

Cambridge
IGCSE®

Modern World History

Option B: The 20th century



2

To what extent was the League of Nations a success?

FOCUS POINTS

- How successful was the League in the 1920s?
- How far did weaknesses in the League's organisation make failure inevitable?
- How far did the Depression make the work of the League more difficult?
- How successful was the League in the 1930s?

You saw in Chapter 1 that setting up a League Nations was one of Woodrow Wilson's key ideas for preventing another war. He saw the League as an organisation that would solve international disputes. He hoped that if the Great Powers had to talk to each other they would no longer need or even want to make secret alliances as they did before the First World War. He thought the League would protect smaller nations from aggression – if they had concerns then the League would be a place where their case would be heard by the world.

Without spoiling the story Wilson's original plan for the League never happened! This chapter will explain why. However, a scaled-down version of the League was created. How well did it do?

On the one hand people argue that the League achieved a lot.

- ◆ Its humanitarian agencies helped the sick, the poor and the homeless.
- ◆ Its financial agencies helped to stabilise several economies after the war.
- ◆ The League handled 66 major international disputes between the wars and was successful in half of them.

However, the League was unsuccessful in the larger international disputes involving the major powers. The League failed to stop the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1931 and Italy's invasion of Abyssinia in 1935, which had disastrous consequences for international relations in Europe.

So your key question in this chapter is to judge **to what extent** the League succeeded. This is not a question with a 'Yes' or 'No' answer. To tackle a 'to what extent' question you need to:

- ◆ weigh the League's successes against its failures
- ◆ compare the aims of the League with what it actually achieved
- ◆ assess whether the failures were the fault of the League or other factors and particularly:
 - how far the League's **organisation** weakened it
 - how far the League was let down by its own **members** and the other Great Powers
 - how far the League's work was hampered by the worldwide economic **Depression** that made the 1930s a dark and dangerous time.

This chapter takes you step by step through those questions so you can reach your own view on this key question: 'To what extent was the League of Nations a success?'

◀ This picture was used as the menu card for a League of Nations banquet in the 1930s. It shows Briand (one of the most influential figures in the League) as Moses leading the statesmen of the world towards the 'Promised Land'. The sunrise is labelled 'The United States of Europe'. Discuss:

- 1 What impression does this picture give you of the League?
- 2 Does this picture surprise you? Why or why not?

2.1 How successful was the League in the 1920s?

The birth of the League

SOURCE 1



The front page of the *Daily Express*, 27 December 1918. Following the Allied victory in the First World War, President Woodrow Wilson was given a rapturous reception by ordinary people wherever he went in Europe.

SOURCE 2

Merely to win the war was not enough. It must be won in such a way as to ensure the future peace of the world.

President Woodrow Wilson, 1918.

Think!

Which of the three kinds of League proposed by the Allies do you think would be the best at keeping peace?

- ♦ a world parliament
- ♦ a simple organisation for emergencies only
- ♦ strong with its own army.

SOURCE 3

[If the European powers] had dared to discuss their problems for a single fortnight in 1914 the First World War would never have happened. If they had been forced to discuss them for a whole year, war would have been inconceivable.

President Wilson speaking in 1918.

After the First World War everyone wanted to avoid repeating the mass slaughter of the war that had just ended. They also agreed that a League of Nations – an organisation that could solve international problems without resorting to war – would help achieve this. However, there was disagreement about what kind of organisation it should be.

- President Wilson wanted the League of Nations to be like a **world parliament** where representatives of all nations could meet together regularly to decide on any matters that affected them all.
- Many British leaders thought the best League would be a **simple organisation** that would just get together in emergencies. An organisation like this already existed. It was called the Conference of Ambassadors.
- France proposed a **strong League with its own army**.

It was President Wilson who won. He insisted that discussions about a League should be a major part of the peace treaties and in 1919 he took personal charge of drawing up plans for the League. By February he had drafted a very ambitious plan.

All the major nations would join the League. They would disarm. If they had a dispute with another country, they would take it to the League. They promised to accept the decision made by the League. They also promised to protect one another if they were invaded. If any member did break the Covenant (see page 28) and go to war, other members promised to stop trading with it and to send troops if necessary to force it to stop fighting. Wilson's hope was that citizens of all countries would be so much against another conflict that this would prevent their leaders from going to war.

The plan was prepared in a great hurry and critics suggested there was some woolly thinking. Some people were angered by Wilson's arrogant style. He acted as if only he knew the solutions to Europe's problems. Others were worried by his idealism. Under threat of war, would the public really behave in the way he suggested? Would countries really do what the League said? Wilson glossed over what the League would do if they didn't.

Even so, most people in Europe were prepared to give Wilson's plans a try. They hoped that no country would dare invade another if they knew that the USA and other powerful nations of the world would stop trading with them or send their armies to stop them. In 1919 hopes were high that the League, with the United States in the driving seat, could be a powerful peacemaker.

Think!

Source 4 may not sound the most riveting of speeches but maybe that explains why Wilson sometimes got people's backs up and failed to convince people of his point of view. If you were a modern spin doctor asked to spice up this speech what would you add or take away? (You can read the full speech on the internet at the Spartacus Educational website.)

SOURCE 4

For the first time in history the counsels of mankind are to be drawn together and concerted for the purpose of defending the rights and improving the conditions of working people – men, women, and children – all over the world. Such a thing as that was never dreamed of before, and what you are asked to discuss in discussing the League of Nations is the matter of seeing that this thing is not interfered with. There is no other way to do it than by a universal league of nations, and what is proposed is a universal league of nations.

Extract from a speech by President Woodrow Wilson to an American audience in 1919.

SOURCE 5A



OVERWEIGHTED.

Woodrow Wilson: "THESE THINGS AREN'T EASY, NOW GET DOWN!"
Bird in Hand: "OF COURSE I WANT TO PLEASE EVERYBODY, BUT NOT THIS A BIT HEAVY!"

SOURCE 5B



READY TO START.

Two British cartoons from 1919/1920.

Source Analysis ▲

Work in pairs. One of you work with Source 5A and the other work with Source 5B.

- 1 What is the message of your cartoon? Make sure that you explain what details in the cartoon help to get this message across.
- 2 Is your cartoon optimistic or pessimistic about the League of Nations? Give reasons.
- 3 Compare your ideas with your partner's, then write a paragraph comparing the two cartoons.

Focus Task

How successful was the League of Nations in the 1920s?

Your prediction

You may already have formed an opinion on the League of Nations – but if you haven't, even better! Make your prediction as to how successful you think the League will be *in the 1920s*. For example, how successful do you think it will be in settling the problems left over from the First World War?



To record your prediction, make your own copy of this diagram, but with one difference. Redraw the segments to show how successful you think it is going to be. Draw your own diagram large and put it somewhere you can refer to it again as you will be asked to check back a number of times to reconsider your prediction.

Think!

Study Source 6. Write a ten-word slogan summarising each reason for opposing the USA's membership of the League.

A body blow to the League

Back in the USA, however, Woodrow Wilson had problems. Before the USA could even join the League, let alone take a leading role, he needed the approval of his Congress (the American 'Parliament'). And in the USA the idea of a League was not at all popular, as you can see from Source 6.

SOURCE 6

The league was supposed to enforce the Treaty of Versailles yet some Americans, particularly the millions who had German ancestors, hated the Treaty itself.



If the League imposed sanctions (e.g. stopping trade with a country that was behaving aggressively) it might be American trade and business that suffered most!



Some feared that joining the League meant sending US soldiers to settle every little conflict around the world. No one wanted that after casualties of the First World War.



Some feared that the League would be dominated by Britain or France – and would be called to help defend their empires! Many in the US were anti-empires.

Reasons for opposition to the League in the USA.

Source Analysis ▶

- 1 What is the message of the cartoon in Source 7?
- 2 Explain how the bridge might have been seen by
 - a) supporters
 - b) opponents of the League.

SOURCE 7

An American cartoon reprinted in the British newspaper the *Star*, June 1919.

Together, the critics of Wilson's plans (see Source 6) put up powerful opposition to the League. They were joined by Wilson's many other political opponents. Wilson's Democratic Party had run the USA for eight troubled years. Its opponents saw the League as an ideal opportunity to defeat

him. Wilson toured the USA to put his arguments to the people, but when Congress voted in 1919 he was defeated.

