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The Role of the Government in the Abdication Crisis of 1936

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The death of King George V on 20 January 1936 was a fateful event for the British nation. The people of England had lost their beloved monarch, and now their country was entering a state of crisis through King Edward VIII's accession to the throne. The new king differed from his paternal predecessor in his attitude concerning the monarchy. Edward's rejection of court life was made manifest in the abdication crisis of 1936 in which the king sought marriage with an American divorcée named Wallis Simpson. The National Government was already opposed to the conduct of King Edward and viewed his marriage plan as a transgression of traditional monarchical value. The Conservative Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin championed the cause to uphold tradition and presented Edward with the choice between his throne and his love interest. Baldwin received not only political support from the House of Commons and the governments of the Dominions, but also religious support from the Archbishop of Canterbury. He conducted his business by forming alliances with the press and withholding substantial information from the king and the public. Under the leadership of Stanley Baldwin, the National Government overpowered King Edward VIII and created a situation in which abdication became inevitable.

King Edward had never grown accustomed to the rigidity of court life. As Prince of Wales, he preferred his leisure activities of hunting, golfing, and going out to nightclubs to his princely duties, and his group of friends was deemed questionable for the company of a monarch. The Prince did not maintain a boundary between his official public life and his active private life, and he allowed his relationship with women to dominate his existence.¹ Beginning with his romance with Mrs. Freda Dudley Ward,

¹ Philip Ziegler, *King Edward VIII* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991), 192.

Edward engaged in a succession of affairs with married women. In 1932 King George V asked his son if he would prefer to have a stable marriage. As a thirty-seven-year-old man destined to become the next king, Prince Edward did desire a nuptial union, but his propensity to fall in love with married women prevented its fulfillment.² After his affair with Mrs. Dudley Ward, he began a relationship with Thelma, Viscountess Furness. When Lady Furness ventured to the United States in January 1934, she asked her friend Wallis Warfield Simpson to look after Prince Edward in her absence. Upon her return, Lady Furness found herself replaced by this married American aristocrat. Although it initially appeared to be another ordinary affair, Edward's relationship with Wallis Simpson would eventually impact his future and the future of the British Crown.

Mrs. Simpson proved to hold great influence over Edward from the inception of their relationship. Many people, including Lady Furness, believed that Edward's infatuation stemmed from Mrs. Simpson's ability to cure his sexual deficiencies. Despite the imaginative speculations offered by Edward's acquaintances, Mrs. Simpson's personality, rather than her sexual manipulation, was her most alluring quality to the Prince.³ Although most British officials did not approve of this liaison, they did not find it necessary to intervene while Edward still held the title of Prince of Wales. This title changed on 20 January 1936, as the Prince became King Edward VIII upon the death of his father. An elevated sense of duty and gravity, however, did not accompany his elevated position, and his relationship with Mrs. Simpson continued to flourish throughout the beginning of his reign. After the funeral of King George V, two royal advisers had anticipatively alerted Stanley Baldwin of the new king's intentions to marry

² Ibid., 173.

³ Ibid., 205.

Mrs. Simpson.⁴ Although Clive Wigram, 1st Baron Wigram and Sir Lionel Halsey had urged Baldwin to intervene in this advancing relationship, the Prime Minister refused to do so. On 20 October, he met with the King and merely asked that he attempt to conduct his affair in a more discrete manner, warning the King of the possibility of bombardment from the press. He suggested the idea of postponing a divorce and sending Mrs. Simpson abroad for six months, but he did not explicitly suggest the impossibility of a marriage with her.⁵ Baldwin could not fully intercede in this private affair of the monarch while Wallis remained married to her husband.

The attitude of the Government towards this formerly personal matter changed on 27 October when Mrs. Simpson obtained a decree *nisi* of divorce in her hearing at the Ipswich Assizes. This is the first decree of two required to obtain a divorce under the English law. Wallis would not be able to receive the decree absolute until six months had passed, rendering her ineligible to remarry until April 1937. Despite the delay in time, the fact remained that Mrs. Simpson would eventually be emancipated from her marriage and free to marry the King. Stanley Baldwin, who had initially distanced himself from entanglement in this affair, could no longer remain a spectator when a marriage between King Edward VIII and Mrs. Wallis Simpson became a possibility. Many British aristocrats were dismayed by Mrs. Simpson's American nationality and her social inferiority, but these were not the principal concerns of the Government.⁶ Civil divorce

⁴ Max Aitken, Lord Beaverbrook, *The Abdication of King Edward VIII* (New York: Athenum, 1966), 13.

