

The League of Nations



Background

- Set up in 1920 by the Treaty of Versailles.
- Originally the idea of Woodrow Wilson who wanted the League to be like a world parliament.
- Based in Geneva, Switzerland.
- 42 countries joined at the start. By the 1930s this had risen to 60.
- May 1920, the US Senate voted against Versailles, thus the country did not join the League.
- The USSR did not join the League.
- Germany was not allowed to join as a punishment for causing WWI.
- The leading members were Britain and France, helped by Italy and Japan.

Aims (SIDE)

Stop war (collective security)

Improve live and jobs

Disarmament

Enforce the Treaty of Versailles (encourage trade, economic and social agencies, health care, end slavery).

The powers of The League

1. **Covenant** (Articles 10-17, members *promised* to keep the peace).
2. **Condemnation** (the League could *tell* a country it was doing wrong).
3. **Arbitration** (the League could *offer* to decide between two countries).
4. **Sanctions** (*stopping trade*).

Structure

1. **Assembly** (the main meeting of the League – all members met once a year). Its main problem was that decisions had to be unanimous (agreed by everyone), which was very difficult to achieve.
2. **Council** (a small group of the more important nations – Britain, France, Italy and Japan plus some other countries – met 4–5 times a year).
3. **Agencies** (committees of the League):
 - Court of International Justice (for small disputes).
 - Health Committee (to improve world health).
 - International Labour Organisation (to try to get fair wages).
 - Slavery Committee (to end slavery).
 - Refugee Committee (to return people to their homes after wars or disasters).
4. **Secretariat** (was supposed to organise the League, but failed).



THE GAP IN THE BRIDGE.

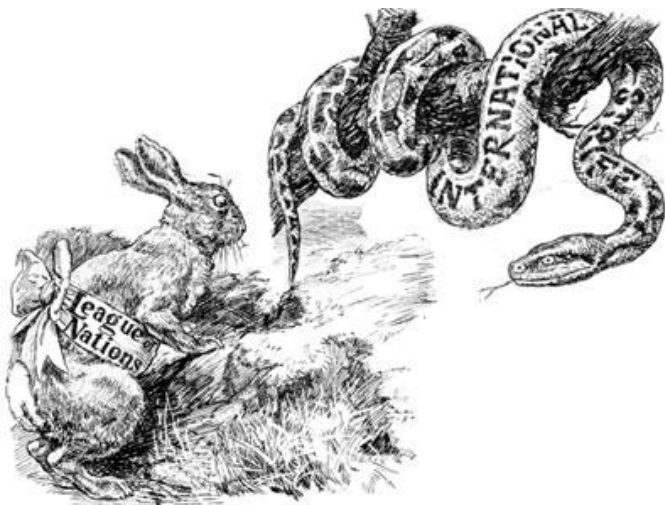
The League and International Agreements

The Dawes Plan – This was designed by America to prevent conflict through lending money to Germany so that they could pay reparations. This helped the League with their aims of enforcing the Treaty of Versailles and stopping wars.

The Locarno Treaties – Germany agreed to accept the borders laid out in the Treaty of Versailles, that the Rhineland would remain a demilitarised zone and that any future disputes between France and Germany would be settled by the League. This again helped the League with their aim of enforcing the Treaty of Versailles.

Kellogg-Briand Pact – This agreement was signed in 1928 by 63 countries who agreed to try and stop any future conflict through peaceful means. This helped the League with their aim of stopping wars. It was particularly significant that America signed the Pact as they were not members of the League.

The cartoon shows that compared to 'international strife' which was a strong and deadly force in the 1920s the League was like little more than a defenceless rabbit. It was well-meaning idea, but in practice it would never work.



Failures of the 1920s

Poland (1920) Stopping wars/Enforcing the Treaty of Versailles

Poland took land from Russia, breaking the Treaty of Versailles. The Poles ignored the League's order to stop

Disarmament (1932) Stopping wars/Enforcing the Treaty of Versailles/ Disarmament

Disarmament talks failed, because Germany demanded as many weapons as everyone else.

Kellogg-Briand Pact (1928) Disarmament/ stopping wars

Sixty-five countries signed the treaty to end war – but just ignored it

Corfu (1923) Stopping wars

Mussolini ignored the League's orders to pull out of Corfu in 1923, and made Greece pay money to Italy.

Jobs Improving lives and jobs

The International Labour Organisation failed to persuade countries to adopt a 48-hour week.

Invasion of the Ruhr Enforcing the Treaty of Versailles

France invaded the Ruhr in 1923 to force the Germans to pay Reparations.