In 1920 Wilson became seriously ill after a stroke. Despite that, he continued to press for the USA to join the League. He took the proposal back to Congress again in March 1920, but they defeated it by 49 votes to 35.

SOURCE 8



A British cartoon from 1920. The figure in the white top hat represents the USA.

Source Analysis ▲

Source 8 is one of the most famous cartoons about the League of Nations. On your own copy of the cartoon add annotations to explain the key features. Then write your own summary of the message of the cartoonist.

Still the Democrats did not give up. They were convinced that if the USA did not get involved in international affairs, another world war might follow. In the 1920 election Wilson could not run for President – he was too ill – but his successor made membership of the League a major part of the Democrat campaign. The Republican candidate, Warren Harding, on the other hand, campaigned for America to be isolationist (i.e. not to get involved in international alliance but follow its own policies and self-interest). His slogan was to ‘return to normalcy’, by which he meant life as it was before the war, with the USA isolating itself from European affairs. The Republicans won a landslide victory.

So when the League opened for business in January 1920 the American chair was empty. The USA never joined. This was a personal rebuff for Wilson and the Democrats, but it was also a body blow to the League.

Think!

Look back to your prediction from the Focus Task on page 25. Do you want to change your prediction in light of the fact that the USA has not joined the league?

Revision Tip

Be sure you can remember:

- ◆ at least two reasons why some Americans were opposed to the USA joining the League (see Source 6)
- ◆ what isolationism means and how it affected the USA's decision.

Factfile

The League of Nations

- The League's home was in Geneva in Switzerland.
- Despite it being the brainchild of the US President, the USA was never a member of the League.
- The most influential part of the League was the Council – a small group representing the most powerful members. But it was a vast organisation with lots of different parts to fulfil different functions (see chart on pages 30–31).
- The League did not have its own army. But it could call on the armies of its members if necessary.
- One of the jobs of the League was to uphold and enforce the Treaty of Versailles. This included running some of the territories (mandates) that had belonged to the defeated countries.
- Forty-two countries joined the League at the start. By the 1930s it had 59 members.

The five giants represent the five continents of the Earth. The giants are standing firm together.



At the giants' feet, leaders of all the nations are working, reading and talking together. The League's members come from all five continents. The League believed that strength came from unity.

The aims of the League

A Covenant set out the aims of the League of Nations. These were:

- to discourage aggression from any nation
- to encourage countries to co-operate, especially in business and trade
- to encourage nations to disarm
- to improve the living and working conditions of people in all parts of the world.

Article 10

The Covenant set out 26 Articles or rules, which all members of the League agreed to follow. Probably the most important Article was Article 10. 'The members of the League undertake to preserve against external aggression the territory and existing independence of all members of the League. In case of threat of danger the Council [of the League] shall advise upon the means by which this obligation shall be fulfilled.' Article 10 really meant **collective security**. By acting together (collectively), the members of the League could prevent war by defending the lands and interests of all nations, large or small.

SOURCE 9



One woman stands astride two silent guns holding her baby – a symbol of hope for the future.

Some of the guns are still firing but, one by one, men and women are pushing them off a precipice where they will break up and be unusable. The League tried to persuade countries to disarm.

Women welcome their men back from war.

Wall paintings by the famous Spanish artist José Maria Sert that decorate the Assembly Chamber in the League's Headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland. They were designed to show the aims and values of the League.

Revision Tip

Make sure you can remember the four aims of the League. The initial letters may help you as they spell out AC/DC.

Think!

The League had four main aims:

- ◆ Discourage aggression
- ◆ Encourage co-operation
- ◆ Encourage disarmament
- ◆ Improve living conditions.

As you work through the chapter note down examples that you think could be used as

- ◆ Evidence of success
 - ◆ Evidence of failure in each of the aims.
- You could record your evidence in a table.

Membership of the League

In the absence of the USA, Britain and France were the most powerful countries in the League. Italy and Japan were also permanent members of the Council, but throughout the 1920s and 1930s it was Britain and France who usually guided policy. Any action by the League needed their support.

However, both countries were poorly placed to take on this role. Both had been weakened by the First World War. Neither country was quite the major power it had once been. Neither of them had the resources to fill the gap left by the USA. Indeed, some British politicians said that if they had foreseen the American decision, they would not have voted to join the League either. They felt that the Americans were the only nation with the resources or influence to make the League work. In particular, they felt that trade sanctions would only work if the Americans applied them.

For the leaders of Britain and France the League posed a real problem. They were the ones who had to make it work, yet even at the start they doubted how effective it could be.

SOURCE 10

The League of Nations is not set up to deal with a world in chaos, or with any part of the world which is in chaos. The League of Nations may give assistance but it is not, and cannot be, a complete instrument for bringing order out of chaos.

Arthur Balfour, chief British representative at the League of Nations, speaking in 1920.

Both countries had other priorities.

- British politicians, for example, were more interested in rebuilding British trade and looking after the British empire than in being an international police force.
- France's main concern was still Germany. It was worried that without an army of its own the League was too weak to protect France from its powerful neighbour. It did not think Britain was likely to send an army to help it. This made France quite prepared to bypass the League if necessary in order to strengthen its position against Germany.

SOURCE 11



Membership of the League of Nations. This chart shows only the most powerful nations. More than 50 other countries were also members.

Think!

- List the strengths and weaknesses of Britain and France as leaders of the League of Nations.
- France proposed that the League should have an army of its own. Why do you think most people opposed this?
- Think back to Wilson's ideas for the League. What problems would be caused by the fact that:
 - the USA
 - Germany
 were not members of the League?

Think!

- Study the diagram. Which part of the League would deal with the following problems:
 - an outbreak of a new infectious disease
 - a border dispute between two countries
 - accidents caused by dangerous machinery in factories
 - complaints from people in Palestine that the British were not running the mandated territory properly?

The Assembly

- The Assembly was the League's Parliament. Every country in the League sent a representative to the Assembly.
- The Assembly could recommend action to the Council and could vote on:
 - admitting new members to the League
 - appointing temporary members of the Council
 - the budget of the League
 - other ideas put forward by the Council.
- The Assembly only met **once a year**.
- Decisions made by the Assembly had to be **unanimous** – they had to be agreed by all members of the Assembly.



The Permanent Court of International Justice

- This was meant to play a key role in the League's work of settling disputes between countries peacefully.
- The Court was based at the Hague in the Netherlands and was made up of judges from the member countries.
- If it was asked, the Court would give a decision on a border dispute between two countries.
- It also gave legal advice to the Assembly or Council.
- However, the Court had no way of making sure that countries followed its rulings.



Organisation of the League

The Covenant laid out the League's structure and the rules for each of the bodies within it – see the diagram below.

The Council

- The Council was a smaller group than the Assembly, which met more often, usually about five times a year or more often in case of emergency. It included:
 - permanent members. In 1920 these were Britain, France, Italy and Japan.
 - temporary members. They were elected by the Assembly for three-year periods. The number of temporary members varied between four and nine at different times in the League's history.
- Each of the permanent members of the Council had a **veto**. This meant that one permanent member could stop the Council acting even if all other members agreed.
- The main idea behind the Council was that if any disputes arose between members, the members brought the problem to the Council and it was sorted out through discussion before matters got out of hand. However, if this did not work, the Council could use a range of powers:
 - Moral condemnation:** they could decide which country was 'the aggressor', i.e. which country was to blame for the trouble. They could condemn the aggressor's action and tell it to stop what it was doing.
 - Economic and financial sanctions:** members of the League could refuse to trade with the aggressor.
 - Military force:** the armed forces of member countries could be used against an aggressor.

The Secretariat

- The Secretariat was a sort of civil service.
- It kept records of League meetings and prepared reports for the different agencies of the League.
- The Secretariat had specialist sections covering areas such as health, disarmament and economic matters.

The International Labour Organisation (ILO)

- The ILO brought together employers, governments and workers' representatives once a year.
- Its aim was to improve the conditions of working people throughout the world.
- It collected statistics and information about working conditions and it tried to persuade member countries to adopt its suggestions.



The League of Nations Commissions

As well as dealing with disputes between its members, the League also attempted to tackle other major problems. This was done through agencies, commissions or committees. The table below sets out the aims of some of these agencies and the scale of some of the problems facing them.