⁵ H.G.C. Matthew, "Edward VIII," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. Lawrence Goldman (January 2011), accessed April 18, 2015, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/31061>.

⁶ Susan Williams, *The People's King: The True Story of the Abdication* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 32.

had been legal in England since 1858, and the innocent party of any divorce could remarry within the Church of England. This practice, although lawful, received widespread disapproval from the British ruling class. Opposition from the Government arose when Edward revealed his intention to marry a divorcée. This aberration from tradition symbolized a deterioration of the values that had defined the monarchy. Divorce was seen as a social stigma and would be especially harmful to the reputation of the King.⁷ Baldwin had described the Crown as the symbol of “national allegiance, continuity, cohesion, and stability,” which King Edward’s matrimonial desires now threatened.⁸ In an attempt to uphold the traditions of his country, Stanley Baldwin determined that his intervention could no longer be postponed.

When Baldwin assumed his role in what would become the abdication crisis, he did not act alone, but relied on his alliances with several influential members of society. As Private Secretary to the Sovereign, Alec Hardinge was concerned about King Edward’s relationship with Mrs. Simpson. He possessed a strong belief that there was a correct way and an incorrect way of conducting oneself and that the correct way was rooted in traditional values.⁹ Hardinge did not establish a good rapport with the King and urged Baldwin to intervene as the affair with Mrs. Simpson rapidly escalated. This plea resulted in Baldwin’s inconsequential meeting with King Edward on 20 October. It was Hardinge’s next act of intervention that provoked significant reactions. On 13 November, Edward received a letter from Hardinge marked “urgent and confidential.” Hardinge

⁷ A.J.P. Taylor, *English History 1914-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), 399.

⁸ Philip Williamson, *Stanley Baldwin: Conservative Leadership and National Values* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 326.

⁹ Williams, *The People’s King*, 57.

informed the King that members of the Government were meeting to discuss the current situation regarding Mrs. Simpson and that the press would not continue remain silent about this matter. He warned him of the possibility of resignation by the Government and asserted that there was no chance of formation of an alternative government. Hardinge concluded his letter with an entreaty, insisting that the only proper action would be “for Mrs. Simpson to go abroad without further delay.”¹⁰ Edward suspected that this letter was a direct result of Hardinge’s communication with Baldwin.¹¹ The King’s suppositions were correct, as Hardinge had conspired with Baldwin and several others throughout the drafting of the letter. On 7 November, Sir Warren Fisher, Permanent Under-Secretary at the Treasury and Head of the Civil Service, disclosed to Neville Chamberlain, the current Chancellor of the Exchequer, that Hardinge proposed the idea of urging the King to end his relationship with Mrs. Simpson in a letter signed by Baldwin rather than imposing an ultimatum.¹² In collaboration with several Ministers and civil officials, Hardinge composed a letter to the King incorporating the casual nature of the first draft with the urgent tone of the second. He also included the contents of the memorandum written by the Parliamentary Counsel discussing the possible resignation of the Government. Although the final draft bore only the signature of Hardinge, it was the true product of the conspiracy of several men.¹³ Baldwin had already achieved a solid network of support at this early stage in the crisis.

¹⁰ Quoted in Edward, Duke of Windsor, *A King’s Story* (New York: Putnam, 1951), 327.

¹¹ Windsor, *A King’s Story*, 328.

¹² Warren Fisher to Neville Chamberlain, 7 November 1936. Cited in Williams, *The People’s King*, 71.

¹³ Williams, *The People’s King*, 72.

