**Chapter 4: Outbreak of WW2 in Europe**

What you need to know:

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| **INEFFECTIVENESS OF THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS IN THE 1930S** |

The League of Nations was created after World War I to maintain peace, but by the 1930s, it **failed to prevent aggression** from powerful nations.

This weakened trust in the League and encouraged dictators like Hitler and Mussolini to take aggressive actions, leading to World War II. Two key failures of the League were:

1. **Failure of Disarmament**
2. **The Abyssinian Crisis (1935-1936)**

**1. Failure of Disarmament**

**Description**

One of the League’s main goals was to **reduce military weapons worldwide**, preventing future wars. The League organized several international talks to encourage disarmament, but these efforts were unsuccessful. Countries were unwilling to limit their military strength due to rising tensions and **lack of trust between members** in the 1930s.

**Example: The World Disarmament Conference (1932-1934)**

* The League **persuaded 60 countries, including the United States, to attend** this conference in Geneva.
* The Conference **attempted to ban bombing civilians and chemical weapons** but failed to enforce these rules. Countries could not agree on what constituted offensive vs. defensive weapons.
* Countries **disagreed on how to handle Germany**:
  + Some wanted **all nations to disarm** to Germany’s level.
  + Others wanted **Germany to rearm** to match other major powers.
* **France opposed German rearmament**, fearing another war.

**Germany’s Response:**

* Germany, under Hitler (from 1933), **pretended to support disarmament** while secretly rearming.
* **In 1933, Hitler withdrew Germany from the League and the Conference**, claiming unfair treatment as other members refused to disarm to its level.
* This **encouraged Germany to expand its military**, leading to later invasions in Europe.

**Impact**

* The League **failed to enforce disarmament**, proving it was weak and ineffective.   
  Hitler **used this failure as an excuse to rearm Germany**, violating the Treaty of Versailles.
* The lack of cooperation between major powers (Britain, France, USA) **made war more likely** as countries started building up their armies instead of reducing them.
* This worsened tensions and would lead to the outbreak of WW2 in 1939.

**2.The Abyssinian Crisis (1935-1936)**

**Description:**

The Abyssinian Crisis was a major test for the League of Nations when Italy, led by Benito Mussolini, invaded Abyssinia in 1935. The League failed to take effective action, which severely damaged its credibility.

**Example:**

* **Italy’s Invasion**: Mussolini wanted to expand Italy’s empire and sought revenge for Italy’s defeat by Abyssinia in 1896. In 1935, Italy invaded Abyssinia using modern weapons like tanks, planes, and poison gas.
* **League’s Response**: The League imposed sanctions on Italy, such as banning arms sales and loans, but these were weak and ineffective. Key resources like oil were not banned, and the Suez Canal (controlled by Britain and France) remained open, allowing Italy to continue its invasion.
* **Fear of Pushing Italy into Germany’s Arms**: Britain and France were anxious not to upset Mussolini because they saw him as a potential ally against Hitler’s Germany. They feared that taking strong action against Italy (such as closing the Suez Canal or imposing oil sanctions) would push Mussolini into forming an alliance with Hitler.
* **Hoare-Laval Pact**: Britain and France secretly tried to negotiate a deal with Mussolini, offering him two-thirds of Abyssinia in exchange for stopping the invasion. When this was leaked, it caused public outrage and further damaged the League’s reputation.
* In May 1936, Italy conquered Abyssinia.

**Impact:**

* The League’s failure to stop Italy’s aggression showed its **inability to enforce collective security.**
* It highlighted how Britain and France were more concerned about their own national interests rather than collective security which **would weaken the league and embolden aggressive countries** such as Italy and Germany.
* The crisis **emboldened Hitler**, who saw that the League would not act against aggressive powers. In 1936, Germany remilitarized the Rhineland, violating the Treaty of Versailles, and the League did nothing.
* The **League lost credibility, and many countries lost faith in its ability to maintain peace**. This failure contributed to the collapse of collective security and the outbreak of World War 2 in 1939.