The Mandates Commissions

The First World War had led to many former colonies of Germany and her allies ending up as League of Nations mandates ruled by Britain and France on behalf of the League. The Mandates Commission was made up of teams of expert advisers whose job was to report to the League on how people in the mandates were being treated. The aim of the Commission was to make sure that Britain or France acted in the interests of the people of that territory, not its own interests. The Commission also took charge of the welfare of minority groups within other states, particularly the new territories created by the Peace Treaties of 1919–23.



The Refugees Committee

At the end of the First World War there were hundreds of thousands of refugees who had fled from the areas of conflict. Some were trying to get back to their homes; others had no homes to go to. The most pressing problems were in former Russian territories: the Balkans, Greece, Armenia and Turkey. In 1927 the League reported that there were 750 000 refugees from former Russian territories and 168 000 Armenians. The League appointed the famous explorer Fridtjof Nansen to oversee the efforts to return refugees to their homes or help refugees to settle and find work in new countries. It was a mammoth task.



The Slavery Commission

This Commission worked to abolish slavery around the world. It was a particular issue in East Africa but slavery was also a major concern in many other parts of the world. And there were also many workers who were not technically slaves but were treated like slaves.



The Health Committee

The Health Committee attempted to deal with the problem of dangerous diseases and to educate people about health and sanitation. The First World War had brought about rapid developments in medicine and ideas about public health and disease prevention. The Health Committee worked with charities and many other independent agencies to collect statistics about health issues, to spread the new ideas and to develop programmes to fight disease.



Focus Task

Were there weaknesses in the League's organisation?

Here is a conversation which might have taken place between two diplomats in 1920.

Peace at last! The League of Nations will keep large and small nations secure.



I'm not sure. It might look impressive but I think there are weaknesses in the League.

- 1 Work in pairs. Choose one statement each and write out the reasons each diplomat might give for his opinion. In your answer make sure you refer to:
 - ♦ the membership of the League
 - ♦ what the main bodies within the League can do
 - ♦ how each body will make decisions
 - ♦ how the League will enforce its decisions.
- 2 Go back to your diagram from page 25 and see if you want to change your predictions about how successful the League will be.

Revision Tip

This is quite a complex chart. Your main aim is to be sure you know the difference between the League's Council and its Assembly.

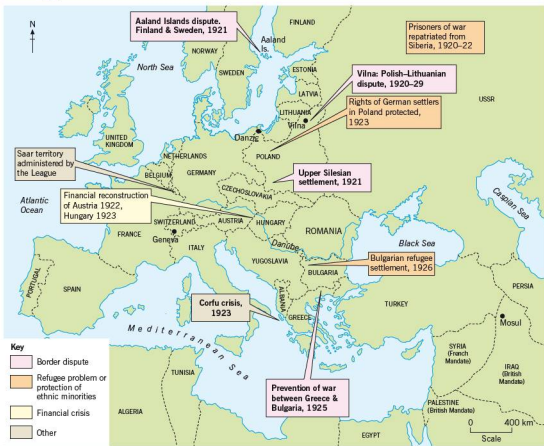
Think!

Five of the problems shown in Source 12 are described on pages 33–4. They are highlighted in bold text on the map on this page. As you read about each one, score the League's success on a scale of –5 (a total failure) to +5 (a great success).

The League and border disputes in the 1920s

The treaties signed at the Paris Peace Conference had created new states and changed the borders of others. Inevitably this led to disputes and was the job of the League to sort out border disputes. From the start there was so much to do that some disputes were handled by the Conference of Ambassadors. Strictly this was not a body of the League of Nations. But it was made up of leading politicians from the main members of the League – Britain, France and Italy – so it was very closely linked to the League. As you can see from Source 12 the 1920s was a busy time.

SOURCE 12



Problems dealt with by the League of Nations or the Conference of Ambassadors in the 1920s. The problems in bold text are described on pages 33–4.

This map actually shows only a few of the disputes which involved the League in this period. We have highlighted some of the more important ones. For example:

- In 1920 Poland effectively took control of the Lithuanian capital Vilna. Lithuania appealed to the League and the League protested to Poland but the Poles did not pull out. France and Britain were not prepared to act.
- In 1921 a dispute broke out between Germany and Poland over the Upper Silesia region. In the end, the League oversaw a plebiscite (vote) and divided the region between Germany and Poland. Both countries accepted the decision.

- Also in 1921, the League ruled on a dispute between Finland and Sweden over the Aaland Islands. Both sides were threatening to go to war but in the end Sweden accepted the League's ruling that the islands should belong to Finland.

We are now going to look at two other disputes in more detail.

SOURCE 13

The League had been designed to deal with just such a dangerous problem as this. It had acted promptly and fairly and it had condemned the violence of the Italians. But it had lost the initiative. The result was that a great power had once again got away with using force against a small power.

Historians Gibbons and Morican referring to the Corfu crisis in *The League of Nations and the UNO*, 1973.

SOURCE 14

The settlement of the dispute between Italy and Greece, though not strictly a League victory, upheld the principles on which it was based.

From J and G Stokes, *Europe and the Modern World*, 1973.

Source Analysis ▲

- 1 Sources 13 and 14 are referring to the same event. How do their interpretations differ?
- 2 Could they both be right? Explain your answer.
- 3 'The main problem in the Corfu crisis was not the League's organisation but the attitude of its own members.' Explain whether you agree.

Corfu, 1923

One of the boundaries that had to be sorted out after the war was the border between Greece and Albania. The Conference of Ambassadors was given this job and it appointed an Italian general called Tellini to supervise it. On 27 August, while they were surveying the Greek side of the frontier area, Tellini and his team were ambushed and killed. The Italian leader Mussolini was furious and blamed the Greek government for the murder. On 29 August he demanded that it pay compensation to Italy and execute the murderers. The Greeks, however, had no idea who the murderers were. On 31 August Mussolini bombarded and then occupied the Greek island of Corfu. Fifteen people were killed. Greece appealed to the League for help. The situation was serious. It seemed very like the events of 1914 that had triggered the First World War. Fortunately, the Council was already in session, so the League acted swiftly. Articles 12 and 15 of the League of Nations were designed for exactly this situation. Under these articles, when League members were in dispute and there was a danger of war, members could take their dispute to the Council and get a judgement. By 7 September it had prepared its judgement. It condemned Mussolini's actions. It also suggested that Greece pay compensation but that the money be held by the League. This money would then be paid to Italy if, and when, Tellini's killers were found.

However, Mussolini refused to let the matter rest. He insisted that this dispute had to be settled by the Council of Ambassadors because the Council of the League was not competent to deal with the issue. Mussolini would probably have failed if the British and French had stood together. Records from the meetings of the British government show that the British did not accept the Italian case and that the British were prepared to intervene to force Mussolini out of Corfu. However, the French completely disagreed and backed the Italians, probably because their forces were tied up in the Ruhr at this time (see pages 90–99) and could not tackle a dispute with Italy as well. The British could have acted alone, possibly by imposing sanctions or sending naval forces to Corfu. Article 16 of the League Covenant said that actions could be taken if one side committed an act of war. But the British were not prepared to act without the French and argued that Mussolini's actions did not constitute an act of war.

In the end Mussolini got his way and the Council of ambassadors made the final ruling on the dispute. A Commission was set up consisting of British, French, Italian and Japanese representatives. The Italian Commissioner was the only one to blame the Greeks in the dispute. Despite this the Council's ruling was changed and the Greeks had to apologise and pay compensation directly to Italy. On 27 September, Mussolini withdrew from Corfu boasting of his triumph.

There was much anger in the League over the Council's actions and League lawyers challenged the legality of the decision. However, the ruling was never changed. As historian Zara Steiner says: 'the dispute showed that the weakest of the great powers could get its way when Britain and France agreed to sacrifice justice for co-operation'.

The Geneva Protocol

The Corfu incident demonstrated how the League of Nations could be undermined by its own members. Britain and France drew up the Geneva Protocol in 1924, which said that if two members were in dispute they would have to ask the League to sort out the disagreement and they would have to accept the Council's decision. They hoped this would strengthen the League. But before the plan could be put into effect there was a general election in Britain. The new Conservative government refused to sign the Protocol, worried that Britain would be forced to agree to something that was not in its own interests. So the Protocol, which had been meant to strengthen the League, in fact weakened it.

SOURCE 15

Make only slight resistance. Protect the refugees. Prevent the spread of panic. Do not expose the troops to unnecessary losses in view of the fact that the incident has been laid before the Council of the League of Nations, which is expected to stop the invasion.

