

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

KS3 History- Lesson 1 of 4

Enquiry: Why did the League of Nations fail?

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What was the League of Nations?

The League of Nations was an international organisation set up to support future world peace. It gave the opportunity for countries to speak about their problems and use **diplomacy** to solve them, instead of going to war.

The **covenant** was the rule book of the League of Nations. It set out the aims of the League of Nations. These were:

- To stop war.
- **Disarmament.**
- To uphold and enforce the **Treaty of Versailles.**



The Structure of the League of Nations

The League was based in Geneva, Switzerland.

The Assembly

- All 42 **member states** could send representatives to the Assembly.
- The Assembly was the League's parliament. It met every year and had the final say on what the League did.
- All nations in the Assembly were equal and could vote on actions.
- The Assembly was too large to react to sudden issues, so the Council was set up which met more often.

The Council

- Britain, France and Italy were permanent members.



Membership of the League of Nations

There were 42 member states. The USA and Germany were not members (although Germany was allowed to join in 1926). It was never an organisation of all states.

Britain and France were the most powerful, but they were **self-interested** and also disagreed about whether the League should take action on issues (France) or whether it should be a place for discussion. This weakened the League.

The following pages give some examples of the work of the League of Nations in the 1920s.



1921 – Upper Silesia

In Upper Silesia there were large numbers of **Poles** and Germans. There were lots of factories in the area which meant that whichever country had it would be able to make lots of money from it. Part of the Treaty of Versailles was the promise that the people in the area could vote to see whether the land should be German or Polish. The majority of people voted for the land to be German.

The League decided to split the area. Germany got over half the land and the population; Poland got most of the factories. Germany was very unhappy with this decision. They felt that they should get the land because most of the people living there had voted to be in Germany.



1923 - Corfu

5 Italians who were working for the League of Nations were killed in Greece.

Mussolini, the leader of Italy, wanted an apology from the Greeks. He also wanted to be paid **compensation**. This did not happen.

Mussolini took over Corfu. The Council of the League of Nations put pressure on Greece to give Mussolini compensation and an apology.

Greece listened to the League of Nations, apologised to Mussolini and paid the compensation money. This is an example of the League solving a problem and stopping war from breaking out. However, some people started to notice that the League seemed to be willing to tell small countries what to do but it seemed less willing to stand up to big countries like Italy.



Disarmament

One of the main aims of the League of Nations was disarmament; the idea that countries should make their armies smaller and reduce the amount of weapons they have.

In 1923, they held a disarmament conference but this failed because Britain did not agree with the terms, which were put forward.

In 1928, however, the Kellogg-Briand pact was supported by 65 countries and signed by 23. This was a step in the right direction – it was an agreement to ban war. It is an example of the League of Nations taking action to help countries to follow peaceful policies.



Glossary

Compensation: Money paid to make up for something that has been lost.

Covenant: An agreement (in this case, the aims of the League of Nations).

Diplomacy: Solving international problems through discussion and compromise, not war.

Disarmament: To reduce the number of weapons a country has.

Member state: A country which could vote in the League of Nations.

Occupy/Occupied: Take control of.

Poles: People who are from Poland.

Self-interested: Doing things for your own gain, not to help others. In this case Britain and France acting to keep their countries strong and not always to uphold the aims of the League of Nations.

Treaty of Versailles: The treaty which set out the terms of peace for Germany after the First World War.



Comprehension Questions

1. The League of Nations was set up as a result of which conflict?
2. What were the three main aims of the League of Nations?
3. How did the League have some success in working towards its aim of 'disarmament'?
4. Why could the outcome of Corfu Crisis of 1923 be seen as a success for the League?
5. Why did the League start to look weak in the 1920s?



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