

## ▪ THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS

- CHAIRMAN      So, to what extent was the League of Nations a success?
- AMERICAN      Not at all! It was totally useless. Look at the Abyssinian crisis. In December 1934 the Italians provoked a border clash at Wal-Wal and *demande*d Abyssinia. But it was February 1935 before the League even set up a commission, and it did not report until October 1935 – almost a year later. And when Mussolini ignored it and invaded anyway, what did the League do: it banned weapons sales – which stopped Abyssinia defending itself and actually *helped* the Italians, who had been stockpiling them. The League DID NOT close the Suez Canal or ban oil sales, which might have hindered the Italians, and soon afterwards it even lifted the sanctions. In the meantime, in December 1935, Hoare and Laval were caught making a secret Pact to *give* Abyssinia to Italy – the two main countries in the League, caught betraying it!!! So *that's* your League of Nations – a toothless, incompetent sham.
- SWISS            I think you are too hard. The League made lots of *good* things. Article 23 of the Covenant installed the International Labour Organisation and the World Health Organisation, bodies which exist STILL today, one knows. She repatriated half a million Prisoners of War' closed Swiss drug-runners, and attacked slave owners. And as for the war, it did all it could. But Hitler believed that the Aryan race OUGHT to dominate inferior nations *by war*. And there were Fascist governments in Italy and Spain, and a military dictatorship in Japan. In such a situation, no institution on Earth could have stopped the War.
- BRITISH        But there were problems before 1939. Take Manchuria; in September 1931 the Japanese provoked a clash over the South Manchurian Railway and invaded Manchuria. It was CLEARLY an aggressive act, but the League did not set up the Lytton commission until December 1931, and he did not *report* until October 1932 – again, a wasted year, 'looking into' the matter. When the League eventually asked Japan to quit Manchuria, Japan instead walked out of the meeting and left the League. The League was one hundred per cent failure in Manchuria.
- SWISS            But do you not agree that the League did well in the 1920s? In 1921 it arbitrated between Sweden and Finland over the Aaland Islands, and it persuaded Greece to stop its invasion of Bulgaria in 1925.
- BRITISH        No I do not. I believe instead that we can see the beginnings of the League's failure as early as 1923, when the League made Greece PAY Italy to leave Corfu, even though it was Italy which had invaded Greece. From the start, whenever the League was faced by a powerful, determined nation, it capitulated. It did not even *try*.
- SWISS            But the League had no POWERS to *make* anyone do anything! America was not a member, and Germany and Russia – they only joined for a few years – the League was simply a collection of B-list powers with no real authority. 'Condemnation of', 'Moral persuasion of' – what *genre* of powers are those! It could to OFFER the arbitration, but people must agree. The International Court of Justice could make acts, but it had no power to enforce. The League organised

disarmament *talks*, and the Kellogg-Briand Pact in 1928 got 65 nations to *promise* to proscribe war – but it had no mechanism to ENFORCE the peace.

AMERICAN But the League DID have very great powers – it just never used them! And why???

It comes down to the money. The League could impose sanctions, but it did not, because sanctions damage trade. The League could raise an army if it wanted, but Britain and France would never pay. The secretariat was too small – that was why the League took forever to do anything.

The League itself – as an institution – was flawed.

SWISS *No* – you have it wrong. For me, the telling point is that all decisions of the League's Assembly had to be unanimous .

The League was an *institution* for allowing the nations to discuss their problems IF THEY WANTED TO. And it therefore succeeded only as much as the member nations wanted it to.

In 1946, the League of Nations met for the last time, and – yes – people did make negative remarks. . But when they had finished, they did not despair and return to their homes – they transformed themselves into the United Nations and tried again. Whatever the League did or did not do, it had established for all time the *principle* that we need some sort of 'league' of nations.

CHAIRMAN Hmmm. I wonder which of you is right?