

# THE CREATION OF THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS



## Aims

The League of Nations was the vision of American President Woodrow Wilson. He wanted to create a peacemaking body that would prevent the use of the 'Alliance' system in Europe and encourage countries to use diplomacy to resolve conflict. With this in mind, the League of Nations had four core aims:

1. To stop war breaking out
2. To encourage disarmament (the reduction of the size of army and weapons per country)
3. Humanitarian work, such as the improvement of working and living conditions
4. Public Health work, such as tackling global epidemics and deadly diseases.

## Membership



During the first meeting, 42 nations were represented. This was the largest assembly of nations in History. There were many large, powerful members, but also less powerful countries represented, such as Holland and Peru.

There were Four Permanent Members (Italy, France, Britain and Japan). Georges Clemenceau had been originally critical of the idea, but then in March 1919, he issued the **Fountainebleau Memorandum** where he declared support for the League; Britain was in support of the League as a place for countries to discuss issues, but without any real power.

The losing countries of WWI (Germany, Hungary, Austria) were not allowed to join and, because Britain and France feared the spread of Communism, neither was Russia. America did not join because the Senate voted for an 'Isolationist' policy, whereby the country remained out of European and world affairs.



## Structure

The League had several important sections. These were:

- **The Assembly:** all members met in an international parliament once a year; however, a decision had to be **unanimous** to pass, otherwise it'd be referred to the Council. The Assembly decided on new members, the election of judges to the Court of International Justice and how money should be spent
- **The Council:** Since the Assembly met too irregularly, and was too large to respond to emergency situations, there was a Council made up of eight countries. There were four permanent members of the Council: Britain, France, Italy and Japan; and four others (later nine) were chosen to sit for a three-year period. The Council had the power to **veto** the decisions made by the Assembly, which meant that powerful countries could still have dominance, even if the Assembly was unanimous against them.
- **The Permanent Court of Justice:** This was a court that was designed to resolve international conflicts. Any member country could bring a dispute to the court and the judges would assess evidence from both sides to arrive at a verdict. The judges would hold the role for eleven years. However, the judges could only provide advice on how to resolve the conflict; it wasn't a compulsory ruling and there was no army to enforce the judges' verdict.
- **The Secretariat:** This was the administrative branch of the League, which was responsible for putting any decisions into action. It was a body of experts, such as lawyers and finance managers.
- **Special Commissions:** These were special groups that were put together to tackle a particular problem; they often focused on under-developed countries, humanitarian crises, and economic issues.

# THE COMMISSIONS OF THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS



## Aims



The Commissions were set up to improve people's lives, such as their working conditions and tackling disease epidemics. Some of these commissions were a **success** in the 1920s. Here are just three examples that you can use in an answer to 'balance out' the failings of the League (of which there were many!) with some successes.

## International Labour Organisation (ILO)

**Aim:** To encourage employers and governments to pass laws that would improve working conditions

**Successes:**

- 1922: poisonous white lead was banned in paint products
- 1928: 77 countries set a minimum wage
- Case study of Tanganyika, Africa, where slave labour was used to build a labour. Many slaves died due to appalling working conditions. The League challenged this and reduced the death rate to 4%

**Failings:**

- 1919: Tried to stop child labour for children aged under 14; however, it was rejected by most members because it would cost too much money.
- 1935: Tried to limit the working day to eight hours a day; when members voted, only four countries were in favour of it because it would cost the industry too much.
- They also suggested the introduction of holiday pay; however, this was ridiculed, one member calling it 'industry suicide'.

## The Commission for Refugees

**Aims:** To return prisoners of war to their native countries and support war refugees by improving camp conditions; they also sought to return the refugees to their native countries once the conflict had ended.

**Successes:**

- 1921: Liberated 427,000 out of 500,000 prisoners of war to their native countries
- 1917-1921: 1.5 million Russians had fled persecution after the Communist Revolution and the League helped them find new homes
- 1922: A war between Turkey and Greece caused many refugees to flee; the League set up homes for 600,000 Greeks who had to flee Turkey.
- Created the Nansen Passport, which identified someone as a refugee

**Failings:**

- 1933: The League tried to set up a High Commission for Jews fleeing the new Nazi regime in Germany; however, Germany rejected this proposal, so a unanimous vote could not be reached, resulting in it having to be set up as a body independent to the League, reducing its power and abilities.

