

History Paper 1

The League of Nations Model Answers



- **2 Model Answers**
- **Revision Notes**

MODEL ANSWERS

The League of Nations faced many difficulties.

(a) Describe events in Vilna in 1920. [4]

At the end of the First World War, the Allies provisionally assigned Vilna, the historic capital of Lithuania, to the USSR. However, the majority of Vilna's inhabitants were Polish people therefore in 1920, Polish troops decided to invade and capture Vilna – claiming that they were defending the “right of self-determination” for Polish people in the city. Lithuania appealed to the League of Nations to mediate and order Poland's withdrawal. Although the League ordered Poland to withdraw, Britain and France who were members of the League supported Poland and this emboldened Poland to refuse the League's demands. The League was unable to force Poland to withdraw its troops as it did not have a standing army to impose its decision therefore Poland maintained its presence and Vilna was incorporated into Poland as part of its territory in 1922. This event was seen as one of the League of Nations' significant failures as they revealed the organisation was powerless to enforce its decision on member states.

(b) Why did the League of Nations not impose sanctions against Japan following the Mukden Incident? [6]

In 1931, the Japanese Army decided to take over Manchuria because area had already received a vast amount of financial investment by Japanese businessmen. There was a railway which had been built by the Japanese called the South Manchurian Railway and there were also Japanese owned farms, mines and factories in Manchuria. In September 1931 the railway was damaged near a place called Mukden, and the Japanese Army claimed the damage was an act of sabotage by the Chinese. This incident, which was called the “Mukden incident,” gave the Japanese army a pretext which they used to invade Manchuria.

On 21 September 1931, the Chinese government made an official appeal to the League of Nations to order the withdrawal of Japan. As a result, The League set up a Commission of Inquiry under Lord Lytton, who was sent to the region to make a report. It took until September 1932 for the League of Nations to publish a report condemning the invasion and ordering Japan's withdrawal from Manchuria. By this time however, the Japanese had established control over Manchuria and were planning further invasions into China.

Japan simply ignored the report and left the League. The League of Nations was unable to impose any effective sanctions as Japan continued to have a successful trade relationship with America, which was its biggest trading partner. The League was unable to therefore hurt Japan economically and it was unable to order an arms embargo on the country as Japan was able to turn to America – which was suffering severe economic depression due to the 1929 Wall Street Crash – and America was able to function as its alternative economic partner. This incident showed that if an aggressive dictator wanted to invade neighbouring countries, he could as the League was unable to effectively implement any sanctions that could hurt the country.

Furthermore the self-interested actions of the League of Nation's members meant that it was unable to impose effective sanctions against Japan. This is because members of the League like Britain and France did not want to annoy the Japanese by punishing it for its invasion of Manchuria. They saw it as a remote region that was a very long distance from Britain and France, and the people of Europe were not concerned with the plight of people living so far

Japan's successful invasion of Manchuria that went unpunished as Japan simply left the League.

(c) 'Ineffective sanctions were the main reason for the failure of the League in Abyssinia.' How far do you agree with this statement? Explain your answer. [10]

It could be stated that ineffective sanctions were a contributing reason that led to the League of Nations failing to resolve the Abyssinian crisis in 1935 – however to state that this was the only factor that influenced the League's inability to resolve the crisis would exclude other significant issues that led to the League's failures to resolve the Abyssinian crisis.

To an extent, ineffective sanctions were an important reason for the failure of the League in Abyssinia. This is because, although the League did attempt to impose sanctions in Italy following its invasion of Abyssinia in 1935, this did not deter the Italian leader, Benito Mussolini, from completing a takeover of the country. Once Italy moved in to invade Abyssinia, using the Wal Wal skirmish between Abyssinian and Italian troops on the border between Abyssinia and Italian Somaliland as an excuse for the invasion, Haile Selassie, the Emperor of Abyssinia asked the League to arbitrate. The League did take measures as it banned arms sales to both Abyssinia and Italy as a way of quelling the conflict. However the use of sanctions in this instance did more to harm Abyssinia than Italy. This is because Italy had a far larger armed force that was superior in its military strength, whilst Abyssinia which was less prepared for battle was unable to purchase the arms it needed for the conflict.

Moreover the League delayed its decision to apply trade sanctions, meaning that Italy could stockpile enough military resources. Worse still, France and Britain refused to stop trading in oil with Italy as it could harm their own economies, and they also refused to shut the Suez Canal in Egypt, which was the route Italy used to transport goods from Italy to Abyssinia because they were afraid of war with Italy. This therefore meant that the League was unable to resolve the crisis as it was unable to impose effective sanctions against Italy.

That being considered, there were several other factors that played a contributing role in the League's failure to resolve the Abyssinian crisis. Firstly, the League's decision to attempt to apportion a part of Abyssinia over to Italy proved that one of its significant tenets – which was preserving a country's national sovereignty – would not be honoured by member states and the League did not have power to prevent this. Moreover, this lack of belief in the League's principles of sovereignty came to the fore when it was revealed that Britain and France made a secret Pact in December 1935 to end the Italian-Abyssinian crisis by offering two-thirds of Abyssinia over to Italy in exchange for Mussolini agreeing to end the conflict. This Pact, which was called the Hoare-Laval Pact, was proposed to Mussolini as an alternative – however even though it was ignored by the leader, once it was made public it revealed that the more powerful members of the League were not interested in protecting the organisation's important principles and this significantly contributed to the failure of the League in Abyssinia as the League did not have the full support of its members in its decisions towards Abyssinia.

Finally, the fact that the League was unable to militarily impose its decisions played a significant role in its inability to resolve the crisis. Although by November 1935 the League had ruled that Italy would need to withdraw from Abyssinia, it was unable to use force to impose its decision. This is because the League had no standing army – it relied on the willingness of its member states to enforce its decision. However its members, including Britain and France, who also had colonies in Africa and feared the repercussions of preventing

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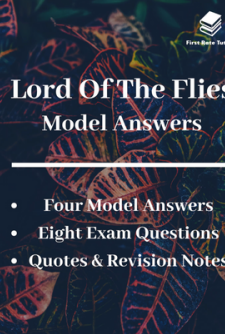
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