Assured of his colleagues' approval, Stanley Baldwin began to exercise greater influence in this episode as he guided the unfolding course of events. After receiving the letter from Alec Hardinge, King Edward called him on 16 November and asked to have a meeting with Baldwin, Chamberlain, Viscount Halifax, and his personal friends, Sir Samuel Hoare and Duff Cooper. Baldwin denied the possibility of this meeting, contending that a select few members of the Cabinet should not have the privilege of discussing a matter before its formal proposal to the entire Cabinet. Baldwin came to Buckingham Palace alone at 6:30 that evening and told the King that many members of the Cabinet did not approve of a marriage between a king and a divorced woman. He claimed to have a clear understanding of the views of the British people and believed that they possessed similar disapproval of such a marriage. In his memoirs, Edward describes Baldwin throughout this meeting as "the Gallup poll incarnate."¹⁴ After listening to Baldwin, King Edward imparted his prevailing desire to marry Mrs. Simpson and stated his willingness to relinquish the throne if he could not dually be the king and the husband of Wallis. Distrustful of his own Private Secretary, Edward sought the counsel of Samuel Hoare and Duff Cooper. Hoare did not think that Edward would be able to change the opinion of the Government, while Mr. Cooper believed that Edward could possibly achieve success if he would abandon the question for now and return to it after the finalization of Mrs. Simpson's divorce proceedings.¹⁵ Although he was the central figure in this scene, the King was gradually losing control of his future.

Despite the lack of compelling advice from Edward's own confidants, a novel solution to came to Mrs. Simpson through the recommendation of Esmond Harmsworth,

¹⁴ Windsor, *A King's Story*, 331.

¹⁵ Windsor, *A King's Story*, 340.

2nd Viscount Rothermere. He suggested to her that she and Edward adopt the plan to petition for a morganatic marriage. In this legal union, a common woman may marry a royal man without inheriting his rank of nobility, and their children do not fall into the royal line of succession. After his initial reluctance to embrace this strategy, King Edward sent Lord Rothermere to discuss the matter with the Prime Minister on his behalf. Rothermere described Baldwin's initial reaction as "surprised, interested, and noncommittal."¹⁶ Seeking a more direct response, Edward met personally with Baldwin on 25 November and expressed his interest in a morganatic marriage. Baldwin was instantly repelled by this proposal because of its source, Lord Rothermere, whom he described as "a disgustingly conceited fellow and yet curiously timid at heart" whose newspaper was "the worst judge in England of what the people were thinking."¹⁷ Generally opposed to the idea, Baldwin told the King that the Government would never pass legislation for a morganatic marriage. Unwilling to concede, King Edward gave Baldwin his permission to present the proposal both to the British Cabinet and to all the Dominion Cabinets. At that moment, the King relinquished his control and surrendered his future to the Government.¹⁸ When the prime minister advises the king, the king is bound to accept the decision of the Government. If he refuses to do so, the Government is wont to resign, and a general election will likely ensue. Subject to the judgment of the ministers, King Edward now awaited news of his own fate.

In accordance with constitutional proceedings, Stanley Baldwin brought the morganatic marriage proposal to the British Government. On 24 November, Baldwin had

¹⁶ Ibid., 342.

¹⁷ From Monica Baldwin's diary. Quoted in Ziegler, *King Edward VIII*, 263.

¹⁸ Williams, *The People's King*, 91.

surreptitiously conferred with the three members of the opposition who could potentially form an alternative government, Clement Attlee, the Leader of the Opposition, Sir Archibald Sinclair, the Leader of the Liberal Party, and Winston Churchill. Sinclair and Attlee assured Baldwin that their loyalty would remain with the Government even if the King refused his advice. Although Baldwin was unsure about the Labour Party, Attlee asserted that Labour voters would not regard a morganatic marriage favorably. Churchill, who supported the King's proposal to marry Mrs. Simpson, maintained that he would support the Government despite his differing opinion. Satisfied with the pledges of these figures, Baldwin brought the matter before the Cabinet for the first time on 27 November. With the exception of the King's friend Duff Cooper, every member of the Cabinet agreed with Baldwin in his objection to a morganatic marriage. Neville Chamberlain especially voiced his antipathy towards the proposal. Two days before the meeting, he had confided to his journal that such a marriage "wd be the prelude to the further step of making Mrs S Queen with full rights."¹⁹ The continually increasing influence of Stanley Baldwin had reached its climax on the home front, as he had garnered overwhelming support from the National Government in opposition to the morganatic marriage of King Edward and Wallis Simpson.