**Why the League Lost Credibility by 1936**

| **Historical Development** | **Brief Description** | **How It Caused the League to Lose Credibility** |
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| **Non-membership of key states (USSR and USA)** | The USA never joined the League, and the USSR only joined in 1934. Both were major global powers whose absence weakened the League’s ability to enforce decisions. | Without the USA and USSR, the League lacked the military and economic power to back its decisions. This made it appear weak and ineffective, as it could not rely on the support of the world’s strongest nations. |
| **Kellogg-Briand Pact (1928)** | This pact did not involve the League. It was signed by 15 countries including the USA, Germany, and Britain, banned the use of war to resolve disputes. But there was no enforcement methods and countries ignored it when their national interests were at stake. It showed that international agreements alone could not ensure peace. | Since the pact had no enforcement mechanism, countries like Germany and Japan continued their aggressive policies without consequences. It shows that countries were willing to bypass the league to make their own agreements -> weakening the League’s authority. |
| **World Disarmament Conference (1932–1934)** | The League organized this conference to limit offensive weapons, but countries could not agree on disarmament. Germany walked out in 1933 after demanding equality in arms, and Hitler later withdrew Germany from the League. | The failure of the conference highlighted the League’s inability to resolve major disputes. It also showed that aggressive powers like Germany could ignore the League’s authority without consequences, further weakening its credibility. |
| **Abyssinian Crisis (1934–1936)** | Italy, led by Mussolini, invaded Abyssinia in 1935. The League imposed weak sanctions but failed to stop Italy, especially since Britain and France were reluctant to take strong action. | The League’s failure to protect Abyssinia exposed its inability to enforce collective security. The Hoare-Laval Pact (a secret deal to appease Italy) further damaged its reputation, showing that major powers prioritized their interests over the League. |
| **German Remilitarization of the Rhineland (1936)** | In March 1936, Hitler sent troops into the Rhineland, violating the Treaty of Versailles. The League took no action, and Britain and France adopted a policy of appeasement. | The League’s failure to respond to this blatant violation of international agreements showed its weakness. It emboldened Hitler and signalled to the world that the League could not enforce its own rules or maintain peace. |

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| **GERMANY’S AGGRESSIVE FOREIGN POLICY** |

**a. Plebiscite in the Saar Region (1935)**

**Description:**

The Saar region, rich in coal and industry, had been under League of Nations control since 1919 as part of the Treaty of Versailles.

In 1935, a plebiscite (vote) was held to decide whether the Saar should return to Germany, join France, or remain under the League.

**Example:**

* Hitler campaigned heavily for the Saar to return to Germany, using propaganda and Nazi influence.
* In January 1935, 90% of the Saar population voted to rejoin Germany.

**Impact:**

* The result boosted Hitler’s popularity and legitimacy in Germany because he managed to oppose the Treaty of Versailles.
* It gave Germany access to the Saar’s coal and industrial resources, strengthening its economy and military.
* The League’s inability to prevent this outcome showed its weakness and emboldened Hitler to pursue further territorial ambitions. It would lead to the outbreak of WW2 in 1939.

**b. Remilitarisation of the Rhineland (1936)**

**Description:**

The Treaty of Versailles had demilitarized the Rhineland (a buffer zone between Germany and France) to prevent German aggression. In March 1936, Hitler ordered German troops to re-enter the Rhineland, violating the treaty.

**Example:**

* Hitler claimed he was responding to the Franco-Soviet Treaty of Mutual Assistance, which he argued threatened Germany.
* The German army was still weak, and Hitler later admitted he would have withdrawn if France had resisted.
* France and Britain did nothing, as they were busy with the Abyssinian crisis.
* Germany successfully remilitarised the Rhineland in 1936.

**Impact:**

* The remilitarization strengthened Germany and showed that the Treaty of Versailles could be openly defied without consequences.
* It marked a turning point in Hitler’s confidence and his belief that Britain and France would not oppose his actions. This emboldened Hitler further to continue with his aggressive ambitions.
* This would lead to increased tensions and the outbreak of WW2 in 1939.

**c. Anschluss with Austria (1938)**

**Description:**

Hitler aimed to unite Germany with Austria (Anschluss), which was forbidden by the Treaty of Versailles. He pressured Austria’s government and used the Austrian Nazi Party to create chaos.

**Example:**

* In March 1938, German troops marched into Austria after Austrian Chancellor Kurt Schuschnigg was forced to resign.
* A plebiscite was held under Nazi control, with 99.75% of Austrians voting in favor of Anschluss.

**Impact:**

* Germany gained Austria’s population, resources, and gold reserves, further strengthening its economy and military.
* Britain and France did nothing, showing their reluctance to confront Hitler and their acceptance of his actions.
* Hitler’s popularity among Germans increased as he was breaking the Treaty with no consequences.
* This emboldened Hitler further to continue with his aggressive ambitions. This would lead to increased tensions and the outbreak of WW2 in 1939.

