

## Democracy in Peril: Great Britain Between the Wars Week Five Posting

### A Fascist King for Great Britain

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“I never thought Hitler was such a bad chap.” -- Edward, Duke of Windsor 1963

Over the centuries, there have been many losers who wore the royal crown of Great Britain. Some have been incompetent imbeciles, others purblind egotists and some were downright wicked—think Richard III. But for royal villainy, none can hold a candle to Edward VIII, who became king in 1936 when his father George V died. Edward was vain, immature, easily led around by the nose by whatever beautiful woman he was seeing, (usually a married woman) and had few interests outside of gardening and golf. But worst of all, he was a Fascist sympathizer and an open admirer of the Nazi regime. Consequently, he could have presented an enormous security risk for Britain had he been still king when war broke out in Sept. of 1939. Fortunately, his stay on the throne was a brief one as he abdicated after just ten months, one of the shortest reigns in British history. One can only imagine how much damage to national morale might have ensued if England had gone to war with a Quisling in Windsor Castle.

Oddly, Edward *might* have been a positive force had he been a more psychologically developed human being. He had many favorable traits: he was good looking, possessed a certain charisma, and at times even demonstrated genuine concern for England’s struggling workers. When touring depressed coal mining villages in Wales, he was appalled at the poverty he witnessed and remarked to his aides “Something must be done for these fellows.” While his empathy for the miners was admirable, he was criticized for his statements on the grounds that he was attempting to guide government policy—a violation of the British Constitution. No one could say that he wasn’t brave; at the outbreak of war in August 1914 he volunteered for active duty at the Front. But Kitchener denied his request, feeling it would have been disastrous if he had been captured by the Germans. As a result, his service during the war was confined to a non-combat role. But he visited soldiers in the trenches whenever he could, and won the respect of the Tommies for his concern.

His horror at the slaughter of 1914-18 led him to believe that there must never be another world war. As such he became a leading exponent of the policy of appeasement (which we will be discussing in detail next week.) But whatever favorable traits Edward had, they were heavily outweighed by his many flaws. Like much of the English upper crust, he developed a keen sense of admiration for what Hitler had accomplished in Germany. He believed that the Nazi Reich and Great Britain were natural allies, and that together they could throttle the Bolshevik menace to Europe. He was anti-Semitic, racist, and had a cruel streak. (He once referred to the natives of Australia as “the most revolting form of living beings I have ever seen. They are the lowest known form of human beings, and are the nearest thing to monkeys.”)

Edward’s infatuation with the American divorcee Wallis Simpson was to prove his undoing as monarch. (Simpson was also pro-Fascist and had earlier conducted a sizzling affair with Nazi Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop.) The two had been lovers before his ascension to the throne, and once king he proclaimed his intention to marry Simpson. That would never do: The Church of England frowned on the match, and Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin made it clear that the government would resign en masse if he insisted on marrying Simpson. Moreover, the P.M.s of the Dominions also objected to the marriage. Realizing that he would create a constitutional crisis if he pressed his case, Edward decided to abdicate rather than lose his beloved—who had him under her thumb, it must be added. The peculiar nature of their relationship—his docile and passive submission to her whims— combined with her Nazi leanings, made many in British Intelligence very nervous. (Edward had a dangerous habit of amusing Simpson by showing her highly sensitive government secret documents.)

After giving up the throne the couple married in a service that was not blessed by the Church of England. His brother and successor George VI denied permission for any member of the royal family to attend the ceremony, and the couple was forced into a form of exile in France. They would never live in England again. During the war it was feared by many government officials that the embittered

Edward, now dubbed Duke of Windsor, was providing the Germans with secret information and encouraging the Luftwaffe to bomb English cities in order to force a negotiated peace. To keep him out of trouble Churchill arranged for Edward to be made Governor of Bermuda, a position that would render him remote and harmless. After the war, Edward and Simpson returned to France where they lived the good life with other degenerate jet-setters. In general, Edward presents a fine example of a completely wasted life.