Model answers: The League of Nations

Study Source A. What is the message of this cartoon? Use details of the cartoon and your own knowledge to explain your answer.

**Answer A**

One of the aims of the League was collective security, an idea that required unity of all countries in order to discourage aggression. This unity was not achieved, in part due to the significant absence of the US. Despite the League being the brainchild of American president Woodrow Wilson as shown in the sign to the left his vision was not met by the American population, as shown by the reclining figure of Uncle Sam in the cartoon. The US opted for a policy of isolationism following World War 1 and therefore did not join the League, introducing a weakness that would hinder the League’s work throughout its lifetime. It was already clear by 1920, when the cartoon was produced, that the League would run into trouble without the involvement of the US, as she was the largest industrial nation and without her economic sanctions imposed would be ineffective. The cartoon uses the symbolism of the USA being the missing keystone of the bridge to show how significant her absence was to the League, which would eventually collapse (like an incomplete bridge) without American help.

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**Explain why the League of Nations was established.**

The League of Nations was one of Woodrow Wilson’s 14 points. He wanted to create a body that could settle international disputes through discussion rather than military action. He was also aware of the way WW1 had started – a small action in a minor nation (the assassination of Franz Ferdinand) had started a series of events which created a huge war. Wilson wanted to prevent this happening again.

Another of Wilson’s aims was to create a just and fair peace, partly through disarmament for all. He planned that the League of Nations would encourage and enforce this. Finally there were a number of social issues that the League aimed to address, including the improvement of workers rights worldwide, and the fight against slavery. The League was more successful in this area than in international relations, though it did create a place where countries could meet up.
What were the main aims of the League of Nations when it was set up in 1920?

4 marks

To encourage disarmament, to discourage aggression and maintain peace through collective security, to encourage countries to cooperate and settle disputes peacefully and to improve health, living and working conditions around the world.

Explain why the League of Nations failed to deal successfully with the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1931.

6 marks

The league failed over the Japanese invasion of Manchuria because America which was not a member and would not support economic sanctions against Japan. Without American support sanctions would be useless. Another reason was that the Lytton Committee took far too long over its report. By the time it reported Japan was in control and it was too late to do anything. Asia was also a long way away and at that time not seen as vital to the countries in Europe and so they did not want to commit. Members were unwilling to impose economic sanctions as the depression was already damaging world trade. Britain was particularly unwilling to impose military action for fear of Japanese attacks on Far East colonies.
How far was the League of Nations a complete failure? Explain your answer.

There were both successes and failures of the league. The Corfu incident of 1923 was a huge failure and demonstrated the weakness of the league. There was an incident at the Greek Albanian border where an Italian General, Tellini and his team were ambushed and killed. The league made a decision that compensation would be paid to the league and when the people responsible were found, it would go to Italy. Formally Mussolini accepted the decision but got it overturned by the conference of Ambassadors. This was not a body of the league but was constantly undermining it.

Disarmament was failure as the disarmament of Germany meant to be the first step towards a more general one, but it never happened. In July 1932 at the disarmament conference it imposed rules, to prohibit the bombing of civilian populations to limit the size of the tanks and to forbid chemical warfare. All three were hard to enforce and fairly ineffective.

The failures of the league can be attributed to the fact that economic sanctions did not work due to the self-interest of leading members. Many defeated countries saw the league as part of the treaties and so associated it with their defeat.

In the Vilna incident of 1920, the Poles simply seized Vilna which belonged to Lithuania. However, the league took no action, so was seen as weak and ineffective. However, the league did some good work. The work of its agencies were very successful. The slavery commission brought about the condemning of slave traders in Burma and reduced the death rate of 50% to 4% on an African railway. The health commission began the global extermination of mosquitoes to prevent malaria and gave advice to Russia regarding the plague in Siberia. The refugee’s commission worked quickly in the refugee crisis and in Turkey to stamp out dysentery in camps and provide sanitary conditions. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) banned poisonous white lead from paint and child labour.

It sorted out border disputes. In Upper Silesia it held a plebiscite to ask whether they wanted to pin Poland or Germany. The industrial areas voted mainly for Germany and the rural for Poland. They divided the region down these lines and safeguarded rail lines and power and water supplies.

In Bulgaria 1925, the league condemned the Greeks and they pulled out without fuss.

