

## **League of Nations: Successes and Failures:**

**Key words: Upper Silesia, Revival of the economy, Humanitarian work, Invasion of the Ruhr, The Corfu Incident, Manchuria 1931-1933, Abyssinia 1935, The Spanish Civil War, The Anschluss of Austria, The Munich Pact**

To administer the former territories of the defeated countries, a **system of mandates** was set up, to be **operated by League members** – mostly Britain, the British Dominions, France and Japan – on agreed conditions, and with annual reports to the League. The league also set up Special Commissions to administer areas such as Danzig and Saar.

### **Successes in the 1920s:**

The League had a number of successes in **ending or preventing conflicts**. It also began to do good work through various Commissions, such as **dealing with refugees, trying to wipe out diseases and attempting to improve working conditions across the world**.

Conflict	Year	The Problem and the Result
Yugoslavia v. Albania	1920	The League persuaded Yugoslavia to withdraw its troops from Albania
the Aaland Islands	1920	Dispute between Finland and Sweden over Islands. The Islands were owned by Finland, but were heavily populated by the Swedes. League settled the issue peacefully, in Finland's favour.
Upper Silesia	1921	Dispute between Poland and Germany. Plebiscite in 1921 that decided the division of the territory was tight, the riots followed. The League was asked to intervene. The territory was divided between Poland and Germany. Germany got most land, but the part given to Poland contained the rich industrial area of Silesia, so the Germans were embittered by this loss.
Mosul	1924	The League resolved a dispute between Iraq and Turkey over Mosul - which was important oil rich area - in a favor of Iraq.
Greece v. Bulgaria	1925	Disputes over Macedonia. The League ordered Greece to withdraw its troops and to pay compensation for the damage caused.

### **Another successes:**

1. Successful running of **Danzig and Saar**.
2. Stabilization of the **currencies** of Austria and Hungary in the 1920s. The League helped raise loans to **save Austria from bankruptcy**.
2. The League *Secretariat* also **helped revive the world economy**, by arranging world conferences on tariffs and trade agreements.
3. Its **humanitarian work with refugees and prisoners** of war was also significant achievement. The League helped return 400 000 prisoners of war to their own countries and found homes for countless refugees. In addition, it did much to deal with **tropical diseases**, such as yellow fever and malaria.
4. The *International Labour Organisation* was set up to **improve workers' rights and working conditions** across the world. Its main achievement was to **limit child labour** in some countries.

### Failures in 1920s:

The League failed to bring about disarmament and also to solve several problems. These failures included: Vilna, 1920, Russo-Polish War 1920-21, Greece vs. Turkey 1920-21, Memel 1923, the occupation of Ruhr 1923, Corfu Incident 1923.

The League often failed to carry the self-determination policy out. For example, it was able to do very little to protect the rights of ethnic minorities in the new central and eastern European states.

Conflict	Year	Dispute and Result
Vilna	1920	Lithuania asked the League to intervene in order to seize Vilna as its capital. The city was largely populated by the Polish population. Poland ignored the claims of Lithuania, the League stayed calm.
Russo-Polish War	1920-21	Poland was not content with its eastern borders and decided to seize White Russia and Ukraine. The League was unable to prevent this warfare. In fact, Poland was backed by France and Britain.
Greece v. Turkey	1920-22	Greece invaded Turkey in order to overthrow the new government led by Ataturk, which was determined to overturn the Treaty of Sevres. The Turkish army defeated Greece and further warfare was avoided by Britain agreeing that a new treaty should be signed – Lausanne 1923. The League had been unable to either prevent or halt this war, in large part because Britain supported Greece, while France supported Turkey.
Memel	1923	The area was under League administration by the Treaty of Versailles. The League was unable to prevent Lithuania seizing it in 1923. This was followed by little success when the league persuaded Lithuania to accept the port becoming an “international zone”, with Lithuania retaining the surrounding area.
Invasion of the Ruhr (in Slovak <i>Porúrie</i> )	1923	The League was unable to prevent France and Belgium from invading the Ruhr after Germany failed to pay its second reparations installment. In fact, France did not even consult the League before it took action.
The Corfu Incident	1923	<p>The League failed to stop Italy from invading the Greek Island of Corfu even though Greece asked for help.</p> <p>The Corfu Incident was seen as a serious failure for the League. It showed that powerful nations could still bully a less powerful neighbor (Greece was a small, weak country with no powerful friends on the Council).</p> <p>G. Scott in 1973 wrote: “<i>The settlement made a nasty smell. The Greeks were bitter, the Assembly felt it had been betrayed and that the League had been degraded. Mussolini appeared to have triumphed in his assertion that where a nation was powerful enough it was justified in using force to further its interests and the League had no right to interfere.</i>”</p>