## The Health Committee

**Aim:** To resolve international health problems

**Successes:**

- Ran an international campaign to kill mosquitos, which spread malaria and yellow fever
- Set up an educational programme in Russia to help deal with an outbreak of typhus
- Sent doctors to treat refugees in Turkey and improved living conditions there
- Renamed the World Health Organisation (WHO) which still exists today



# LEAGUE OF NATIONS: HOW SUCCESSFUL IN 1920s?



## 1920: Vilna

Poland and Lithuania were new countries, created after the division of the Austro-Hungarian empire. Vilna was assigned as the capital of Lithuania, but the majority of people in the city wanted to be Polish.

The Polish army took control of the city and so Lithuania appealed to the League for help. The League commanded Poland to withdraw troops – but they refused!

France did not intervene because they saw Poland as an ally against Germany, and Britain refused to send troops without the support of other countries. As a result, the League were powerless and Poland took control of Vilna.

## 1920: Upper Silesia

Upper Silesia bordered Germany and Poland, and both nations had a claim to it, as it was important for coal and steel production. In 1921, the League held a **plebiscite** so the people could decide; the French and British sent troops to monitor the polling booths to ensure calm. Germany won by 60%, but Poland complained that the citizens who had voted no longer lived in Upper Silesia. Therefore, the League decided to split the region according to how people voted.

Germany received a mostly rural area, whilst Poland kept the industrial area. In 1922, Germany were given a heavy discount on coal from the region to help their industry. Both countries accepted this outcome as a compromise, even though both sides were not fully satisfied.



## 1921: The Aland Islands

Both Sweden and Finland lay claim to the Aland islands, which lay in between the two countries. The League intervened and decided the islands should go to Finland. However, Finland was not allowed to build any forts on the islands, so they could not be used as a base to attack Sweden. Both countries accepted these terms and so this was a success for the League 😊

## 1923: Corfu

The border between Greece and Albania remained undecided in 1923, and so the League commissioned an Italian general called Tellini to investigate and resolve the matter. However, while in Greece, he was murdered! This caused dictator Mussolini to blame the Greek government. He demanded the execution of the murderers and compensation pay – but the Greeks did not know who had committed the murder so they could not oblige. As a result, Mussolini invaded the island of Corfu, killing fifteen people. Greece appealed to the League for help, and in return, the League issued a moral condemnation to Italy. This outraged Mussolini, who then appealed to Britain and France separately for support. As a result, the League (on the behest of the Allies) made Greece issue an apology to Italy and pay compensation. Only at this point did Mussolini withdraw his troops. This proved the League was not effective and relied heavily on its most powerful members.

## 1925: Bulgaria

When Greek soldiers were killed on the Bulgarian border, Greece invaded. Bulgaria appealed to the League, who in turn condemned Greece for their actions. Greece felt the League were being hypocritical as they'd allowed Mussolini to do similar in Corfu, but they were not powerful enough to object.

# INTERNATIONAL AGREEMENTS OUTSIDE OF THE LEAGUE

## 1925: The Locarno Pact

The relationship between France and Germany remained hostile in the early 1920s, resulting in the French invading the industrial area of the Ruhr and taking Germany's coal. However, after Gustav Stresemann was appointed as the Foreign Secretary, relations began to improve. He invited the French foreign minister, Aristide Briand, to sign a new treaty between the two countries.

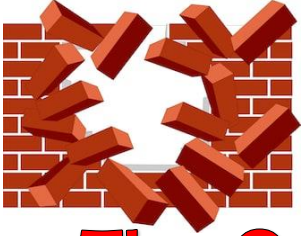
They met in Locarno, in Switzerland, since this was neutral territory. Stresemann signed seven treaties on behalf of Germany that formally accepted the terms of the Treaty of Versailles, including the land borders. Germany also gave up her claim to Alsace-Lorraine. This was important because Germany had not been allowed to the Peace Conference in Paris – and so the Treaty had been a 'diktat'. This was Stresemann's opportunity to build bridges with France. However, because Germany was not yet a member of the League of Nations, this important peace deal had to be done outside of the League's mandate. This undermined their credibility as it showed the 'powerful' countries like France could operate without it.