Confident in a secure domestic response, Baldwin subsequently approached the Dominion Governments with the same question regarding the hypothetical marriage of the King. The Dominions had become independent and had gained their own national governments under the Statute of Westminster. As the final legal connection between England and the Dominions, the king possessed the sole authority to consult their

¹⁹ From the Neville Chamberlain diary, 25 Nov 1936. Quoted in Ziegler, *King Edward VIII*, 264.

Governments. When Edward had given his permission to Baldwin to pursue the question of a morganatic marriage, he had simultaneously granted his permission to approach the leaders of the Dominions.²⁰ Baldwin, Chamberlain, Hoare, John Simon, and Sir Thomas Inskip helped the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, Malcolm MacDonald, to compose telegrams addressed to the Dominions. Baldwin sent the final drafts to the Prime Ministers of Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa on 28 November, and Sir Harry Batterbee personally delivered a letter to the Irish Free State. King Edward was unaware of these overseas consultations although he possessed the right to be informed of matters discussed at Cabinet meetings.²¹ In the telegrams, Baldwin explained the situation to the Dominions and presented two possible choices. The King could marry Mrs. Simpson, and she could acquire the title of Queen, or a morganatic marriage could occur in which Mrs. Simpson would be the lawfully wedded wife of the King without gaining his royal status.²² Baldwin asked the Dominion leaders for their initial thoughts and reactions and told them that he would ask them to consult their Cabinets at a later date. Lord Beaverbrook, a newspaper magnate and a friend of King Edward, was infuriated that the telegrams had not been shown to the King before they were sent out, claiming that Baldwin had manipulated his language to present abdication in a favorable manner.²³ Baldwin had inserted his own opinion into the telegrams, claiming that “neither the Parliament nor the great majority of the public in all parties here should or would

²⁰ Windsor, *A King's Story*, 344.

²¹ Williams, *The People's King*, 96.

²² Telegram “from Prime Minister [of Britain] for Prime Minister [of the Dominions]”, 28 November 1936. Cited in Williams, *The People's King*, 96.

²³ Ziegler, *King Edward VIII*, 265.

accept such a plan.”²⁴ The Prime Minister of Australia, Joseph Lyons, pledged his full support to Baldwin in his telegram, stating that his Government would not welcome Mrs. Simpson as Queen or Consort.²⁵ The Canadian Prime Minister, William Lyon Mackenzie King, voiced similar disapproval the King’s possible marriage to Mrs. Simpson. He emphasized his belief that Edward’s abdication would be the “honourable and right course for the King to pursue” only if it was a voluntary act, not a decision forced by the Government.²⁶ The South African Prime Minister considered the abdication the lesser of two evils, while the Prime Minister of New Zealand justified the possibility of a morganatic marriage on the basis of the King’s popularity. In the Irish Free State, Batterbee persuaded Prime Minister Eamon de Valera that abdication was the only plausible choice.²⁷ On 2 December, Baldwin met with the King at Fort Belvedere to discuss the replies of the Dominions. He did not fully disclose the details of each telegram, simply asserting that the Dominion Governments would not support a morganatic marriage between the King and Mrs. Simpson. Shortly before his death in 1947, Baldwin revealed his belief that his correspondence with the Dominion Prime Ministers was a decisive factor in the results of the abdication crisis.²⁸ At this stage in the crisis, Baldwin had acquired support from his own National Government and from the Prime Ministers of the Dominions, and the prospect of the King’s abdication was becoming increasingly possible.

²⁴ Telegram “from Prime Minister [of Britain] for Prime Minister [of the Dominions]”, 28 November 1936. Cited in Williams, *The People’s King*, 97.

²⁵ 5 Dec 1936. Quoted in Ziegler, *King Edward VIII*, 265.

²⁶ Telegram “for Prime Minister [of Canada] to Prime Minister [of Britain]”. 30 November 1936. Quoted in Williams, *The People’s King*, 101.

²⁷ Williams, *The People’s King*, 102.