A telegram from the Bulgarian Ministry of War in Sofia to its army commanders, 22 October 1925.

Source Analysis

- 1 Read Source 15. Why do you think Bulgaria was so optimistic about the League?
- 2 Look at Source 16. What impression of the League does this cartoon give you?

Focus Task

Did the weaknesses in the League's organisation make failure inevitable?

Can you find evidence to support or challenge each of the following criticisms of the League's organisation:

- ♦ that it would be slow to act
- ♦ that members would act in their own interests, not the League's
- ♦ that without the USA it would be powerless?

Use a table like this to record your answers:

Criticism	Evidence for	Evidence against

Focus first on the Bulgarian and Corfu crises. These will be most useful for your exam. Then look for evidence from the other crises.

Keep your table safe. You will add to it in a later task on page 37.

Once you have completed your table look at the balance of evidence. Does this suggest to you that the League could have succeeded, or not?

Bulgaria, 1925

Two years after Corfu, the League was tested yet again. In October 1925, Greek troops invaded Bulgaria after an incident on the border in which some Greek soldiers were killed. Bulgaria appealed for help. It also sent instructions to its army (see Source 15).

The secretary-general of the League acted quickly and decisively calling a meeting of the League Council in Paris. The League demanded both sides stand their forces down and Greek forces withdraw from Bulgaria. Britain and France solidly backed the League's judgement (and it is worth remembering they were negotiating the Locarno Treaties at the same time – see the Factfile on page 36). The League sent observers to assess the situation and judged in favour of the Bulgarians. Greece had to pay \$45,000 in compensation and was threatened with sanctions if it did not follow the ruling.

The Greeks obeyed, although they did complain that there seemed to be one rule for the large states (such as Italy) and another for the smaller ones (such as themselves). Nevertheless the incident was seen as a major success for the League and many observers seemed to forget the shame of the Corfu incident as optimism about the effectiveness of the League soared. Few pointed out that it was not so much the effectiveness of the machinery of League in this dispute but the fact that the great powers were united on their decision.

SOURCE 16



A cartoon about the Bulgarian crisis in *Punch*, 11 November 1925. The characters are based on Tweedledee and Tweedledum, from the children's book *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, who were always squabbling.



Two League of Nations' projects.

Think!

- Study Sources 17A and 17B. What aspects of the League's work do you think they show?
- Why do you think the founders of the League wanted it to tackle social problems?
- The work of the League's commissions affected hundreds of millions of people, yet historians write very little about this side of its work. Why do you think this is?

Revision Tip

Border disputes

Make sure you can:

- describe one success in the 1920s and explain why it was a success
- describe one failure in the 1920s and explain why it was a failure and as a bonus:
- describe and explain one **partial** success or failure.

The commissions

Make sure you can remember two specific examples of work done by the League's commissions or committees. Choose the ones that you think affected the most people.

How did the League of Nations work for a better world?

The League of Nations had set itself a wider task than simply waiting for disputes to arise and hoping to solve them. Through its commissions or committees (see page 31), the League aimed to fight poverty, disease and injustice all over the world.

- Refugees** The League did tremendous work in getting refugees and former prisoners of war back to their homelands. Head of the Refugees Committee Fridtjof Nansen introduced a document which became known as the 'Nansen Passport'. This made it much easier for genuine refugees to travel across borders to return home or resettle in new lands. It is estimated that in the first few years after the war, about 400,000 prisoners were returned to their homes by the League's agencies. When war led to a refugee crisis hit Turkey in 1922, hundreds of thousands of people had to be housed in refugee camps. The League acted quickly to stamp out cholera, smallpox and dysentery in the camps. However, the Refugee Committee was constantly short of funds and Nansen spent much of his time trying to raise donations. Its work became more difficult in the 1930s as the international situation became more tense and the authority of the League declined.
- Working conditions** The International Labour Organisation was successful in banning poisonous white lead from paint and in limiting the hours that small children were allowed to work. It also campaigned strongly for employers to improve working conditions generally. It introduced a resolution for a maximum 48-hour week, and an eight-hour day, but only a minority of members adopted it because they thought it would raise industrial costs. Like the Refugees Commission, the ILO was also hampered by lack of funds and also because it could not do much more than 'name and shame' countries or organisations that broke its regulations or generally mistreated workers. Nevertheless it was influential and it was a step forward in the sense that many abuses were not even known about before the ILO exposed them.
- Health** The Health Committee produced some important achievements. As well as collecting statistical information and spreading good practice it sponsored research into infectious diseases with institutes in Singapore, London and Denmark. These institutes were important in helping to develop vaccines and other medicines to fight deadly diseases such as leprosy and malaria. It started the global campaign to exterminate mosquitoes, which greatly reduced cases of malaria and yellow fever in later decades. Even the USSR, which was otherwise opposed to the League, took Health Committee advice on preventing plague in Siberia. The Health Committee is generally regarded as one of the most successful of the League's organisations and its work was continued by the United Nations Organisation after 1945 in the form of the World Health Organisation.
- Transport** The League made recommendations on marking shipping lanes and produced an international highway code for road users.
- Social problems** The League blacklisted four large German, Dutch, French and Swiss companies which were involved in the illegal drug trade. It brought about the freeing of 200,000 slaves in British-owned Sierra Leone. It organised raids against slave owners and traders in Burma. It challenged the use of forced labour to build the Tanganyika railway in Africa, where the death rate among the African workers was a staggering 50 per cent. League pressure brought this down to four per cent, which it said was 'a much more acceptable figure'.

Even in the areas where it could not remove social injustice the League kept careful records of what was going on and provided information on problems such as drug trafficking, prostitution and slavery.

Factfile

International agreements of the 1920s

- **1921 Washington Conference:** USA, Britain, France and Japan agreed to limit the size of their navies.
- **1922 Rapallo Treaty:** The USSR and Germany re-established diplomatic relations.
- **1924 The Dawes Plan:** to avert a terrible economic crisis in Germany, the USA lent money to Germany to help it to pay its reparations bill (see this page).
- **1925 Locarno treaties:** Germany accepted its western borders as set out in the Treaty of Versailles. This was greeted with great enthusiasm, especially in France. It paved the way for Germany to join the League of Nations.
- **1928 Kellogg-Briand Pact:** 65 nations agreed not to use force to settle disputes. This is also known as the Pact of Paris.
- **1929 Young Plan:** reduced Germany's reparations payments.

Source Analysis ▶

- 1 What is Source 18 commenting on?
- 2 Is the cartoonist praising or criticising someone or something in Source 18? Explain your answer.

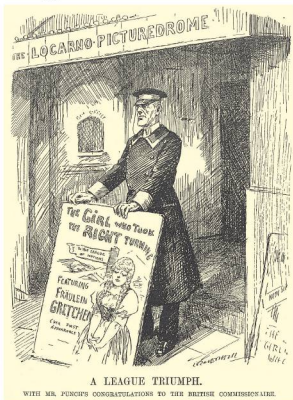
Disarmament

In the 1920s, the League largely failed in bringing about disarmament. At the Washington Conference in 1921 the USA, Japan, Britain and France agreed to limit the size of their navies, but that was as far as disarmament ever got.

The failure of disarmament was particularly damaging to the League's reputation in Germany. Germany had disarmed. It had been forced to. But no other countries had disarmed to the same extent. They were not prepared to give up their own armies and they were certainly not prepared to be the first to disarm.

Even so, in the late 1920s, the League's failure over disarmament did not seem too serious because of a series of international agreements that seemed to promise a more peaceful world (see Factfile).

SOURCE 18



WITH MR. PUNCH'S CONGRATULATIONS TO THE BRITISH COMMISSIONER.

A *Punch* cartoon from 1925. The woman on the billboard represents Germany.

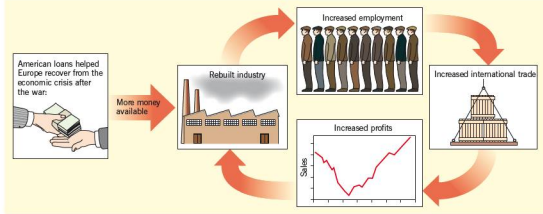
SOURCE 19

There was a tendency for nations to conduct much of their diplomacy outside the League of Nations and to put their trust in paper treaties. After the USA assisted Europe financially there seemed to be more goodwill which statesmen tried to capture in pacts and treaties. Many of them, however, were of little value. They represented no more than the hopes of decent men.