## 1928: The Kellogg-Briand Pact

Sixty-five countries met in Paris where they signed a huge peace agreement stating they would not go to war with one another. Since the USA was a part of this agreement, it had to take place outside of the League of Nations. This once again showed that individual (especially powerful) countries could act independently of the League. It made the League appear like somewhere to simply air problems and debate issues – rather than a place where real, meaningful treaties could be signed!





# CONSEQUENCES OF THE WALL STREET CRASH



## The Crash: Nov, 1929

After a period of 'Boom' in economic development, both in America and in Europe, the Roaring Twenties came crashing down in a single day. The Wall Street Crash took place in New York, where the stock markets crashed, and companies lost their value overnight, plunging the economy into depression. Because America had trading relations with European countries, this had a devastating knock-on effect. This period from 1929-1933, became known as the **Great Depression**.

## Impact on Britain and France

Both France and Britain suffered as a result of the Great Depression. When Hitler came to power – and Mussolini invaded Abyssinia in 1935 as a distraction tactic from the hardships that Italy was suffering – both Britain and France were too concerned about their own economy to intervene. The voting public were anti-war and by this point, many felt as though the Treaty of Versailles had been too unfair on Germany. This resulted in Britain and France doing nothing to prevent Hitler's early actions as dictator of Germany and also allowing Mussolini to take control of Abyssinia. It also indirectly led to Britain following the policy of Appeasement throughout the late 1930s.

## Impact on Germany

The Great Depression hit Germany hard because their economic recovery (thanks to 'Super Stresemann') had relied on loans by American businesses, set out in the Dawes Plan of 1924. When American companies recalled their loans (asked for their money back), Germany was plunged into a deep depression, which resulted in soaring levels of unemployment, up to 6 million by 1933.

The Weimar Government struggled to cope, resorting to increased taxation and cutting welfare benefits. Consequently, people turned away from the moderate parties that had governed the Reichstag in the 1920s, and instead moved to extreme parties, such as the Nazi and Communist parties. From 1930 to 1933, these parties gained more votes in elections, whilst the other parties had to rely on forming weak coalition governments to hold onto power. This eventually led to Hitler's appointment as Chancellor in 1933 and, by 1934, he had dismantled the fabric of the Weimar constitution and turned Germany into a dictatorship.

## Impact on the League



The League of Nations was a peacemaking body that operated based upon the use of democracy and diplomacy. However, extreme rulers had a more aggressive attitude. For example, in 1933, Hitler stormed out of a disarmament conference in Paris because France refused to disarm and Hitler therefore refused to stick to the heavy restrictions that the Treaty of Versailles placed upon Germany's armed forces. Both Hitler and Mussolini appealed to the public by invoking national pride and the promise of conquest overseas, which would then be used to overcome the economic problems at home. The League of Nations did not have an army so could not prevent this. Furthermore, its two most powerful countries, Britain and France, were more focused on their own problems to worry about international peace.

# THE MANCHURIAN CRISIS: 1931

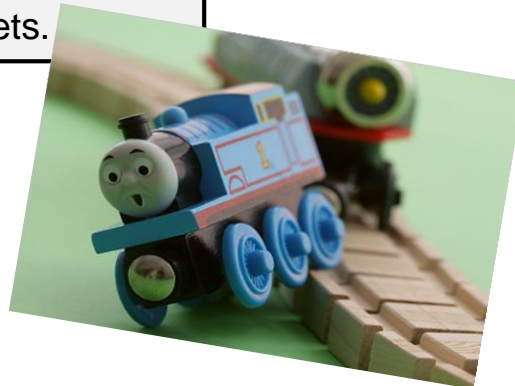
## Why did Japan want Manchuria?

Manchuria is a region of China, close to Japan. It has many natural resources like coal and iron. Japan had factories there in the 1930s. In the 1930s, China was divided and weak and the country was split into many regions. Therefore, Japan had ambitions to take over the Manchuria incident.

However, they could not invade without a reason... They needed some kind of 'incident' as an excuse to invade.

## The Mukden Incident

In September 1931, there was an explosion on a railway in Manchuria that was owned by the Japanese. The Japanese claimed it was caused by Chinese soldiers, but China denied this, saying their soldiers were asleep! Nevertheless, the Japanese used this as an excuse to invade Manchuria. They did this successfully and the Japanese public were so pleased, they threw parties on the streets.



