

How was the League organized?

There were forty-two members states at the beginning and fifty-five by 1926 when Germany was admitted. Its main organ were as follows

- a. The General Assembly
This met annually and contained representatives of all the members states, each of which had one vote. Its function was to decide general policy. It could, for example, propose a revision of peace treaties, and it handled the finances of the League. Any decisions taken had to be unanimous (undisputed)
- b. The Council
This was a much smaller body which met more often, at least three times a year, and contained four permanent members- Britain, France, Italy and Japan. The USA was to have been a permanent member but decided not to join the League. There were four other members had increased to nine by 1926. It was the Council's task to deal with specific political disputes as they arose; again, decisions had to be unanimous.
- c. The Permanent Court of International Justice
This was based at the Hague in Holland and consisted of fifteen judges of different nationalities; it dealt with legal disputes between states, as opposed to political ones.
- d. The Secretariat
This looked after all the paperwork, preparing agendas, and writing resolutions and reports for carrying out the decisions of the League
- e. Commissions and committees
There were a number of these, to deal with specific problems, some of which had arisen from the First World War. The main Commissions were those handled the mandates, military affairs, minority groups and disarmament. There were committees for international labor, health, economic and financial organization, child welfare, drug problems and women's rights.

Peace Keeping

In its function of peacekeeping, it was expected that the League would operate as follows: all disputes threatening war would be submitted to the League, and any member which resorted to war, thus breaking the covenant, *would face collective action by the rest*. The Council would

recommend 'what effective military, naval or air force the members should contribute to the armed forces.'

Why did the League fail to preserve peace?

How effective would the League be after its establishment? It would be unfair to dismiss the League as a total failure. This is because many of the committees and commissions achieved valuable results and much was done to foster international cooperation. Unfortunately several challenges occurred during the 1930s, and on every occasion the League was found struggling for its survival, however.

A. It was too closely linked with the Versailles Treaties

This initial disadvantage made it seem like an organization especially for the benefit of the victorious powers. In addition it had to defend a peace settlement which was far from perfect. Some of its provisions were bound to cause trouble- for example, the disappointment of Italy and the inclusion (In addition) of Germans in Czechoslovakia and Poland.

B. It was rejected by the USA

The League was dealt a serious blow in March 1920 when the United States Senate rejected both the Versailles Settlement and the League. The reasons behind their decisions were varied. The absence of the USA meant that the League was deprived of a powerful member whose presence would have been of great psychological and financial benefit.

C. Other important powers were not involved

- ☺ Germany was not allowed to join until 1926; and
- ☺ The USSR only became a member in 1934 (when Germany left)

So far the first few years of its existence the League was deprived of three of the world's most important powers.

D. The Conference of Ambassadors in Paris was an embarrassment

It was only intended to function until the League machinery was up and running, but it lingered on, and on several occasions, it took precedence over the league.

E. There were serious weakness in the covenant

These made difficult to ensure that decisive action was taken against any aggressor. It was difficult to get unanimous decisions; the League had no military force of its own which made nonsense of the idea of collective security.

F. It was very much a French/British affair

The continued absence of the USA and the USSR, plus the hostility of Italy, made the League very much a French/ Britain affair.

G. The world economic crisis began in 1929

This contributed to the league's decline. It brought unemployment and failing living standards to most countries, and caused the extreme right-wing governments to come to power in Japan and Germany; together with Mussolini, they refused to keep to the rules and took a series of actions which reveled the Leagues weaknesses.