Written by historian
Jack Watson in 1984.

Economic recovery

Another reason for optimism in 1928 was that, after the difficult days of the early 1920s, the economies of the European countries were once again recovering. The Dawes Plan of 1924 had helped to sort out Germany's economic chaos and had also helped to get the economies of Britain and France moving again (see Source 20). The recovery of trading relationships between these countries helped to reduce tension. That is why one of the aims of the League had been to encourage trading links between the countries. When countries were trading with one another, they were much less likely to go to war with each other.



How the Dawes Plan helped economic recovery in Europe.

How far did the League succeed in the 1920s?

Although Wilson's version of the League never happened, the League still achieved a lot in the 1920s. It helped many sick, poor and homeless people. It stabilised several economies after the war. Perhaps most important of all, the League became one of the ways in which the world sorted out international disputes (even if it was not the only way). Historian Zara Steiner has said that 'the League was very effective in handling the "small change" of international diplomacy'. The implication, of course, is that the League could not deal with 'big' issues but it was not tested in this way in the 1920s.

Some historians believe that the biggest achievement of the League was the way it helped develop an 'internationalist mindset' among leaders – in other words it encouraged them to think in terms of collaborating rather than competing. One way in which the League did this was simply by existing! Great and small powers felt that it was worth sending their ministers to League meetings throughout the 1920s and 1930s, so they would often talk when they might not have done so otherwise. Even when the Great Powers acted on their own (for example, over Corfu) it was often after their ministers had discussed their plans at League meetings!

Focus task

How successful was the League in the 1920s?

It is now time to draw some conclusions to this key question.

Stage 1: Recap your work so far

- 1 Look back at your table from page 34. What evidence have you found of success or failure in each objective?
- 2 Look back to your predictions for the League for the 1920s (page 25). Has the League performed better or worse than you predicted? Redraw your prediction to show the balance of success and failure in the 1920s.

discourage aggression	encourage co-operation
encourage disarmament	improve living conditions

Stage 2: Evaluate the successes and failures

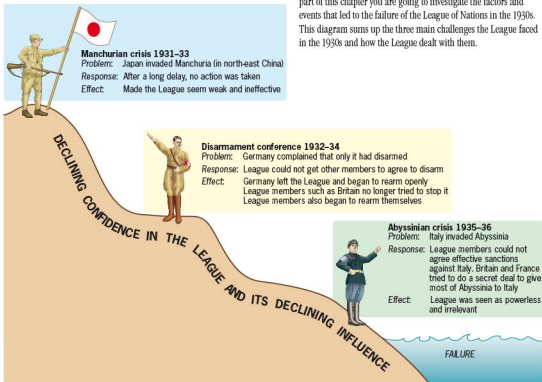
- 3 Create four file cards like this – one for each of the League's objectives.
- 4 Put the objective you think was achieved to the greatest extent at the top, and that which was achieved to the least extent at the bottom.
- 5 Write a paragraph to explain your order and support it with evidence from this chapter.
- 6 Suggest one change the League could make to be more effective in each of its objectives. Explain how the change would help.

Stage 3: Reach a judgement

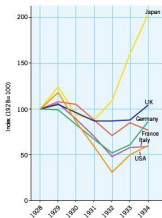
- 7 Which of the following statements do you most agree with?
 - ◆ 'The League of Nations was a great force for peace in the 1920s.'
 - ◆ 'Events of the 1920s showed just how weak the League really was.'
 - ◆ 'The League's successes in the 1920s were small-scale, its failures had a higher profile.'
- Explain why you have chosen your statement, and why you rejected the others.

2.2 How successful was the League of Nations?

Historians do not agree about how successful the League of Nations was in the 1920s. However, in contrast, they almost all agree that in the 1930s the League of Nations was a failure. In the second part of this chapter you are going to investigate the factors and events that led to the failure of the League of Nations in the 1930s. This diagram sums up the three main challenges the League faced in the 1930s and how the League dealt with them.



SOURCE 1



The rise and fall in industrial production in selected countries, 1928–34.

It makes quite depressing reading!

However, historians do not all agree on how far these failures were the fault of the League and how far other factors that the League could not control were more important. The biggest of these was the economic depression so let's start with that.

The economic depression

In the late 1920s there had been a boom in world trade. The USA was the richest nation in the world. American business was the engine driving the world economy. Everyone traded with the USA. Most countries also borrowed money from American banks. As a result of this trade, most countries were getting richer. You saw on page 37 how this economic recovery helped to reduce international tension. However, one of the League's leading figures predicted that political disaster might follow if countries did not co-operate economically. He turned out to be right.

In 1929 economic disaster did strike. In the USA the Wall Street Crash started a long depression that quickly caused economic problems throughout the world (see page 41). It damaged the trade and industry of all countries (see Source 1). It affected relations between countries and it also led to important political changes within countries (see diagram on page 39). Much of the goodwill and the optimism of the late 1920s evaporated.

Revision Tip

- ◆ The key idea to grasp here is that the Depression created economic problems which led to political problems later on.
- ◆ The two most important examples are Germany and Japan so make sure you can describe how the Depression affected them.

In the 1930s, as a result of the Depression much of the goodwill and the optimism of the late 1920s evaporated.

- As US loans dried up, businesses in many countries went bust, leading to unemployment.
- Some countries tried to protect their own industries by bringing in tariffs to stop imports. But this just meant their trading partners did the same thing and trade got even worse, leading to more businesses going bust and more unemployment.
- Many countries (including Germany, Japan, Italy and Britain) started to rearm (build up their armed forces) as a way of trying to get industries working and giving jobs to the unemployed.
- As their neighbours rearmed, many states began to fear that their neighbours might have other plans for their new armies so they built up their own forces.

The internationalist spirit of the 1920s was replaced by a more nationalist 'beggar my neighbour' approach in the Depression.

The USA

One way that the League of Nations could stop one country invading another was to use economic sanctions. But the Depression made the USA unwilling to help in this because economic sanctions would make its own economy even worse.

Top priority – sort out US economy.
Low priority – help sort out international disputes.



Britain

Britain was one of the leaders of the League of Nations. But, like the USA, it was unwilling to help sort out international disputes while its economy was bad. For example, when Japan invaded Manchuria it did nothing – it did not support economic sanctions against Japan and did not send troops to protect Manchuria.

Top priority – sort out British economy.
Low priority – help sort out international disputes.



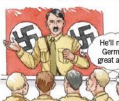
Japan

The Depression threatened to bankrupt Japan. Its main export was silk to the USA, but the USA was buying less silk. So Japan had less money to buy food and raw materials. Its leaders were all army general. They decided to build an empire by taking over weaker countries that had the raw materials Japan needed. They started by invading Manchuria (part of China) in 1931.



Germany

The Depression hit Germany badly. There was unemployment, poverty and chaos. Germany's weak leaders seemed unable to do anything. As a result, Germans elected Adolf Hitler to lead them. He was not good news for international peace. He openly planned to invade Germany's neighbours and to win back land that Germany had lost in the Great War.



Italy

In Italy economic problems encouraged Mussolini to try and build an overseas empire to distract people's attention from the difficulties the government faced.



Focus task

How did the Depression make the work of the League harder?

Study these statements:

- 'I have not worked since last year.'
 - 'I will support anyone who can get the country back to work.'
 - 'If we had our own empire we would have the resources we need. Economic depressions would not damage us so much.'
 - 'Reparations have caused this mess.'
 - 'The bank has closed. We've lost everything!'
 - 'We need tough leaders who will not be pushed around by the League of Nations or the USA.'
 - 'We should ban all foreign goods. That will protect the jobs of our workers.'
- suggest which country (or countries) they could have been made in during the Depression – USA, Britain, France, Germany, Japan or Italy
 - suggest why these views would worry the League of Nations.

Revision Tip

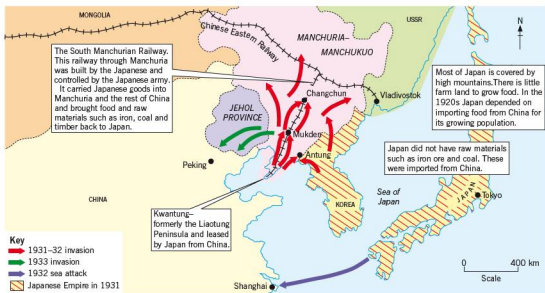
Make sure you can explain:

- what the League decided should happen in Manchuria
- why it was unable to force Japan to obey.