²⁸ John Gilbert Lockhart. *Cosmo Gordon Lang* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1949), 404.

While the Prime Ministers of five Commonwealth countries had become aware of the developing crisis, the people of England remained ignorant of the events unfolding in their own country. The American press, however, had been reporting the relationship between the King and Mrs. Simpson from the time of their cruise aboard the luxury yacht *Nahlin* in August. The 31 August 1936 edition of *Time* magazine informed readers that the “notably lugubrious” King “visibly expands in such company as that of Mrs. Simpson, ‘a real wisecracking American.’”²⁹ *The New York Times* devoted a front-page article to Mrs. Simpson’s divorce case on 16 October, mentioning that “she recently assisted the King in planning the gardens at his country home.”³⁰ Meanwhile in the King’s own country, the press had remained silent as a result of a “gentleman’s agreement” between the leading newspaper proprietors. At the start of Mrs. Simpson’s divorce proceedings, Edward had summoned Lord Beaverbrook, owner of the *Daily Express* and the *Evening Standard*, to Buckingham Palace to ask for limited publicity about the divorce without any hint of sensationalism.³¹ While the American press erupted with news about the King and Mrs. Simpson throughout the months leading up to the abdication, the British newspapers honored this agreement until early December.

A.W.F. Blunt, the Bishop of Bradford had written a sermon that he was due to give at the Diocesan Conference in Bradford on 1 December. Disturbed by the King’s lack of attention to religion as the Supreme Governor of the Church of England, Blunt spoke of Edward’s need for divine grace. Blunt had learned of the controversy over Mrs.

²⁹ "Happy King," *Time* 28, no. 9 (August 31, 1936): 22, *Academic Search Complete, EBSCOhost*, accessed April 19, 2015.

³⁰ "Mrs. Simpson Asks Divorce," *New York Times* (October 15, 1936): 1, *ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times*, accessed April 19, 2015.

³¹ Windsor, *A King’s Story*, 317.

Simpson a few days before the conference, but he decided not to change his speech with the expectation that his words would not be misinterpreted.³² On 2 December, the British newspapers began to publish reports of Blunt's speech, and the silence of the press was broken. Baldwin's Parliamentary Private Secretary, Tom Dugdale, noted the convenience of the way in which this affair entered the public sphere as "purely religious, non-political, non-sectarian—just SB's luck!"³³ The Bishop of Bradford had unintentionally given permission to the British press to speak freely about this formerly concealed subject.

Geoffrey Dawson, the owner of *The Times*, was especially eager to broach the topic of the King's crisis. Dawson was a friend of Stanley Baldwin and met with him twice on 2 December in order to determine the best approach to this subject. Dawson recorded in his diary that the idea of the King's marriage to Mrs. Simpson must be seen "only as unthinkable."³⁴ Unlike the journalists in America, the British presented the subject as a governmental issue rather than a human-interest piece. In this approach, the English public's first view of the affair was mixed with criticism.³⁵ *The Times* published an article in support of the Government on 4 December. Although many had accused Parliament of deciding Edward's fate for him, *The Times* upheld the view that Edward has initiated the idea of the marriage proposal and that the Ministers were only performing their duty in examining the matter further. The article stated, "They have

³² Ziegler, *King Edward VIII*, 267.

³³ From the diary of Nancy Dugdale. Quoted in Williams, *The People's King*, 106.

³⁴ Entry for 2 December 1936, Geoffrey Dawson, *Abdication Diary*. Quoted in Williams, *The People's King*, 115.

³⁵ Fred S. Siebert, "The Press and the British Constitutional Crisis," *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 1, no. 4 (October 1937): 123, *JSTOR*, accessed April 18, 2015, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2745185>.

been asked a question and have given their answer.”³⁶ Throughout this affair, Dawson met frequently with both Baldwin and Hardinge, and the King began to view him as his archenemy.³⁷ Lord Beaverbrook claimed that Baldwin associated himself with several newspapers in addition to *The Times* and approached figures such as Lord Kemsley, the owner of *The Sunday Times*, with direct requests for alliances.³⁸ Despite these efforts of Baldwin, most newspapers expressed their favor of the King. Finally aware of the crisis rising in their country, the majority of British people united in support of the King.

