

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

KS3 History- Lesson 2 of 4

Enquiry: Why did the League of Nations fail?

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What was the situation in the 1930s?

The League of Nations had a number of successes in the 1920s, however, things changed for the world in the 1930s, following the Wall Street Crash.

On 30th October 1929, the American **economy** collapsed. This was known as the Wall Street Crash and had an impact on every country in the world. It resulted in a huge rise in **unemployment**. In some countries people started to vote for more **extremist** political parties. This meant that **dictators** came to power in some European countries. These dictators were willing to use violence and aggression to make their countries stronger.



The work of the League of Nations was made much more difficult by the situation in the 1930s for several reasons:

1. All countries were suffering economically: This meant that they did not want to spend time or money dealing with international problems. Supporting the League of Nations did not seem like a priority compared to sorting out economic problems at home.
2. America stopped getting involved in European affairs: While America had not been a member of the League of Nations, American **loans** had helped lots of countries in Europe. Without these, the future of Europe became more unstable.
3. Rising levels of unemployment: As people became desperate, they turned to political parties who looked strong. The people (particularly in Germany, which had been so harshly punished after the First World War), often saw their governments as weak for allowing the economic crisis to get so bad.
4. The rise of extreme dictators: As people turned to strong leaders, Fascism took hold in Europe. Leaders such as Mussolini (Italy) and Hitler (Germany), promised to rebuild the strength of their countries. This meant taking over new land. If the League of Nations was going to do its job, it needed to stop them.



The League of Nations in the 1930s

During the 1930s, the League of Nations failed to stop powerful countries from attacking weaker countries.

Two examples of this are in the League's reaction to events in Manchuria and Abyssinia. Japan and Italy both behaved violently and aggressively and it paid off. Both countries kept land that they had invaded and with no further punishment from the League.

Britain and France showed weakness in dealing with Manchuria and Abyssinia. If the most powerful countries in the League were not taking action, the League was seen as useless.

The next three pages look at these events in more detail.



Manchuria

Manchuria is an example of when the League of Nations failed to act to stop international aggression.

In the late 1920s and early 1930s, Japan was becoming more and more powerful. Manchuria was a part of northern China and it was attractive to Japan as it was rich in **natural resources**.



Manchuria

In 1932, Japan invaded and took over Manchuria, renaming it Manchukuo. The League ordered Japan to leave Manchuria. Japan ignored this instruction and left the League of Nations instead. Japan went on to invade more of China, and the League did not act to stop it.

These events showed that the League was powerless. It had told Japan to leave Manchuria and Japan had not followed the League's instructions without consequence.

The League's supporters felt that, if a similar event happened in Europe then a country would not be allowed to ignore the League. This is because any event in Europe would affect the **great powers**. The supporters of the League thought it was a shame the League had not protected Manchuria but that the League was not totally undermined.



Abyssinia

Abyssinia is another example of when the League of Nations failed to act to stop international aggression. The outcome of the Abyssinia crisis was that the League was seen as powerless.

Mussolini, the leader of Italy, was an extreme Fascist with an aggressive **foreign policy**. Mussolini wanted to take over new areas to make Italy stronger.

Abyssinia was an independent country in East Africa. Today it is called Ethiopia.



Abyssinia

In October 1935, Italy invaded Abyssinia. The League **condemned** Italy and told all League members to stop trading with Italy. This seemed like a strong reaction from the League and should have been a very harsh punishment.

The League, however, was worried about angering Mussolini. So they did not completely stop the trade in war materials (coal/iron/oil). This meant that Mussolini could continue to attack Abyssinia.

Behind the scenes, the British **foreign minister**, Hoare, and the French foreign minister, Laval, met and made a plan to stop the invasion. They planned to divide up Abyssinia and give the most useful and **fertile** pieces of land to Italy and the worse land to Abyssinia. Before this was shared with Italy or Abyssinia, the plan was found out and reported in the news.



Abyssinia

News of the Hoare-Laval plan was bad for the League of Nations. In public Britain and France, had been supporting the League's trade ban against Italy. But in secret they were doing the opposite and planning to reward Mussolini for his violence and aggression by giving him the best bits of Abyssinia. The plan never went through.

The League of Nations was powerless when Britain and France would not take effective action. By May 1936, the Italians had taken over the whole of Abyssinia.

The Abyssinian Crisis marked the end of the League as a useful organisation. It had failed to stop war or aggression. Without a powerful organisation to stop international aggression it looked like it would be harder to stop another world war.



Glossary

Condemned: To strongly disagree with something.

Dictator: A ruler with total power over a country.

Economy: To do with the money in a country.

Extremist: A person who holds very strong and very extreme views.

Foreign minister: The government official whose job it was to deal with foreign policy.

Foreign policy: The part of the decision-making of a government to do with their relationship to other countries.

Great powers: Britain, France, Italy and Japan (although in this instance, Japan would not object to its own invasion of Manchuria).

Loans: Money lent to a country.

Unemployment: Not having a paid job.



Comprehension Questions

1. What economic event happened in 1929?
2. Why were governments less likely to want to spend time and money supporting the League in the 1930s?
3. How did Japan react when told to leave Manchuria?
4. Why did the League look particularly weak during the Abyssinian Crisis?