**d. Munich Agreement & Invasion of Czechoslovakia (1938–1939)**

**Description:**

The Munich Agreement, signed on September 30, 1938, was an agreement between Germany, Britain, France, and Italy.

It allowed Nazi Germany to annex the Sudetenland, a region of Czechoslovakia with a large German-speaking population.

The agreement was seen as an attempt to avoid war by appeasing Hitler, but it ultimately failed to prevent German aggression.

**What happened**

* Hitler claimed that the Sudeten Germans were being mistreated by the Czechoslovak government and demanded that the Sudetenland be ceded to Germany. He threatened to invade Czechoslovakia if his demands were not met.
* Czechoslovakia was a democratic country with a strong military and alliances with France and the USSR. It was prepared to defend itself but relied on its allies for support.
* Britain’s Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain and French Premier Édouard Daladier were determined to avoid war. They believed that giving Hitler the Sudetenland would satisfy his territorial ambitions and bring “peace for our time.”
* September 29–30, 1938: The leaders of Germany (Hitler), Italy (Mussolini), Britain (Chamberlain), and France (Daladier) met in Munich to resolve the crisis. Czechoslovakia was not invited to the negotiations.
* Germany was allowed to annex the Sudetenland, which contained Czechoslovakia’s fortified border defences and key industrial areas.
* Britain and France made Hitler promise not to make anymore territorial claims.
* This is known as the **Munich Agreement.**
* Chamberlain returned to Britain declaring that the agreement had secured “peace for our time.”

**Invasion of Czechoslovakia (March 1939):**

* Hitler was emboldedned when he could gain Sudetenland without fighting.
* In March 1939, Hitler broke the Munich Agreement by invading the rest of Czechoslovakia.

**Reactions:**

* The invasion shocked Chamberlain and Daladier, who realized that Hitler’s ambitions were not limited to German-speaking territories. This marked the end of appeasement.
* In Britain, public opinion turned against Hitler, and Chamberlain began preparing for war.
* The invasion demonstrated that Hitler could not be trusted.

**Impact of the Munich Agreement and Invasion of Czechoslovakia:**

1. **Strengthening of Germany:**
   * Germany was strengthened with resources from Czechoslovakia. It gained control of Czechoslovakia’s highly developed industries, including the Skoda arms factory, which significantly boosted its military production.
2. **Failure of Appeasement:**
   * The Munich Agreement was seen as a betrayal of Czechoslovakia and a failure of the policy of appeasement.
   * It became clear that Hitler’s ambitions were not limited to uniting German-speaking peoples but included the domination of Europe.
3. **Shift in British and French Policy:**
   * After the invasion of Czechoslovakia, Britain and France abandoned appeasement and began preparing for war.
   * In March 1939, Britain and France issued a guarantee to Poland, promising to defend it if Germany invaded. This marked a shift toward a policy of deterrence.
4. **Hitler’s Confidence:**
   * The Munich Agreement and the subsequent invasion of Czechoslovakia emboldened Hitler, who believed that Britain and France would not resist his further expansion.
   * This confidence led directly to Hitler’s next target: Poland, which would trigger World War II in September 1939.



**Sudetenland (part of Czechoslovakia)**

**POLAND**

**e. Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact & Invasion of Poland (1939)**

**Description:**

The Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact, signed on **August 23, 1939**, was an agreement between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union.

The pact shocked the world because the two countries were ideological enemies (Nazism vs. Communism).

The agreement included a public promise not to attack each other and a secret plan to divide Poland between them.

**Example:**

* **Hitler’s Motivation**: Hitler wanted to invade Poland but feared a two-front war if Britain, France, and the USSR united against him. The pact ensured that the USSR would not oppose Germany’s invasion of Poland.
* **Stalin’s Motivation**: Stalin distrusted Britain and France after they excluded the USSR from the Munich Agreement (1938). He saw the pact to buy time to prepare for a potential future conflict with Germany. The pact also allowed the USSR to expand its influence in Eastern Europe.
* **Terms of the Pact**:
  + Publicly, Germany and the USSR agreed not to attack each other for 10 years.
  + Secretly, they agreed to divide Poland: Germany would take western Poland, and the USSR would take eastern Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia.

