

Chapter 2 sample Cambridge IGCSE questions with sample answers

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In 1920 everything seemed to run smoothly. The League's agencies were working extremely well and the world's statesmen were actually getting together and talking with each other. They met at the League's headquarters in Geneva. They were able to sort out international problems over brandy and a cigar in front of a fire.

From a British history book published in 1990.

- a)** What part did (i) the Council and (ii) the Permanent Court of Justice play in the organisation of the League of Nations? (4)

The Council was the executive body of the League, meeting four or five times a year and in times of crisis. Because it had a small membership—just five permanent members in 1930—it could meet quickly to deal with disputes. It would be the Council that decided whether to take action against an aggressor by imposing economic or military sanctions.

The Permanent Court of Justice, which was based at the Hague, provided legal advice to the Council and, if asked to do so, gave a decision to countries locked in a dispute. It also interpreted international agreements and conventions.

- b)** Why did the Depression of the 1930s affect the work of the League? (6)

The 1930s Depression affected the work of the League because it helped to bring right-wing regimes to power in Japan and Germany, regimes that were committed to aggressive expansion in order to find new markets and sources of raw materials. It also confirmed the aggressive intentions of Italy.

The Depression made it more difficult for the League to impose economic or military sanctions as League members were short of money and anxious not to lose their trading partners. This was the case with Manchuria.

The Depression removed any hope that the USA might rethink its decision not to join the League as it was now absorbed by the problems of unemployment at home. Overall the Depression meant that national issues became more important than international cooperation and this undermined the purpose of the League.

c) How successful was the League of Nations? Explain your answer. (10)

Overall the League of Nations has to be considered a failure because it was set up primarily to preserve world peace after the carnage of the First World War and yet a second world war broke out only 21 years later in September 1939. It could be argued that if the League had dealt effectively with Japan in 1931 and Italy in 1935 then Hitler might have reconsidered his plans for German expansion. Even during the 1920s the League had demonstrated that it was incapable of checking the ambitions of a major power intent on aggressive action—this became clear during the course of the Corfu Incident of 1923. The League was unable to make collective action an effective way of preserving world peace.

Nevertheless, it would be unfair to consider the League a total failure. It resolved a number of minor disputes during the 1920s and 1930s including those involving the Aaland Islands (1921), Mosul (1924) and Bulgaria (1925). Minor disputes always have the potential to escalate into major conflicts as happened in the lead-up to war in 1914. Furthermore, the League's agencies and commissions such as the Health Organisation and Special Committee for Refugees often performed useful and effective work.

Hence the League failed in its central purpose. But its success in promoting international cooperation on a wide range of issues ensured that the idea of a general assembly of nations lived on after 1945 with the United Nations.