How did the Manchurian crisis weaken the League?

The first major test for the League came when the Japanese invaded Manchuria in 1931.

SOURCE 2



The railways and natural resources of Manchuria.

Background

Since 1900 Japan's economy and population had been growing rapidly. By the 1920s Japan was a major power with a powerful military, strong industries and a growing empire (see Source 2). But the Depression hit Japan badly as China and the USA put up tariffs (trade barriers) against Japanese goods. Army leaders in Japan were in no doubt about the solution to Japan's problems – Japan would not face these problems if it had an empire to provide resources and markets for Japanese goods.

Invasion 1, 1931

In 1931 an incident in Manchuria gave them an ideal opportunity. The Japanese army controlled the South Manchurian Railway (see Source 2). When Chinese troops allegedly attacked the railway the Japanese armed forces used this as an excuse to invade and set up a government in Manchukuo (Manchuria), which they controlled. Japan's civilian government protested but the military were now in charge.

China appeals

China appealed to the League. The Japanese argued that China was in such a state of anarchy that they had to invade in self-defence to keep peace in the area. For the League of Nations this was a serious test. Japan was a leading member of the League. It needed careful handling. What should the League do?

SOURCE 3

I was sad to find everyone [at the League] so dejected. The Assembly was a dead thing. The Council was without confidence in itself. Beneš [the Czechoslovak leader], who is not given to hysterics, said [about the people at the League] 'They are too frightened. I tell them we are not going to have war now; we have five years before us, perhaps six. We must make the most of them.'

The British elder statesman Sir Austen Chamberlain visited the League of Nations late in 1932 in the middle of the Manchurian crisis. This is an adapted extract from his letters.

The League investigates

There was now a long and frustrating delay. The League's officials sailed round the world to assess the situation in Manchuria for themselves. This was well before the days of instant communication by satellite. There was not even reliable air travel. It was September 1932 – a full year after the invasion – before they presented their report. It was detailed and balanced, but the judgement was very clear. Japan had acted unlawfully. Manchuria should be returned to the Chinese.

Invasion 2, 1933

However, in February 1933, instead of withdrawing from Manchuria the Japanese announced that they intended to invade more of China. They still argued that this was necessary in self-defence. On 24 February 1933 the report from the League's officials was approved by 42 votes to 1 in the Assembly. Only Japan voted against. Smarting at the insult, Japan resigned from the League on 27 March 1933. The next week it invaded Jehol (see Source 2).

The League responds

The League was powerless. It discussed economic sanctions, but without the USA, Japan's main trading partner, they would be meaningless. Besides, Britain seemed more interested in keeping up a good relationship with Japan than in agreeing to sanctions. The League also discussed banning arms sales to Japan, but the member countries could not even agree about that. They were worried that Japan would retaliate and the war would escalate.

There was no prospect at all of Britain and France risking their navies or armies in a war with Japan. Only the USA and the USSR would have had the resources to remove the Japanese from Manchuria by force and they were not even members of the League.

Consequences

All sorts of excuses were offered for the failure of the League. Japan was so far away. Japan was a special case. Japan did have a point when it said that China was itself in the grip of anarchy. However, the significance of the Manchurian crisis was obvious. As many of its critics had predicted, the League was powerless if a strong nation decided to pursue an aggressive policy and invade its neighbours. Japan had committed blatant aggression and got away with it. Back in Europe, both Hitler and Mussolini looked on with interest. Within three years they would both follow Japan's example.

SOURCE 4

Source Analysis

- Source 4 is a comment on this Manchurian crisis. On your own copy of this cartoon add annotations to explain:
 - the key features
 - the message
 - what the cartoonist thinks of the League.
- Read Source 3. Does Beneš share the same view of the League as the cartoonist in Source 4?

Think!

- Why did it take so long for the League to make a decision over Manchuria?
- Did the League fail in this incident because of the way it worked or because of the attitude of its members?



A cartoon by David Low, 1933. Low was one of the most famous cartoonists of the 1930s. He regularly criticised both the actions of dictators around the world and the ineffectiveness of the League of Nations.

SOURCE 5

To make myself perfectly clear, I would ask: is there anyone within or without Germany who honestly considers the present German regime to be peaceful in its instincts . . . Germany is inhibited from disturbing the peace of Europe solely by its consciousness of its present military inferiority.

Professor William Rappard speaking to the League in 1932.

Why did disarmament fail in the 1930s?

The next big failure of the League of Nations was over disarmament. As you saw on page 00, the League had not had any success in this area in the 1920s either, but at that stage, when the international climate was better, it had not seemed to matter as much. In the 1930s, however, there was increased pressure for the League to do something about disarmament. The Germans had long been angry about the fact that they had been forced to disarm after the First World War while other nations had not done the same. Many countries were actually spending more on their armaments than they had been before the First World War.

Disarmament Conference

In the wake of the Manchurian crisis, the members of the League realised the urgency of the problem. In February 1932 the long-promised Disarmament Conference finally got under way. By July 1932 it had produced resolutions to prohibit bombing of civilian populations, limit the size of artillery, limit the tonnage of tanks, and prohibit chemical warfare. But there was very little in the resolutions to show how these limits would be achieved. For example, the bombing of civilians was to be prohibited, but all attempts to agree to abolish planes capable of bombing were defeated. Even the proposal to ban the manufacture of chemical weapons was defeated.

German disarmament

It was not a promising start. However, there was a bigger problem facing the Conference – what to do about Germany. The Germans had been in the League for six years. Most people now accepted that they should be treated more equally than under the Treaty of Versailles. The big question was whether everyone else should disarm to the level that Germany had been forced to, or whether the Germans should be allowed to rearm to a level closer to that of the other powers. The experience of the 1920s showed that the first option was a non-starter. But there was great reluctance in the League to allow the second option.

This is how events relating to Germany moved over the next 18 months.

July 1932: Germany tabled proposals for all countries to disarm down to its level. When the Conference failed to agree the principle of ‘equality’, the Germans walked out.

September 1932: The British sent the Germans a note that went some way to agreeing equality, but the superior tone of the note angered the Germans still further.

December 1932: An agreement was finally reached to treat Germany equally.

January 1933: Germany announced it was coming back to the Conference.

February 1933: Hitler became Chancellor of Germany at the end of January. He immediately started to rearm Germany although secretly.

May 1933: Hitler promised not to rearm Germany if ‘in five years all other nations destroyed their arms’.

June 1933: Britain produced an ambitious disarmament plan, but it failed to achieve support at the Conference.

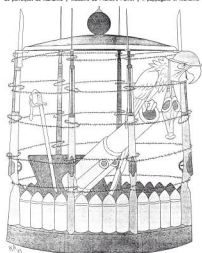
October 1933: Hitler withdrew from the Disarmament Conference, and soon after took Germany out of the League altogether.

Source Analysis ▼

- 1 What is the message of Source 6?
- 2 Why might this cartoon have been published in Germany in July 1933?

SOURCE 6

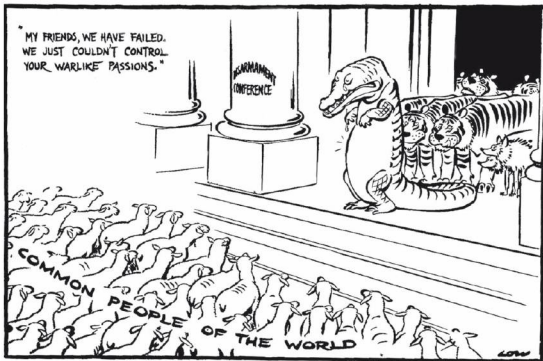
Marianne Pöggendorf
Le perroquet de Marianne / Madame La France's Parrot / Il papagallo di Marianne



A German cartoon from July 1933. The parrot represents France. It is calling for more security.

By this stage, all the powers knew that Hitler was secretly rearming Germany already. They also began to rebuild their own armaments. Against that background the Disarmament Conference struggled on for another year but in an atmosphere of increasing futility. It finally ended in 1934.

SOURCE 7



David Low's cartoon commenting on the failure of the Disarmament Conference in 1934.