**Invasion of Poland:**

* On **September 1, 1939**, Germany launched a full-scale invasion of Poland using **blitzkrieg** tactics (lightning war), which combined fast-moving tanks, aircraft, and infantry to overwhelm Polish defences.
* The USSR invaded eastern Poland on **September 17, 1939**, as agreed in the secret protocol.
* Poland was quickly defeated and divided between Germany and the USSR.

**Impact:**

**Outbreak of World War II**:Britain and France had promised to defend Poland. On **September 3, 1939**, they declared war on Germany, marking the official start of World War II in Europe.

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| **POLICY OF APPEASEMENT** |

**a. What is Appeasement?**

**Description:**

Appeasement was a foreign policy strategy adopted by Britain and France in the 1930s to avoid war by giving in to the demands of aggressive powers, particularly Nazi Germany under Adolf Hitler.

The policy was based on the belief that satisfying Hitler’s grievances, particularly those related to the Treaty of Versailles, would prevent another devastating world war.

**b. Reasons for Appeasement**

**1. Fear of Another War:**

* **World War I Trauma**: The memory of the horrors of World War I (1914–1918) was still fresh. Both Britain and France were determined to avoid another conflict that could lead to massive casualties and economic devastation.
* **Public Opinion**: In Britain and France, there was strong public opposition to war. Many people believed that the Treaty of Versailles had been too harsh on Germany and that Hitler’s demands for territorial adjustments were reasonable.

**2. Economic Weakness:**

* **Great Depression**: Both Britain and France were still recovering from the economic devastation of the Great Depression (1929–1930s). They could not afford the massive rearmament needed to confront Germany militarily.
* **Rearmament Costs**: Britain was focused on domestic issues and social reforms, and there was little appetite for spending on military buildup.

**3. Misjudgement of Hitler:**

* **Hitler’s Early Promises**: Initially, Hitler presented himself as a leader who only wanted to revise the unfair terms of the Treaty of Versailles. Many British and French leaders believed that once these grievances were addressed, Hitler would be satisfied.
* **Underestimation of Hitler’s Ambitions**: Leaders like Neville Chamberlain (British Prime Minister) and Édouard Daladier (French Premier) underestimated Hitler’s long-term goals of European domination and racial expansion.

**4. Sympathy for Germany:**

* **Criticism of the Treaty of Versailles**: Many in Britain and France believed that the Treaty of Versailles had been too harsh on Germany. They felt that Hitler’s demands for the return of German-speaking territories (e.g., the Sudetenland) were justified.
* **Desire for Fairness**: There was a widespread belief that Germany had been unfairly treated after World War I, and that addressing these grievances would lead to lasting peace.

**5. Lack of Reliable Allies:**

* **US Isolationism**: The United States had adopted a policy of isolationism after World War I and refused to get involved in European conflicts. This left Britain and France without a powerful ally.
* **Distrust of the USSR**: Britain and France were wary of forming an alliance with the Soviet Union due to ideological differences (capitalism vs. communism). This distrust prevented a united front against Germany.

**c. Specific Examples and Impact of Appeasement**

**1. Remilitarization of the Rhineland (1936):**

* **Event**: In March 1936, Hitler sent German troops into the Rhineland, a demilitarized zone under the Treaty of Versailles. This was a direct violation of the treaty.
* **Appeasement**: Britain and France did not take military action, believing that Hitler was only reclaiming German territory.
* **Impact**: The remilitarization strengthened Germany’s strategic position and emboldened Hitler to pursue further aggression.

**2. Anschluss with Austria (1938):**

* **Event**: In March 1938, Germany annexed Austria (Anschluss), violating the Treaty of Versailles and the Treaty of St. Germain.
* **Appeasement**: Britain and France did nothing, accepting Hitler’s claim that the union was a natural one between German-speaking peoples.
* **Impact**: Germany gained Austria’s resources and population, further strengthening its economy and military. Hitler’s confidence grew, and he began to believe that Britain and France would not resist his expansion.

**3. Munich Agreement (1938):**

* **Event**: In September 1938, Britain, France, Germany, and Italy signed the Munich Agreement, allowing Germany to annex the Sudetenland (a region of Czechoslovakia with a large German-speaking population).
* **Appeasement**: Chamberlain and Daladier believed that giving Hitler the Sudetenland would satisfy his territorial ambitions and bring “peace for our time.”
* **Impact**: The Munich Agreement was seen as a betrayal of Czechoslovakia and a failure of appeasement. It emboldened Hitler, who went on to invade the rest of Czechoslovakia in March 1939.