Reports concerning the King were ubiquitous in the pages of the London press in December, but no comments from the King himself had been publicized. On 3 December, King Edward asked Baldwin for permission to deliver a radio broadcast to the British people. He believed that a public address was the only way to ensure widespread public support.³⁹ The King’s advisers warned him that Baldwin would probably prohibit the speech and instructed him not to give a copy to the Prime Minister. When the King made his petition, Baldwin replied that he would have to consult the Cabinet and the Dominion Governments before making a decision. After he had somehow secured a copy of Edward’s proposed speech, Baldwin read it to the Cabinet and sent it in a telegram to the Dominions. In an emotional appeal to the public, Edward had written, “I am so firmly resolved to marry the woman I love, when she is free to marry me.”⁴⁰ On 4 December, the Cabinet agreed to prohibit the King from delivering this speech. Baldwin explained to

³⁶ “The King and a Crisis,” *The Times* (4 December 1936): 16, *The Times Digital Archive*, accessed April 19, 2015.

³⁷ Ziegler, *King Edward VIII*, 268.

³⁸ Beaverbrook, *The Abdication of King Edward VIII*, 66.

³⁹ Windsor, *A King’s Story*, 357.

⁴⁰ Copy of the broadcast proposed by the King. Quoted in Williams, *The People’s King*, 121.

Edward that the King could not give a public address without the advice of the Government, adding that such a speech had the potential to divide the British people. Ramsay MacDonald of the Labour Party denounced it as “a plausible and blatant attempt to get the country and Empire to throw over his ministers.”⁴¹ King Edward had been overruled once again by the decisions of the Government.

Although Baldwin prevented the King from delivering his speech, he did agree that Edward could freely seek the counsel of Winston Churchill. The Prime Minister came to regret this concession, as Churchill became a vociferous advocate for the King.⁴² Churchill was adamant that a constitutional issue did not presently exist between the King and the Government since Mrs. Simpson’s divorce had not been finalized. He told Baldwin that the King should not be forced to make a decision about his future in his weakened state, but Baldwin responded that the King’s mind had never been clearer. Factions began to form in Parliament as the Ministers adopted different opinions regarding the King. There was concern amongst the Ministers that the group led by Churchill would resign from the Government and form a King’s party. Fearing that Edward would decide to retain the throne, Baldwin promised the King that he would attempt to pass a corollary to the Abdication Bill, which would expedite the divorce proceedings of Mrs. Simpson. Duff Cooper questioned how the Government could refuse to pass legislation for a morganatic marriage but could instead pass a bill “to legalize adultery so as to expedite his departure.”⁴³ Baldwin quickly decided to dismiss this plan. He had spoken to the House of Commons on the afternoon of 4 December and

⁴¹ From the Ramsay MacDonald diary, 4 Dec 1936. Quoted in Ziegler, *King Edward VIII*, 274.

⁴² Ziegler, *King Edward VIII*, 274.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 276.

proclaimed that the Royal Marriages Act of 1772, which gave the King power to prohibit any royal marriage, did not apply to the King himself. Baldwin stated that the wife of the King would necessarily become the Queen without the proper legislation, which the Government would not introduce. Over the weekend of 5-6 December, the attitude in the House of Commons changed.⁴⁴ Churchill was the only remaining supporter of the King's party, and his plea for a delay in the decision of Edward's marriage was met with opposition. The members of Parliament were becoming disturbed by the idea that the King was conflicted between "his duty to the Throne and his affection for a second-rate woman."⁴⁵

On 7 December, Mrs. Simpson had told the press that she was willing to relinquish her relationship with Edward in an effort to avoid abdication. In Baldwin's only moment of fear throughout the entire affair, he wrote telegrams to the Dominions voicing his doubt of Mrs. Simpson's declaration.⁴⁶ He also sent her solicitor, Theodore Goddard, to Mrs. Simpson's location in France. Goddard and Mrs. Simpson telephoned Edward together, who declared that he had already decided to abdicate. On 8 December, Baldwin brought his suitcase to Fort Belvedere when he met with the King, prepared to stay overnight in order to reach a final decision. Baldwin's task did not require much effort, as only a radical transformation within the King could have allowed him to change his position.⁴⁷ In the final action of the crisis, King Edward and his brothers signed the Instrument of Abdication on 10 December 1936. Baldwin delivered a speech to the House of Commons on this same day speaking kindly and respectfully of the King. He

⁴⁴ Ibid., 278.

