his officers. But the most important fact shaping Canadian foreign policy during the final few years of peace was King's determination that, though he would continue to rely on Skelton's advice, the Prime Minister would "lead and not be controlled."

As the Depression eased in the late 1930s, Skelton hoped to expand the Department's representation in Europe, across the emerging Commonwealth, and throughout Latin America. But King and his Cabinet were unenthusiastic about increased spending on diplomatic posts. As the threat of war stalked Europe and Asia, the Prime Minister worried too about being drawn into embarrassing situations abroad that might generate domestic divisions and endanger Canada's national unity. Although a minister was appointed to Belgium in 1938, with dual accreditation to the Netherlands, expansion remained slow.

Skelton was more successful on other fronts. He managed to secure the appointment of career foreign-service officers as heads of post, which was essential to his concept of a truly professional and modern foreign service. By 1939, only London and Washington continued to be headed by political appointees.



21 Prime Minister Mackenzie King, leaving the Chancellery in Berlin on June 29, 1937, during his unsuccessful peace mission to Nazi Germany. (Source: Presse Illustrationen Hoffman, Library and Archives Canada, PA-119008)