**4. Invasion of Czechoslovakia (1939):**

* **Event**: In March 1939, Hitler broke the Munich Agreement by invading and occupying the rest of Czechoslovakia.
* **Appeasement**: Britain and France did not take military action, but the invasion marked the end of appeasement. Chamberlain realized that Hitler’s ambitions were not limited to German-speaking territories.
* **Impact**: The invasion demonstrated that Hitler could not be trusted, and that appeasement had failed. Britain and France began preparing for war and issued a guarantee to Poland, promising to defend it if Germany invaded.

1. **Spanish Civil War (1936–1939):**

* **Event**: In July 1936, a civil war broke out in Spain between the **Republicans** (the democratic government) and the **Nationalists** (rebels led by General Franco, who wanted a fascist dictatorship). Germany and Italy supported Franco with troops, weapons, and planes, while the Soviet Union helped the Republicans. Britain and France stayed neutral.
* **Appeasement**: Britain and France adopted a policy of **non-intervention**, refusing to support either side. They feared that getting involved could lead to a larger European war. This allowed Germany and Italy to freely support Franco without consequences.
* **Impact**:
  + The war allowed Germany and Italy to test new military tactics and equipment, such as bombing civilian areas (e.g., the bombing of **Guernica** in 1937). This helped them prepare for World War II.
  + It showed Hitler that Britain and France were unwilling to stand up to fascist aggression, which encouraged him to pursue further expansion in Europe.
  + The war also deepened tensions between the Western powers (Britain and France) and the Soviet Union, making it harder for them to work together against Hitler later on.

The policy of appeasement was a controversial and complex strategy. While it bought time for Britain and France to prepare for war and reflected the public’s desire for peace, it ultimately failed to prevent World War II.

By allowing Hitler to grow stronger and more aggressive, appeasement contributed to the outbreak of a conflict that could have been avoided with a firmer stance earlier in the 1930s.

**Was Appeasement a Mistake? Yes and No**

**YES it was wrong**

**Emboldened Hitler to be more aggressive.**

By taking no action against Hitler, he viewed the Allies as weak and continued with his aggression.

* Hitler was able to expand and strengthen his military - By 1939 his Airforce had 8250 planes.
* Remilitarizing the Rhineland not only strengthened Germany but made Hitler very popular among Germans.
* Countries – Austria/Czech – that may have been allies were sacrificed. – this strengthened Germany as they could acquire the resources found in these countries.
* **Eventually led to Germany invading Poland in 1939 which triggered the start of WW2 when Britain and France declared war on Germany.**
* **Policy of appeasement failed to prevent war.**

**Worsened the relationship with Stalin. -> eventually led to the signing of the Nazi Soviet Pact**

* Stalin was unhappy with Britain and France for allowing Germany to expand in the 1930s.
* Germany’s expansion over Austria and Czechoslovakia brough Germany’s borders closer to the USSR -> Stalin saw this as a threat.
* When Stalin was not invited for the Munich Conference, he grew suspicious of the West. Stalin felt the Allies wanted Hitler to attack the USSR and that is why he was not invited to the Munich Conference.
* Stalin was very unhappy that the Allies had given Sudetenland to Germany. => Because now Germany’s borders were nearer to USSR.
* **Hence Stalin, decided to take action to protect the borders of the USSR by signing the Nazi Soviet Pact.**
* **This gave Hitler confidence in invading Poland knowing that he can avoid a two front war.**
* **This contributed to the outbreak of WW2 when Germany invaded Poland.**

**NO, it was not wrong**

**It avoided war temporarily and bought time for Britain to rearm.**

* Britain was suffering from huge debts and unemployment due to the Great Depression and WW1. They were in no position to engage in a military conflict with Hitler.
* British publics were not keen on another war as World War 1 had caused a lot of suffering already. So, appeasement avoided war and was a very popular policy.
  + Chamberlain claimed the Munich Agreement brought “peace in our time”.
* Although Britain began to rearm itself after 1935, they were not ready for another war as their military was still in the process of rebuilding itself.
* Without the support of the United States or the Soviet Union, Britain and France were not in a strong position to confront Germany militarily in the 1930s.
* **Policy of appeasement would give Britain time to fix its economy especially during the Great Depression.**
* **this ensured political stability in the government as the government would not lose the people’s support**.
* **The Policy of appeasement would thus maintain peace and provide time for Britain to prepare itself by strengthening its military.**
* **This will put Britain in a better position for an eventual war.**