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1935

THE BENNETT YEARS

The election of a Conservative government under R.B. Bennett in 1930 might have spelled trouble for Skelton and his Department. The Conservatives remained more attached to Britain and notions of imperial unity than either Skelton or King. Indeed, Bennett had sharply criticized the opening of the new legations, which he believed weakened the diplomatic unity of the British Empire. What Canada needed abroad, the new Prime Minister declared as the Great Depression

of the 1930s set in, was trade commissioners, not diplomats. As fiercely partisan as King, Bennett entered office determined to get rid of Skelton. However, he soon discovered that Skelton was indispensable and retained him in his position, an outcome made possible by Skelton's impeccably non-partisan conduct.

Nevertheless, the Department could not escape the effects of the Depression. The government's priorities obviously had to be



¹⁸ Prime Minister Bennett drew on the Department's economists for help expanding Canada's external trade during the Depression of the 1930s. Bennett (middle) is shown here greeting Britain's Lord President of the Council, Stanley Baldwin (left), and Neville Chamberlain (right), chancellor of the exchequer. (Source: Library and Archives Canada, C-81448)