League of Nations – Summary Notes

The League of Nations was an international organisation that was created after the Great War and the Paris Peace Conference in 1919. It was designed to create a place to resolve global disputes. President Woodrow Wilson was the first to propose this organisation as part of his Fourteen Points plan for peace in Europe, America never joined it. The aim of the League was to prevent war through collective security, improving international welfare and to settle issues between nations through negotiation.

The league was created to prevent any more wars in the world, after the disaster of World War 1. They wanted to ensure that war would never break out again, hence enforcing the Treaty of Versailles.

The Structure of the League

- The Assembly
  Action: only met once a year to discuss issues
  Membership: all member countries had a vote
  How it worked: all decisions had to be agreed by all members to be passed

- The Council
  Action: met 5 times a year and in emergencies
  Membership: it included Britain, France, Italy and Japan as permanent members and 4 temporary members
  How it worked: any disputes would be negotiated, collective security against aggressors, range of powers/actions – moral, economic and military and each permanent member had the power to veto – block decisions

- The Secretariat
  Leagues civil service responsible for keeping records of meetings and preparing reports

Successes

- Improving lives
- Stopping small wars
- 1921 – Stopped war between Germany and Poland
- 1921 – Arbitrated between Sweden and Finland over the Aaland Islands
- 1925 – Greece invaded Bulgaria, but were forced to step down, which they did
- Kellogg-Briand Pact of 1928 – Outlawed war
Failures

- Failed to enforce Treaty of Versailles
- 1920 – Poles captured Vilna and refused to withdraw
- League could not stop wars when powerful nations were involved
- 1922 – Turks drove out Greeks out of Smyrna
- 1923 – Tellini was murdered in Greece. Greece asked the League for help, ordering Mussolini to leave, but the Conference of Ambassadors overruled the League and forced Greece to pay compensation for Italy.

Large Scale Failures

- Japan in China – during the 1930’s, Japan controlled the Manchurian railway and claim that Chinese soldiers sabotaged the railway. This resulted in an attack on the Chinese army and by 1932 Manchuria was conquered. China appealed to the LoN and they sent a delegation to Manchuria. At a Special Assembly, 40 nations, except Japan, voted that Japan should withdraw from Manchuria, instead they walked out of the League. Thereafter in 1933, Japan invaded China. The League suggested economic sanctions, but nothing was done as the US was not a member. The League did not even attempt to stop arms sales, as they believed Japan would declare war.

- Italy/Ethiopia – Italy invaded Ethiopia in 1935 to boost national pride, which was triggered by the defeat of Italian’s at the Battle of Adowa in the 19th century, where Ethiopia was saved from Italian colonisation. After Ethiopia lost the invasion, they made an appeal. The LoN acknowledged the invasion and voted to impose economic sanctions on the aggressor. However, they were ineffective as they lacked general support. Although Mussolini’s aggression was not appreciated by the British, the other major powers had no real desire to oppose him.

Transformation into United Nations

The UN replaced the LoN, in 1946. The Allied Powers aimed to create this new body and many old affiliates joined the UN. They key difference was have its own peacekeepers in all states.