On the whole, the League failed at stopping wars (Corfu) and disarmament (Kellogg-Briand), as well as enforcing the Treaty of Versailles (Poland). These failures were mainly due to the fact that the League had no way of effectively imposing sanctions due to its lack of an army and the fact that the one country that could support the League with the necessary economic and military power, the USA, was not a member. Britain and France were too weak following WWI to really be able to support the League.

Successes of the League in the 1920s

Reparations (1921) Enforcing the Treaty of Versailles

When the Germans refused to pay, France and Britain invaded Germany and made them pay.

Prisoners of War Improving lives and jobs

The League took home half a million WWI prisoners of war.

Aaland Islands (1921) Stopping wars

In this disagreement over control between Sweden and Finland – League acted as arbitrator and said they should go to Finland, Sweden accepted.

Bulgaria (1925) Stopping wars

Greece obeyed the League's orders to pull out of Bulgaria in 1925.

Slaves **Improving lives and jobs**

The League attacked slave traders in Africa and Burma and freed 200,000 slaves.

Disease **Improving lives and jobs**

The League worked to prevent malaria and leprosy.

Refugees (1922) **Improving lives and jobs**

The League set up camps and fed Turkish refugees.

Economic problems **Improving lives and jobs**

The League sent economics experts to help Austria and Hungary.

Drugs **Improving lives and jobs**

The League closed down four big Swiss companies which were selling drugs.

Overall the League was very successful at improving people's lives and jobs during the 1920s. These activities tended to be carried out by the League's committees, showing that this area of the structure worked particularly well. The work of the League which successfully highlighted social problems on a global scale and made positive steps towards eradicating diseases such as leprosy and their work in relocating refugees had never been achieved before by any organisation.



Failures of the 1930s

Manchuria

- The Nationalist government of China led by Chiang Kai-shek was weak, corrupt and busy fighting the Communists.
- Due to the Great Depression, Japan wanted to build an empire to secure supplies of raw materials.
- The Japanese government was controlled by the army
- China ruled Manchuria, but the Japanese army ran the railway there,

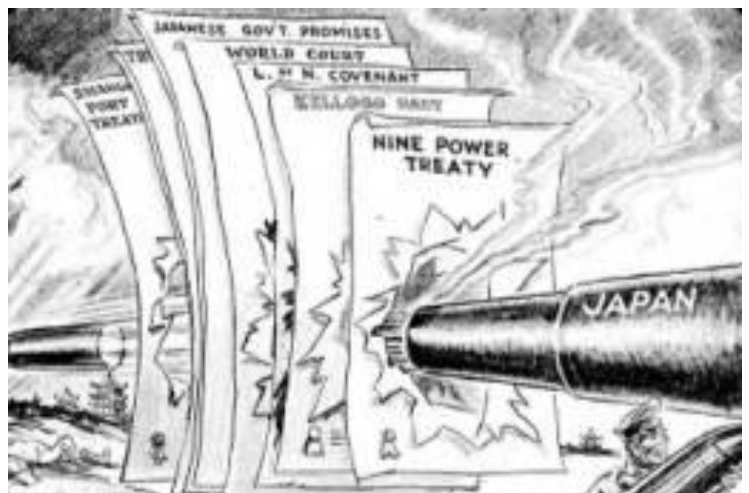
and ruled in Korea.

- Sept 1931: There was some vandalism on the Manchurian railway; Japan claimed the Chinese had sabotaged the railway.
- Japan invaded Manchuria and set up the 'independent' state of Manchukuo under the former Emperor of China, Henry P'ui.
- China appealed to the League.
- Dec 1931: the League appointed a commission led by Lord Lytton from Britain to investigate.
- April 1932 Lytton goes to Manchuria.
- Oct 1932: Lytton's report published - stated that Japan was the aggressor and should leave.
- 24 Feb 1933: The Assembly voted that Japan should leave Manchuria, Japan walked out of the meeting.
- Japan stayed in Manchuria.
- The League could not agree economic sanctions or an arms sales ban.
- In 1933 Japan resigned from the League, and invaded/ conquered Jehol (next to Manchuria).
- In 1937 Japan invaded the rest of China.

A **SPECTACULAR** failure:

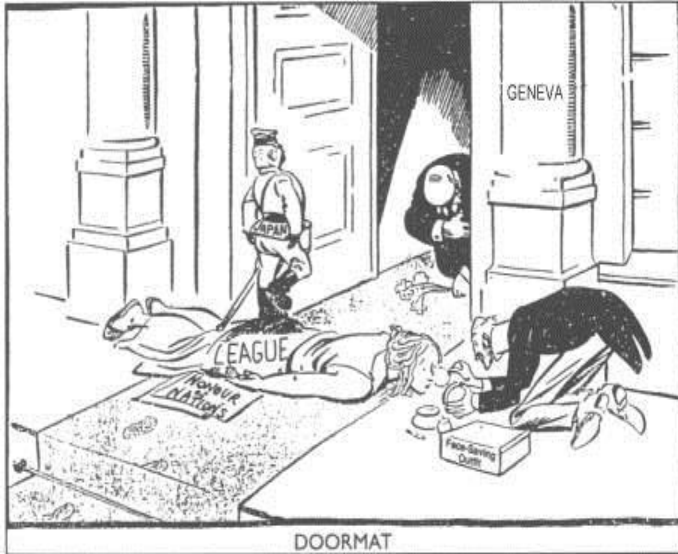
The League was discredited

Manchuria showed:



- It was slow (the Lytton Report took almost a year)
- A country could get its own way if it ignored the League 'Collective security' was useless against big countries - especially during the Great Depression.