Source Analysis

Look at Source 7. Explain what the cartoonist is saying about:

- ordinary people
- political leaders.

Think!

- In what ways were each of the following to blame for the failure of the Disarmament Conference:
 - Germany
 - Britain
 - the League itself?
- Do you think the disarmament failure did less or more damage to the League's reputation than the Manchurian crisis? Give reasons.

Reasons for failure

The Conference failed for a number of reasons. Some say it was all doomed from the start. No one was very serious about disarmament anyway. But there were other factors at work.

It did not help that Britain and France were divided on this issue. By 1933 many British people felt that the Treaty of Versailles was unfair. In fact, to the dismay of the French, the British signed an agreement with Germany in 1935 that allowed Germany to build up its navy as long as it stayed under 35 per cent of the size of the British navy. Britain did not consult either its allies or the League about this, although it was in violation of the Treaty of Versailles.

It seemed that each country was looking after itself and ignoring the League.

Revision Tip

Although disarmament was a key aim of the League it never really had much success on this in either the 1920s or the 1930s. The key thing to remember is why this was more serious in the 1930s than in the 1920s. In the 1930s it was serious because Germany used the failure as an excuse for its rapid and risky rearmament programme.

How did Mussolini's invasion of Abyssinia damage the League?

SOURCE 8



British, French and Italian possessions in eastern Africa.

The fatal blow to the League came when the Italian dictator Mussolini invaded Abyssinia in 1935. There were both similarities with and differences from the Japanese invasion of Manchuria.

- **Like Japan**, Italy was a leading member of the League. Like Japan, Italy wanted to expand its empire by invading another country.
- However, **unlike Manchuria**, this dispute was on the League's doorstep. Italy was a European power. It even had a border with France. Abyssinia bordered on the Anglo-Egyptian territory of Sudan and the British colonies of Uganda, Kenya and British Somaliland. Unlike events in Manchuria, the League could not claim that this problem was in an inaccessible part of the world.

Some argued that Manchuria had been a special case. Would the League do any better in this Abyssinian crisis?

Background

The origins of this crisis lay back in the previous century. In 1896 Italian troops had tried to invade Abyssinia but had been defeated by a poorly equipped army of tribesmen. Mussolini wanted revenge for this humiliating defeat. He also had his eye on the fertile lands and mineral wealth of Abyssinia. However, most importantly, he wanted glory and conquest. His style of leadership needed military victories and he had often talked of restoring the glory of the Roman Empire.

In December 1934 there was a dispute between Italian and Abyssinian soldiers at the Wal-Wal oasis – 80 km inside Abyssinia. Mussolini took this as his cue and claimed this was actually Italian territory. He demanded an apology and began preparing the Italian army for an invasion of Abyssinia. The Abyssinian emperor Haile Selassie appealed to the League for help.

Think!

To help you analyse these events draw a timeline, from December 1934 to May 1936, down the middle of a piece of paper and use the text to mark the key events on it. On one side put the actions of Mussolini or Hitler, on the other the actions of Britain, France and the League.

Phase 1: the League plays for time

From January 1935 to October 1935, Mussolini was supposedly negotiating with the League to settle the dispute. However, at the same time he was shipping his vast army to Africa and whipping up war fever among the Italian people.

To start with, the British and the French failed to take the situation seriously. They played for time. They were desperate to keep good relations with Mussolini, who seemed to be their strongest ally against Hitler. They were given an agreement with him early in 1935 known as the Stresa Pact which was a formal statement against German rearmament and a commitment to stand united against Germany. At the meeting to discuss this, they did not even raise the question of Abyssinia. Some historians suggest that Mussolini believed that Britain and France had promised to turn a blind eye to his exploits in Abyssinia in return for his joining them in the Stresa Pact.

However, as the year wore on, there was a public outcry against Italy's behaviour. A ballot was taken by the League of Nations in Britain in 1934–35. It showed that a majority of British people supported the use of military force to defend Abyssinia if necessary. Facing an autumn election at home, British politicians now began to 'get tough'. At an assembly of the League, the British Foreign Minister, Hoare, made a grand speech about the value of collective security, to the delight of the League's members and all the smaller nations. There was much talking and negotiating. However, the League never actually did anything to discourage Mussolini.

On 4 September, after eight months' deliberation, a committee reported to the League that neither side could be held responsible for the Wal-Wal incident. The League put forward a plan that would give Mussolini some of Abyssinia. Mussolini rejected it.

Phase 2: sanctions or not?

In October 1935 Mussolini's army was ready. He launched a full-scale invasion of Abyssinia. Despite brave resistance, the Abyssinians were no match for the modern Italian army equipped with tanks, aeroplanes and poison gas.

This was a clear-cut case of a large, powerful state attacking a smaller one. The League was designed for just such disputes and, unlike in the Manchurian crisis, it was ideally placed to act.

There was no doubting the seriousness of the issue either. The Covenant (see Factfile, page 28) made it clear that sanctions must be introduced against the aggressor. A committee was immediately set up to agree what sanctions to impose.

Sanctions would only work if they were imposed quickly and decisively. Each week a decision was delayed would allow Mussolini to build up his stockpile of raw materials. The League banned arms sales to Italy; banned loans to Italy; banned imports from Italy. It also banned the export to Italy of rubber, tin and metals. However, the League delayed a decision for two months over whether to ban oil exports to Italy. It feared the Americans would not support the sanctions. It also feared that its members' economic interests would be further damaged. In Britain, the Cabinet was informed that 30,000 British coal miners were about to lose their jobs because of the ban on coal exports to Italy.

More important still, the Suez Canal, which was owned by Britain and France, was not closed to Mussolini's supply ships. The canal was the Italians' main supply route to Abyssinia and closing it could have ended the Abyssinian campaign very quickly. Both Britain and France were afraid that closing the canal could have resulted in war with Italy. This failure was fatal for Abyssinia.

SOURCE 9



THE AWFUL WARNING.

FRANCE AND ENGLAND
(together) to:

"WE DON'T WANT YOU TO FIGHT,
BUT, BY JINGO, IF YOU DO,
WE SHALL PROBABLY ISSUE A JOINT MEMORANDUM
SUGGESTING A MILD DISAPPROVAL OF YOU!"

A cartoon from *Punch*, 1935, commenting on the Abyssinian crisis. *Punch* was usually very patriotic towards Britain. It seldom criticised British politicians over foreign policy.

Source Analysis ►

1 Study Source 9. At what point in the crisis do you think this might have been published? Use the details in the source and the text to help you decide.

2 Here are three possible reasons why this cartoon was drawn:

- ♦ To tell people in Britain what British and French policy was
- ♦ To criticise British and French policy
- ♦ To change British and French policy.

Which do you think is the best explanation?

Think!

- How did:
 - the USA
 - Britain
 undermine the League's attempts to impose sanctions on Italy?
- Explain in your own words:
 - why the Hoare–Laval deal caused such outrage
 - how it affected attitudes to the League
 - how the USA undermined the League.
- Look at Source 10. What event is the cartoonist referring to in 'the matter has been settled elsewhere'?

The Hoare–Laval Pact

Equally damaging to the League was the secret dealing between the British and the French that was going on behind the scenes. In December 1935, while sanctions discussions were still taking place, the British and French Foreign Ministers, Hoare and Laval, were hatching a plan. This aimed to give Mussolini two-thirds of Abyssinia in return for his calling off his invasion! Laval even proposed to put the plan to Mussolini before they showed it to either the League of Nations or Haile Selassie. Laval told the British that if they did not agree to the plan, then the French would no longer support sanctions against Italy.

However, details of the plan were leaked to the French press. It proved quite disastrous for the League. Haile Selassie demanded an immediate League debate about it. In both Britain and France it was seen as a blatant act of treachery against the League. Hoare and Laval were both sacked. But the real damage was to the sanctions discussions. They lost all momentum. The question about whether to ban oil sales was further delayed. In February 1936 the committee concluded that if they did stop oil sales to Italy the Italians' supplies would be exhausted in two months, even if the Americans kept on selling oil to them. But by then it was all too late. Mussolini had already taken over large parts of Abyssinia. And the Americans were even more disgusted with the ditherings of the French and the British than they had been before and so blocked a move to support the League's sanctions. American oil producers actually stepped up their exports to Italy.