⁴⁵ From the Leo Amery diary, 7 Dec 1936. Quoted in Ziegler, *King Edward VIII*, 279.

⁴⁶ Williams, *The People's King*, 168.

⁴⁷ Ziegler, *King Edward VIII*, 280.

understated the role of the Ministers in the King's decision, stating, "He has told us what he wants to do, and I think we must close our ranks."⁴⁸ Edward made a broadcast over the radio from Windsor Castle on 11 December in his new role as the Duke of Windsor. He began his address by saying, "At long last I am able to say a few words of my own," and proceeded to explain his decision and offer praise of his brother, the new King.⁴⁹ After a tumultuous period within the monarchy, King Edward chose his beloved Mrs. Simpson in place of his inherited throne.

In the days following the King's abdication, discussion of his decision permeated every social circle in England. The Archbishop of Canterbury, Cosmo Gordon Lang, had remained silent throughout the crisis, but he unabashedly offered his opinion of the whole ordeal after it had reached its conclusion. On 13 December, he delivered a radio broadcast in which he attributed Edward's abdication to a "craving for private happiness" and to his chosen social circle.⁵⁰ Although this was the first instance in which Lang spoke publicly about the abdication, he had remained informed throughout the crisis. Edward felt that Lang held a great, though passive, influence in this matter.⁵¹ The Archbishop had been a close friend of King George V and Queen Mary and deeply valued his relationship with them. Upon the death of King George, Lang had a lengthy conversation with the new King, reporting back that Edward knows and cares little about the Church of

⁴⁸ Stanley Baldwin, "His Will is Not His Own," *Vital Speeches Of The Day* 3, no. 6 (January 1937): 192, *Academic Search Complete, EBSCOhost*, accessed April 18, 2015.

⁴⁹ Edward, Duke of Windsor, "A Few Words of My Own," *Vital Speeches Of The Day* 3, no. 6 (January 1937): 189, *Academic Search Complete, EBSCOhost*, accessed April 18, 2015.

⁵⁰ Lockhart, *Cosmo Gordon Lang*, 404.

⁵¹ Windsor, *A King's Story*, 274.

England.⁵² Lang was most disturbed at the prospect of presiding over Edward's impending coronation, describing it as a burden. He did not think it right to consecrate Edward as king if he married a woman who had been divorced twice. The Archbishop was especially conflicted because he had been planning a campaign entitled "Recall to Religion" in which he sought to promote a renewed dedication to God and country among the British people.⁵³ Lang met with Baldwin repeatedly throughout the crisis on 1 November, 19 November, and 26 November, but he only gave his advice in one instance, on 5 December. The Archbishop found it unnecessary to share his views since Baldwin held the same opinions, and he believed that government involvement would be more appropriate than ecclesiastical interference in this matter.⁵⁴ Although a tacit figure, Lang nevertheless held a significant role.

In the speeches given following the official abdication, both Edward and Baldwin emphasized the King's sole responsibility for the decision and denied any governmental interference. This claim does not align with the actions of the Ministers and the National Government throughout the period of crisis, as they intentionally created a situation in which abdication was inevitable under the leadership of Stanley Baldwin. The Government had several reasons for desiring the abdication of Edward in favor of his brother, the future King George VI. Many Ministers who had been fond of King George V did not approve of Edward's lack of traditional values. They were especially disturbed by Edward's apparent sympathy for Nazi Germany, which he shared in common with

⁵² Lockhart, *Cosmo Gordon Lang*, 395.

⁵³ Williams, *The People's King*, 59.

⁵⁴ Lockhart, *Cosmo Gordon Lang*, 402.