## How did the League React?

**What did the League do?** The League did not want to get involved, but this was a clear case of aggression by Japan, so they had to. They sent a British politician, called Lord Lytton, over to Manchuria to investigate. It took Lytton a year to write his report and all it did was state the obvious: Japan should not have invaded Manchuria. The Japanese ignored the report. Instead, they left the League of Nations and invaded another region of China. By 1937, had taken over the whole of China



## Consequences for the League

This was a big blow to the prestige/reputation of the League because...

- They had been very slow to react to this crisis
- They had failed to prevent a war
- Japan (a powerful country and Permanent Member of the League) clearly preferred aggression to peace!



# THE ABYSSINIAN CRISIS: 1935

## Why did Italy want Abyssinia?

After World War One, the people of Italy turned against their government. Benito Mussolini seized power in 1922. He was a dictator who invented right-wing **fascism**. In the 1930s, the Great Depression hit Italy. Factories and businesses closed. Millions lost their jobs. Mussolini searched for ways to build a new 'Roman Empire' and distract his people from hardship. In 1935, he invaded Abyssinia (modern day Ethiopia) because it was an independent nation (not part of the British or French empire). It was also rich in resources, especially farmland, and Italy already owned Somaliland, which bordered Abyssinia



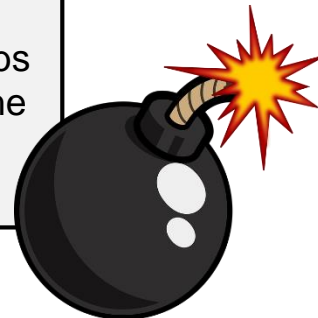
## How did the League React?

Both France and England did not want to intervene – they wanted Mussolini as an ally against Hitler so did not want to upset him. The leader of Abyssinia, named Haile Selassie, pleaded with the League to intervene and warned them that this would have negative consequences. The League gave out only a **moral condemnation**. After the invasion, the League issued **trade sanctions** against Italy – however, this did not stop Italy from trading coal with Britain because Britain did not want to cause unemployment for miners. Plus, the USSR and USA continued to trade oil with Italy.



## Mussolini's Invasion

Mussolini ordered soldiers to cause conflict on the border between Somaliland and Abyssinia. 150 Abyssinians and 2 Italians were killed. Before the League could do anything, the French foreign minister met secretly with Mussolini and promised not to intervene, giving Mussolini the green light to invade. Mussolini used chemical warfare and bombs on the tribal villages of rural Abyssinia – some of the Abyssinian army were armed with just spears in defence!



## The Hoare-Laval Pact

British foreign minister, Hoare, and French foreign minister, Laval, met in secret to discuss what should be done. They decided that Italy could have all the fertile (farming) areas of Abyssinia, leaving only the mountains as an independent region. This deal was leaked to the press and caused outrage; both ministers had to resign in embarrassment. As a result of this scandal, Italy left the League and took over the whole of Abyssinia. After this, the League was pretty much over!

# WHY DID THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS FAIL?

## Long-term reasons

*Reasons that stem back to the creation of the League*

The American Senate voted against America joining the League of Nations, despite it being Woodrow Wilson's idea. Other important countries such as Germany and the USSR were not allowed to join when the League was formed.

The League had some very ambitious plans and ideals – to stop war and make the world a better place. However, it could be argued that these plans were *too* ambitious and didn't really stand a chance of succeeding.

The League's structure was complex and there weren't enough experts and diplomats to carry out decisions that were made.

The League could not enforce judgements due to not having an army. Trade sanctions didn't work because countries could still trade with places such as the USA. All they could use was moral condemnation.

The League only met once a year, the Council could veto proposals, and decisions had to be unanimous. This made decision-making slow.

## Medium to short term reasons

*Reasons that occur in the 1930s*

The Great Depression of 1930-33 meant people turned to extremist dictators such as Hitler and Mussolini, who were keen to invade other countries. This made it hard for the League to maintain peace.

The League was slow to act during the Manchurian Crisis of 1931. They sent British diplomat, Lord Lytton, to investigate and form a report. However, the moral condemnation this provided wasn't sufficient to stop Japan's plans.

Britain and France kept the Suez canal open during the Abyssinian Crisis. They put their own economic interests ahead of international peace. They were also more bothered about keeping Mussolini as an ally against Hitler.



"THIS LOOKS VERY MUCH LIKE THE SPOT WE STARTED FROM"