The league was certainly not a complete failure. It worked effectively for a better world through its agencies and achieved some success. However, in many cases it was seen as weak and could be undermined by the conference of Ambassador, which was meant to be a temporary body but lasted until 1933. It can also be said that it had one rule for big states and another for small. Perhaps with the presence of the USA it could be more effective. The rise of the aggressive military dictatorship did not help the league.
The weaknesses of the League were so great that it was bound to fail. Do you agree?

The League of Nations was formed in 1919 to encourage the member countries to cooperate in trade, improve social conditions, complete disarmament and to protect any member country that was being threatened with war. The League of Nations was the initial idea of Woodrow Wilson, the president of the USA, and was formed to make sure such world atrocities like the First World War never happened again. However, we know that a Second World War with even greater loss of life took place, and therefore most people conclude that the League of Nations failed. But why did the League fail?

The League of Nations had many 'design' weaknesses; with probably the most important and noticeable weakness was the absence of the USA. It was a great shock and disappointment for the rest of the world when the American people voted for a 'policy of isolation', and despite the campaigning of Woodrow Wilson, decided not to join the League of Nations. This can be considered a great weakness because the USA was becoming the most powerful and influential country in the world, and therefore the League would probably be unwilling to make a decision which would go against the USA, and it would also mean that a country inside the League, who had trade sanctions placed upon them would still be free to trade with the USA. The League of Nations also seemed to have a weakness in not accepting Germany in the League when it was first formed. This gave the impression that the League was for the 'winners' of WWI, with Britain and France part of the inner council, and kept the German people bitter and still wanting revenge.

Another weakness of the League was that it did not have an army of its own, and that if it wanted an army to stand up to a troublesome country, it must raise an army from member countries. This became ineffective, as many member countries were very unwilling to raise an army and physically challenge a country, as they were afraid that it would effect their own self-interests, as we'll see later in the Manchurian and the Abyssinian crisis.

Despite all these weaknesses, the League did have some success in the 1920's. The League had successfully sorted out a disagreement between Finland and Sweden over the Aaland Islands; between Germany and Poland over Upper Silesia, and between Greece and Bulgaria. Apart from international disputes, some of the League's greatest successes came in its work in the 'International Labour Organisation', in which they got member countries to agree to things such as the '8 hour maximum working day' and that there should be 'No-one to be in full time employment under 15 years of age'. However, the League did have failures in the 1920's, such as Vilna and Corfu, and failed in its aim to achieve disarmament.

The small holes in the League became gaping ones after its downright failure to do anything significant in the two main 'crisis' of the early 1930's: The invasion of Manchuria by Japan in '31 and the invasion of Abyssinia by the Italians in '35.
In 1929 the world experienced the 'Wall Street collapse', a mass economic depression that effected many of the countries of the world hard, especially Japan. Therefore, Japan was in desperate need of raw materials such as coal and Iron Ore, which an area of China, named Manchuria, was rich in. Japan already had influence in Manchuria, and so decided to take it over. China appealed to the League, which decided to set up a Commission of Inquiry under Lord Lytton, who was sent to the area to make a report. During the year it took to make the report, Japan tightened its grip on the area. When the League finally 'morally condemned' Japan with the report, Japan simply ignored the report and left the League. Japan continued to make successful trade with the USA, its biggest trading partner, and then announced the intention to invade China itself. This incident showed that if an aggressive dictator wanted to invade neighbouring countries, he could.

This point was underlined 4 years later, when Abysinnia appealed for help to the League about the Italian Invasion. The League took eight months to discuss the matter, and then concluded that Italy could have some of Abyssinia (as Italy had roots in Abyssinia), but Mussolini rejected this offer. The League delayed its decision to apply trade sanctions, meaning that Italy could stockpile enough resources. Also, in self-interest, France and Britain refused to stop trading in oil with Italy as it could harm their own economies, and refused to shut the Suez Canal, the route Italy used to get things from Italy to Abyssinia, because they were afraid of war with Italy, and they also did not want to upset Mussolini, as they hoped he would be their ally with in increasing threat of Hitler. So, this meant that the League did not manage to stop Italy, and showed that the League was actually weak and quite powerless. Hitler saw this, and was able to exploit the League's weakness to rearm and march into the Rhineland.

So, in conclusion, and to directly answer the question "Was the League bound to fail?" I would say that yes, the League was bound to fail eventually, as I personally feel that the League's Physical weakness was too great in a world that was still very self-interested. For example, Britain and France were happy for Italy to invade the virtually defenceless country Abyssinia, as long as it meant that they would stay on good terms with Mussolini. To put it simply, the League's main aim above all others was to end world conflict, and it failed to do this, meaning that the League must have been a failure.