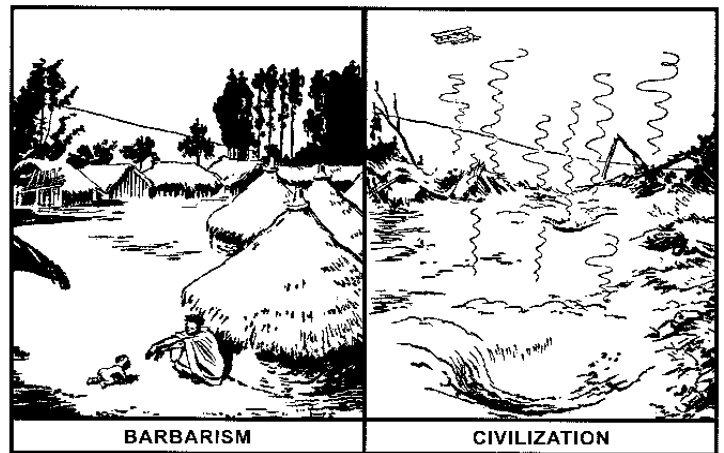
- Even the great powers within the League (Japan was on the Council) were happy to ignore it.



Abyssinia

- Independent African nation, rich in raw materials.

- October 1935 Italy invaded.
- The Abyssinian Emperor Haile Selassie asked the League of Nations for help.
- The League did not want a clash with Mussolini. Britain and France wanted him to be their ally against Hitler.
- The Hoare-Laval Pact (a secret agreement to give the rich areas of Abyssinia to Italy) was drawn up.
- As result of the Pact and the subsequent failure of the League, weaker countries realised they could not depend on the League for Help.
- Hitler invaded the Rhineland.
- It showed that the League could not make collective security work.
- In October 1936 Hitler and Mussolini made the Rome-Berlin Axis Agreement: another world war was looming.



Why did the League fail?

It **WAS DUMB!**

Weak – the League's 'powers' were virtually useless. Sanctions did not work (Failed to stop the sale of arms to Italy during the Abyssinian crisis). It had no army.

America – the strongest nation in the world never joined. Britain and France were not strong enough to impose peace on their own.

Structure – the League was muddled, so it took ages to do anything. Members couldn't agree – but decisions had to be unanimous. This paralysed the League. It was very slow to act (Manchuria).

Depression – the world-wide Depression made countries try to get more land and power. They were worried about themselves, not about world peace.

Unsuccessful – the more the League failed, the less people trusted it. (Manchuria led to the invasion of the Rhineland). In the end, everybody just ignored it.

Members – the League's main members let it down. Italy (Abyssinian Crisis) and Japan (Manchurian Crisis) betrayed the League. France and Britain did nothing to help it.

Big bullies – in the 1920s, the League had dealt with weak countries. In the 1930s, powerful countries like Germany, Italy and Japan attacked weaker countries. They were too strong for the League to stop them.

Past Exam Questions

Four Mark Questions

What were the main aims of the League of Nations?

What methods did the League of Nations plan to prevent future wars?

What was the structure of the League of Nations?

Six Mark Questions

What were the successes of the League in the 1920s?

Explain why the agencies of the League of Nations were successful.

Some countries were not members of the League of Nations when it was set up. Explain how this weakened the League.

Explain why the League of Nations failed to deal successfully with the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1931.

Why did the Italians invade Abyssinia?

Explain how the League of Nations tried to solve social problems during the 1920s and 1930s.

Ten Mark Questions

'The Manchurian Crisis of 1931 was the main cause of the failure of the League of Nations' How far do you agree with this statement? Explain your answer.

How far can the failure of the League in the 1930s be blamed on the Great Depression?

How successful was the League at keeping peace in the 1920's and 1930's? Explain your answer.

Explain why the League was established.

Explain why the League of Nations failed to deal successfully with the Abyssinian Crisis of 1935-36.

The most important reason why the League was weak in the 1920s was its lack of an army'. Do you agree with this statement? Explain your answer.

How far was the League of Nations a complete failure? Explain your answer.

