

# SUBJECT: History

## UNIT: Conflict and Tension 1918-1939 The League of Nations



**What was the League of Nations?** 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.

### Membership

42 countries joined at the start. By the 1930s this had risen to 60. The USA did not join the League. The USSR did not join the League. Germany was not allowed to join as a punishment for causing WWI—they joined in 1926 left 1933.

The **global depression** and affected the work of the League. It made countries try to get more land and power. They were worried about themselves, not about world peace.

### Powers of the League

Covenant of the League of Nations said that the League could settle disputes by: a hearing, a ruling by the International Court of Justice and an inquiry of the LON. If unresolved they could use: **Moral Persuasion**—League of Nations could put pressure on the offending country by lining up world opinion against it. **Economic Sanctions**-- members of the League could refuse to trade with the offending country. **Military Force**—the armed forces of member countries could be joined together BUT League did not have its own military force.

**The Locarno Treaties 1925** – Germany agreed to accept that: the borders laid out in the Treaty of Versailles the Rhineland would remain a demilitarised zone and that any future disputes between France and Germany would be settled by the League.

**Kellogg-Briand Pact** – This agreement was signed in 1928 by 63 countries who agreed to try and stop any future conflict through peaceful means.

**Structure: Assembly** (the main meeting of the League – all members met once a year). Decisions=unanimous and all had to agree. **Council** (a small group of the more important nations – Britain, France, Italy and Japan etc—met 4–5 times a year). Could override vote with a veto. **Agencies** e.g. Court of International Justice (for small disputes) and Health Committee (to improve world health). **Secretariat** (was supposed to organise the League, but failed).

**The Manchurian Crisis** Japan was suffering the effects of the depression so it looked to Manchuria in China, that had natural resources to trade and for land. On 18th September 1931 there was an explosion on the South Manchurian Railway, owned by Japan. They blamed China and invaded Manchuria in 1932. China went to the League and Lord Lytton was sent to investigate and write a report. The report was published in October 1932 (a year later) and said Japan should not have invaded. Japan ignored the report, left the League and then continued their invasion of China.

**The Abyssinian Crisis** Mussolini wanted an empire for Italy—they had previously tried to invade Abyssinia unsuccessfully in 1896. After signing the Stresa Front with Britain and France he did not think they would stand in his way. In December 1934 Italian and Abyssinian troops clashed at Wal Wal. Emperor Haile Selassie asked for help. Despite moral condemnation from the League Italian troops entered Abyssinia on 3rd October 1935 using the latest weapons including chemical. In December the British and French Foreign Ministers secretly agreed to give half of Abyssinia to Italy. This was leaked to the press with both men resigning. Still the League failed to act and did nothing. They could have stopped Italy using the Suez Canal or impose trade sanctions on oil, steel, iron and coal but it did nothing.

### Successes in the 20s

**Improving lives and jobs** e.g. prisoners of war, slaves and refugees. The League worked to prevent malaria and leprosy. **Stopping wars** e.g. Aaland Islands (1921)— League said they should go to Finland, Sweden accepted, Corfu (1923), Bulgaria Greece obeyed the League's orders to pull out of Bulgaria (1925).