### Failures in 1930s:

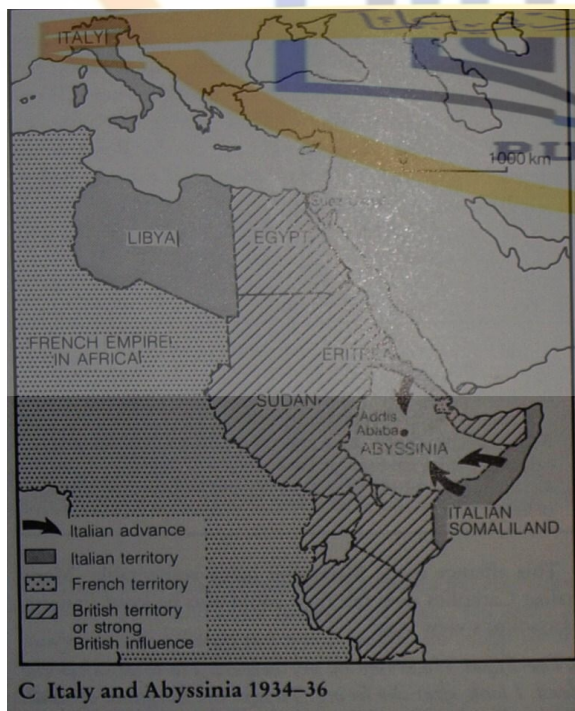
**1. The Manchuria Affair, 1931-1933:** The power of Japan increased enormously during WWI. In WWI Japan captured Germany's Far Eastern possessions and worked their industries at full blast to produce ships and munitions for the Allies. After the war, the Japanese fleet was the strongest in the Pacific. Of all the countries

involved in the war, Japan seemed to have made the biggest profits. But Japan was badly hit by the economic Depression. The Japanese searched for a way out of troubles. Their army came up with an answer - to attack Manchuria. The attack started with so-called **Mukden Incident**, which was a staged event that was engineered by Japanese military personnel as a pretext for attack of Manchuria. Japanese Army blew up the railway near Mukden but blamed Chinese dissidents for that. Japan “responded” with a full invasion that led to the occupation of Manchuria, in which Japan established its puppet state of Manchukuo in 1932. In 1933 the League condemned the Japanese invasion. **Japan simply left the League in 1933 and carried on with its conquests in China. Japan launched its second phase of intervention in China in 1937 and was in war with China until 1945.**

**The Manchurian Affair 1931 – 1933 had 3 very important results:** 1. The League showed it is incapable of enforcing world peace, 2. the Affair encouraged the European dictators to try the same tactics in Africa and Europe, 3. Japan continues in violent policy and launches full-scale attack in 1937.

**2. Abyssinia, 1935:** Benito Mussolini, the Fascist dictator of Italy, dreamed of building a **new Roman Empire**. Mussolini wanted to fight a war. He believed this would help Italians forget their problems at home. It would also win the coal, iron and oil Italy lacked. Mussolini wanted to add **Abyssinia - now called Ethiopia** - to the Italian Empire. Abyssinia was sandwiched between the Italian colonies of Eritrea and Somaliland. It was an independent country ruled by the Emperor **Haile Selassie**. Country was a member of the League of Nations.