The outcomes

On 7 March 1936 the fatal blow was delivered. Hitler, timing his move to perfection, marched his troops into the Rhineland, an act prohibited by the Treaty of Versailles (see page 12). If there had been any hope of getting the French to support sanctions against Italy, it was now dead.

The French were desperate to gain the support of Italy and were now prepared to pay the price of giving Abyssinia to Mussolini.

Italy continued to defy the League's orders and by May 1936 had taken the capital of Abyssinia, Addis Ababa. On 2 May, Haile Selassie was forced into exile. On 9 May Mussolini formally annexed the entire country.

Implications for the League

The League watched helplessly. Collective security had been shown up as an empty promise. The League of Nations had failed. If the British and French had hoped that their handling of the Abyssinian crisis would help strengthen their position against Hitler, they were soon proved very wrong. In November 1936 Mussolini and Hitler signed an agreement of their own called the Rome–Berlin Axis.

SOURCE 11

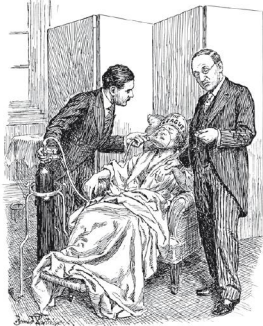
Could the League survive the failure of sanctions to rescue Abyssinia? Could it ever impose sanctions again? Probably there had never been such a clear-cut case for sanctions. If the League had failed in this case there could probably be no confidence that it could succeed again in the future.

Anthony Eden, British Foreign Minister, expressing his feelings about the crisis to the British Cabinet in May 1936.

SOURCE 10



A German cartoon from the front cover of the pro-Nazi magazine *Simplicissimus*, 1936. The warrior is delivering a message to the League of Nations (the 'Völkerbund'): 'I am sorry to disturb your sleep but I just wanted to tell you that you should no longer bother yourselves about this Abyssinian business. The matter has been settled elsewhere.'



A cartoon from *Punch*, 1938. The doctors represent Britain and France.

Think!

Write a caption for the cartoon in Source 12, showing people's feelings about the League after the Abyssinian crisis. The real caption is on page 323.

Focus Task

How far did weaknesses in the League's organisation make failure inevitable?

1 When the League was set up its critics said there were weaknesses in its organisation that would make it ineffective. On page 34 you drew up a table to analyse the effect of these weaknesses in the 1920s. Now do a similar analysis for the 1930s.

What evidence is there in the Manchurian crisis, the disarmament talks and the Abyssinian crisis of the following criticisms of the League:

- ◆ that it would be slow to act
- ◆ that members would act in their own interests
- ◆ that without the USA it would be powerless?

2 'The way the League was set up meant it was bound to fail.' Explain how far you agree with this statement. Support your answer with evidence from the tables you have compiled for this Focus Task and the one on page 34.

A disaster for the League and for the world

Historians often disagree about how to interpret important events. However, one of the most striking things about the events of 1935 and 1936 is that most historians seem to agree about the Abyssinian crisis: it was a disaster for the League of Nations and had serious consequences for world peace.

SOURCE 13

The implications of the conquest of Abyssinia were not confined to East Africa. Although victory cemented Mussolini's personal prestige at home, Italy gained little or nothing from it in material terms. The damage done, meanwhile, to the prestige of Britain, France and the League of Nations was irreversible. The only winner in the whole sorry episode was Adolf Hitler.

Written by historian TA Morris in 1995.

SOURCE 14

After seeing what happened first in Manchuria and then in Abyssinia, most people drew the conclusion that it was no longer much use placing their hopes in the League...

Written by historian James Joll in 1976.

SOURCE 15

The real death of the League was in 1935. One day it was a powerful body imposing sanctions, the next day it was an empty sham, everyone scuttling from it as quickly as possible. Hitler watched.

Written by historian AJP Taylor in 1966.

SOURCE 16

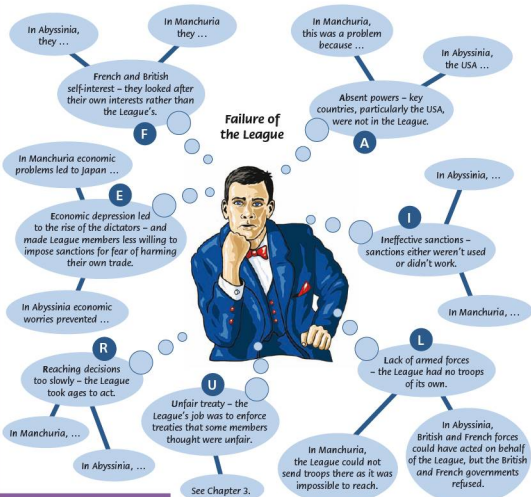
Yes, we know that World War began in Manchuria fifteen years ago. We know that four years later we could easily have stopped Mussolini if we had taken the sanctions against Mussolini that were obviously required, if we had closed the Suez Canal to the aggressor and stopped his oil.

British statesman Philip Noel Baker speaking at the very last session of the League in April 1946.

Focus task A

Why did the League of Nations fail in the 1930s?

Here is a diagram summarising reasons for the failure of the League of Nations in the 1930s. Complete your own copy of the diagram to explain how each weakness affected the League's actions in Manchuria and Abyssinia. We have filled in some points for you. There is one weakness that you will not be able to write about – you will find out about it in Chapter 3.



Revision Tip

The memory aid **FAILURE** should help you remember these key points for an exam.

Focus Task B

To what extent was the League of Nations a success?

The last few pages have been all about failure. But remember there were successes too. Look back over the whole chapter.

- 1 The League and its aims: give the League a score out of 5 on how far it achieved its aims. Make sure you can support your score with examples.
- 2 Other factors which led to success: give these a score out of 5 to show their importance – remember the examples.
- 3 Other factors which led to failure: Repeat step 2.
- 4 Weigh successes against failures: how does the League score out of 100?
- 5 Write a short paragraph explaining your mark out of 100.

Keywords

Make sure you know what these terms mean and are able to define them confidently.

Essential

- ◆ Abyssinian crisis
- ◆ Disarmament
- ◆ Economic depression
- ◆ Isolationism
- ◆ Manchurian crisis
- ◆ Trade sanctions
- ◆ Wall Street Crash
- ◆ Article 10
- ◆ Assembly
- ◆ Collective security
- ◆ Commissions
- ◆ Conference of Ambassadors
- ◆ Council
- ◆ Covenant
- ◆ Military force
- ◆ Moral condemnation
- ◆ Secretariat
- ◆ Unanimous

Useful

- ◆ Normalcy
- ◆ Tariffs

Chapter Summary

The League of Nations

- 1 The League of Nations was set up to solve problems between countries before they led to war.
- 2 Its methods were mainly diplomacy (talking), trade sanctions, or if necessary using the armies of their members.
- 3 It was the big idea of President Wilson but his own country the USA never joined but returned to its isolationist policy.
- 4 The leading members were Britain and France but they had their own interests and bypassed the League when it suited them.
- 5 The League's structure made it slow to take decisions, which made it less effective in settling international disputes, but it did have some successes in the 1920s.
- 6 The League's agencies (committees and commissions) were set up to solve social problems such as post-war refugee crises, health problems and slavery/forced labour. It had many successes throughout the 1920s and 1930s.
- 7 The League was supposed to encourage disarmament but failed to get any countries to disarm.
- 8 In the 1930s the League's work was made much harder by the economic depression, which made countries less willing to co-operate and helped turn previously democratic countries such as Germany into dictatorships.
- 9 In 1931–32 the League condemned the Japanese invasion of Manchuria and China but was helpless to do anything to stop it.
- 10 In 1936–37 the League tried to prevent Italy invading Abyssinia but it could not agree what to do and never even enforced trade sanctions.
- 11 From 1936 the League was seen as irrelevant to international affairs although its agencies continued its humanitarian work.

Exam Practice

See pages 168–175 and pages 316–319 for advice on the different types of questions you might face.

- 1 (a) Describe the main powers available to the League to sort out international disputes. [4]
 (b) Explain why the League of Nations did not impose sanctions against Italy during the Abyssinian crisis. [6]
 (c) 'The League of Nations had failed before the Abyssinian crisis even started.' How far do you agree with this statement? Explain your answer. [10]
- 2 Study Source 17 on page 35. How useful are these two photographs for finding out about the League of Nations? Explain your answer by using details of the source and your own knowledge. [7]