Mrs. Simpson.⁵⁵ The King further upset the Government when he visited South Wales in November 1936. He overtly expressed his distress in witnessing the squalid conditions of the coal miners and seemed to support the workers over the Government.⁵⁶ Edward's budding relationship confirmed their worries, as it symbolized his disregard for tradition. Foreseeing a possible constitutional issue, the Government saw their involvement in this matter as necessary protection for the monarchy.

Stanley Baldwin initially expressed reluctance to interfere with the King's personal romantic affairs, but he soon became the principal agent in the King's abdication. Baldwin's network of alliances significantly influenced the outcome of the crisis. The Prime Minister would not have originally approached Edward in October without the encouragement of Alec Hardinge. His relationship with Geoffrey Dawson and *The Times* proved to be one of great importance. With the influence of Dawson, the formerly covert affair of Edward and Mrs. Simpson reached every person in England. Although Baldwin's interactions with the Archbishop of Canterbury appeared to be inconsequential because of Lang's lack of public support, the Prime Minister benefitted from this relationship. He knew that the Church agreed with his position and would continue to approve of his decisions. Garnering support from fellow officials in the Government, newspaper magnates, and high-ranking Church officials, Stanley Baldwin had created a network that would ensure his success in a conflict with the King.

As Baldwin grew increasingly confident in his position, the King became a spectator in his own personal drama. The crucial point for Baldwin came when Edward gave him permission to consult the Cabinet and the Dominions about the proposal for a

⁵⁵ Ziegler, *King Edward VIII*, 232.

⁵⁶ Williams, *The People's King*, 95.

morganatic marriage. By granting this authority to Baldwin, Edward surrendered himself to the decisions of the Government. The Ministers were authorized to give their advice to Edward, and if he refused to accept it, the Government would likely resign. Baldwin had placed Edward in a predicament in which he was faced with unfavorable options. He could lose his throne or become King without Wallis as his Queen. In another instance, his country could enter into a civil war. With this looming threat, Edward knew that he must accept the advice of the Government.

Baldwin's tendency both to conceal and to exaggerate information gave him a great advantage over the King in this affair. He often left Edward ignorant as to what course of action he was planning to pursue. In his failure to produce the reports of the Cabinet meeting and the copies of the telegrams sent to the Dominions, Baldwin had ensured that Edward remained unaware of his overseas correspondence. He had not shown these documents to the King, as he had manipulated the wording of the telegrams to gain support for the Government.⁵⁷ If Baldwin did not make the drafts public, then the King could not prevent their delivery. In other instances, Baldwin provided the King with more information than he possessed. He strongly proclaimed that the Government would never pass a bill for a morganatic marriage before he had introduced the topic in the Cabinet. Baldwin further asserted that the people of Britain would never condone Edward's petition. Baldwin had no evidence for this claim and was eventually proven wrong when ninety percent of the letters received by newspapers during the crisis conveyed support for the King. He further manipulated information when he warned Edward of the Government's possible resignation if he did not accept its advice. When

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 97.

Baldwin made this claim, the opposition leaders had already pledged not to resign. The Prime Minister successfully achieved control in his negotiations with the King by selectively releasing his information. Through his carefully constructed statements, Baldwin effectively presented Edward with a scenario necessitating his abdication.

The final result of the abdication crisis of 1936 arose from the difference in the determination of King Edward and of Baldwin. As the ruling Sovereign, the King could have overpowered the objections posed by the Prime Minister. He possessed the constitutional right to marry whomever he wished as long as his wife was not Catholic, but Edward did not defend himself or combat the force of the Government. His weakness contrasted with the strength and boldness of Stanley Baldwin. From his initial meeting with Edward in October until his final speech in the House of Commons in December, Baldwin possessed control of the situation. He decided who the King could consult and denied his petition to broadcast a speech to the British people. Baldwin approached the Cabinet and the Dominions with Edward's proposals for a morganatic marriage and for the broadcast, knowing what the final outcome would be in both instances. Exercising his great strength, Baldwin arose as an indomitable figure through the abdication crisis, while Edward recoiled in his weakness and handed over control to the Government. Upheld by the resolute strength of Stanley Baldwin, the Government facilitated the abdication of King Edward VIII in its attempt to promote the tradition, the values, and the sense of duty inherent in a British monarch.

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