**In 1935 the Italians invaded.** The Italian soldiers used tanks, poison gas, bombs and flame-throwers against Abyssinian troops armed with spears and outdated rifles. Selassie appealed to the League of Nations for help. Britain and France, two leading members of the League, could have stopped Italy by closing the Suez Canal to Italian ships – cutting the Italian supply route to Abyssinia. Instead they agreed with the rest of the League to **impose certain economic sanctions on Italy**. These measures had **little effect**, because they did not include **steel, oil and coal**, which were vital to the Italian war effort. In May 1936 the Italian captured the capital of Abyssinia, Addis Ababa. The Abyssinian crisis dealt a death blow to the League of Nations which was now ignored as a peace-keeping body.



**Haile Selassie's speech to the League of Nations in 1936:** *"I, Haile Selassie, Emperor of Abyssinia, am here today to claim that justice is due to my people and the assistance promised to it 8 months ago. I assert that the problem is a much wider one than the removal sanctions. It is not merely a settlement of Italian aggression. It is very existence of the League of Nations. It is the value of promises made to small states that their independence be respected and ensured. God and history will remember your judgments."*

The Abyssinian crisis was a fatal blow to the League. The historian A J P Taylor explains: *"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."*

**3. Rhineland, 1936:** Rhineland was part of Germany, but the **Treaty of Versailles had demilitarised the area - no weapons or soldiers were allowed there**. Hitler wanted full control of Rhineland. Hitler feared that much stronger French army would force them out. Hitler took a risk by sending in troops with orders to withdraw if they meet opposition from the French army. Hitler explained his worries: *"The 48 hours after the march into Rhineland were the most nerve-racking in my life. If the French had then marched into the*



*Rhineland, we would have had to withdraw with our tails between our legs, our military resources would have been wholly inadequate for even a moderate resistance."*

The march into Rhineland was a clear breach of the Locarno Treaties and the Treaty of Versailles. So why did France and Britain make no attempt to stop it? France lacked a strong leader and had problems at home. The French would not act without British support. Britain was not willing to stop Germany. These events had important effects on Europe.

**4. The Spanish Civil War (July 1936 - April 1939):** The War ended with the victory of the rebels, who called themselves 'Nationalists'. The **Republican Government** was overthrown, thousands of Spanish Republicans were exiled. With the establishment of a **conservative dictatorship led by General Francisco Franco** in the aftermath of the Civil War, all right-wing parties were fused into the structure of the Franco regime. **The fascist regime of General Francisco Franco was in power until 1975.**



The Spanish Civil War has been dubbed "the first media war." Foreign correspondents covering it included **Ernest Hemingway** or photographer **Robert Capa**.

Picture on the left: Robert Capa, 1936. Death of a Loyalist Militiaman, Spanish Civil War

Painting below: Guernica by Pablo Picasso, 1937

**5. The Anschluss of Austria:** was the occupation and annexation of Austria into Nazi Germany in **March 1938**. Although the Allies were committed to upholding the terms of the treaties of Versailles and St. Germain, which specifically prohibited the union of Austria and Germany, **their reaction was only verbal and moderate. No fighting ever took place.**



**6. The Munich Pact (29.-30.9.1938):** was an agreement permitting Nazi German annexation of Czechoslovakia's **Sudetenland** signed in Munich, Germany. The Sudetenland were areas along Czech borders, mainly inhabited by ethnic Germans. The purpose of the conference was to discuss the future of the Sudetenland in the face of territorial demands made by Adolf Hitler. The agreement was signed by Nazi Germany, France, Britain, and Italy. The Sudetenland was of immense strategic importance to Czechoslovakia, as most of its border defenses were situated there, and many of its banks were located there as well. Because the state of Czechoslovakia was not invited to the conference, Czechs and Slovaks sometimes call the Munich Agreement the **Munich Dictate**. The phrase **Munich Betrayal** is also used because the military alliance Czechoslovakia had with France was not honoured.

