

League of Nations: establishment and mission:

Key words: The Fourteen Points, Policy of Isolationism, Bodies of the League, Purpose of the League, The Corfu Incident in 1923

The **Fourteen Points** was a speech delivered by the **United States President Woodrow Wilson** to a joint session of Congress on **January 8, 1918**. The address was intended to assure the country that the Great War was being fought for a **moral cause** and for **postwar peace in Europe**.

Point No. 14 was a call to set up a “general association of nations” to guarantee the “political independence and territorial integrity” of all nations. Wilson believed the USA should use its new global economic and military power to create a “new international order” which would “make the world safe for democracy”.

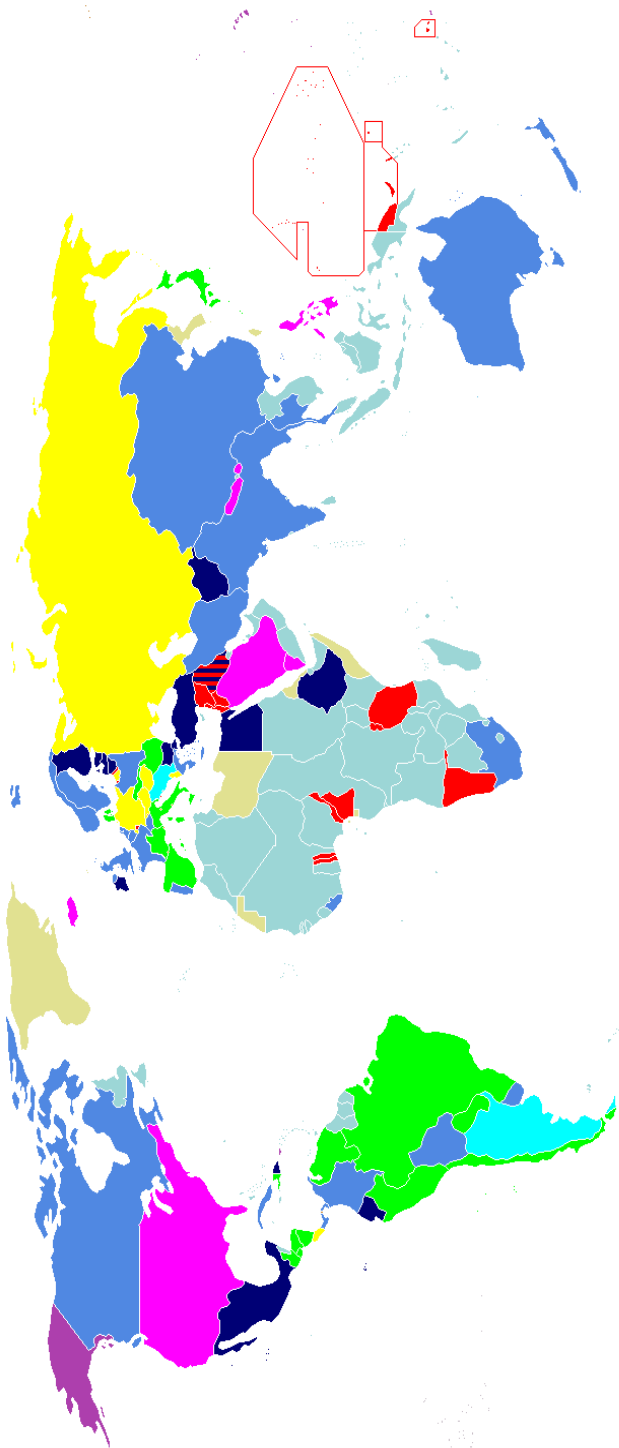
The **League of Nations (=LoN)** was an **international organization** founded in 1919 when the **Treaty of Versailles** was signed. The first 26 Articles of all five treaties of the Paris Peace conference of 1919-1920 were setting up this new organization. The League began its work in **1920** and lasted until **1946**. The organization was the precursor to the **United Nations** which was founded in **1945**.

The League's **primary goals**, as stated in its *Covenant*, included **preventing war** through disarmament, collective security, and **settling international disputes** through negotiation and arbitration. Other goals in this and related treaties included labour conditions, just treatment of native inhabitants, trafficking in persons and drugs, arms trade, global health, prisoners of war, and protection of minorities in Europe.

Members: There were **42 members** to start with. **Czechoslovakia** was among founding members. At its greatest extent, it had **59 members**.

Germany became a member in 1926

and left the organization in 1933. Despite Germany being allowed to join in 1926, the League was still seen as a “**victors club**”. These were serious early weaknesses, which were made worse by the fact that the **fear of communism** meant that Soviet Russia was also not allowed to join. In fact, the **Russian government** condemned the League as a **capitalist club dominated by imperialist powers**.



League of Nations



- League of Nations mandate
- Never members
- Colonies of members
- Colonies of members that left
- Colonies/territories of non-members
- Founding member that stayed until the end
- Founding member that left and joined again
- Founding member that left
- Joined later and stayed until the end
- Joined later and left later

Germany in *LoN*: 1926 - 1933

Soviet Union in *LoN*: 1934-1939: as the only country expelled

Italy in *LoN*: left in 1933

Japan in *LoN*: left in 1937

USA in *LoN*: never became a member (!)

USA out: Despite Wilson's efforts to establish and promote the League, for which he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in October 1919, the United States did not join the League. Opposition in the U.S. Senate, particularly from Republican politicians Henry Cabot Lodge and William E. Borah, together with Wilson's refusal to compromise, ensured that the United States would not ratify the Covenant.

Speech by a leading Republican Senator, Henry Cabot Lodge in December 1919: “*You may call me selfish if you will, but an American I was born, an American I have remained all my life. I can never be anything else but an American, and I must think of the USA first. The USA is the world’s best hope, but if you tangle her in the intrigues of Europe, you will destroy her power for good and endanger her very existence. She has great problems of her own to solve, very grim and perilous, and a right solution, if we can attain to it, would largely benefit mankind.*”

—————→ The **policy of Isolationism**: The USA stays out of world affairs.

4 main purposes of *LoN*: 1-4

1. (1a+1b): 1a. **Stopping aggression** and to keep **world peace** by dealing with disputes among nations.
- 1b. The League also **safeguarded the independence of countries** and their frontiers.

Article 10 of the *Covenant* reads as follows: “*The members of the League undertake to respect and preserve **against aggression** the territory and existing independence of all members of the League. In case of any such aggression or any threat of danger, the Council shall advise upon the means by which this obligation shall be fulfilled.*”

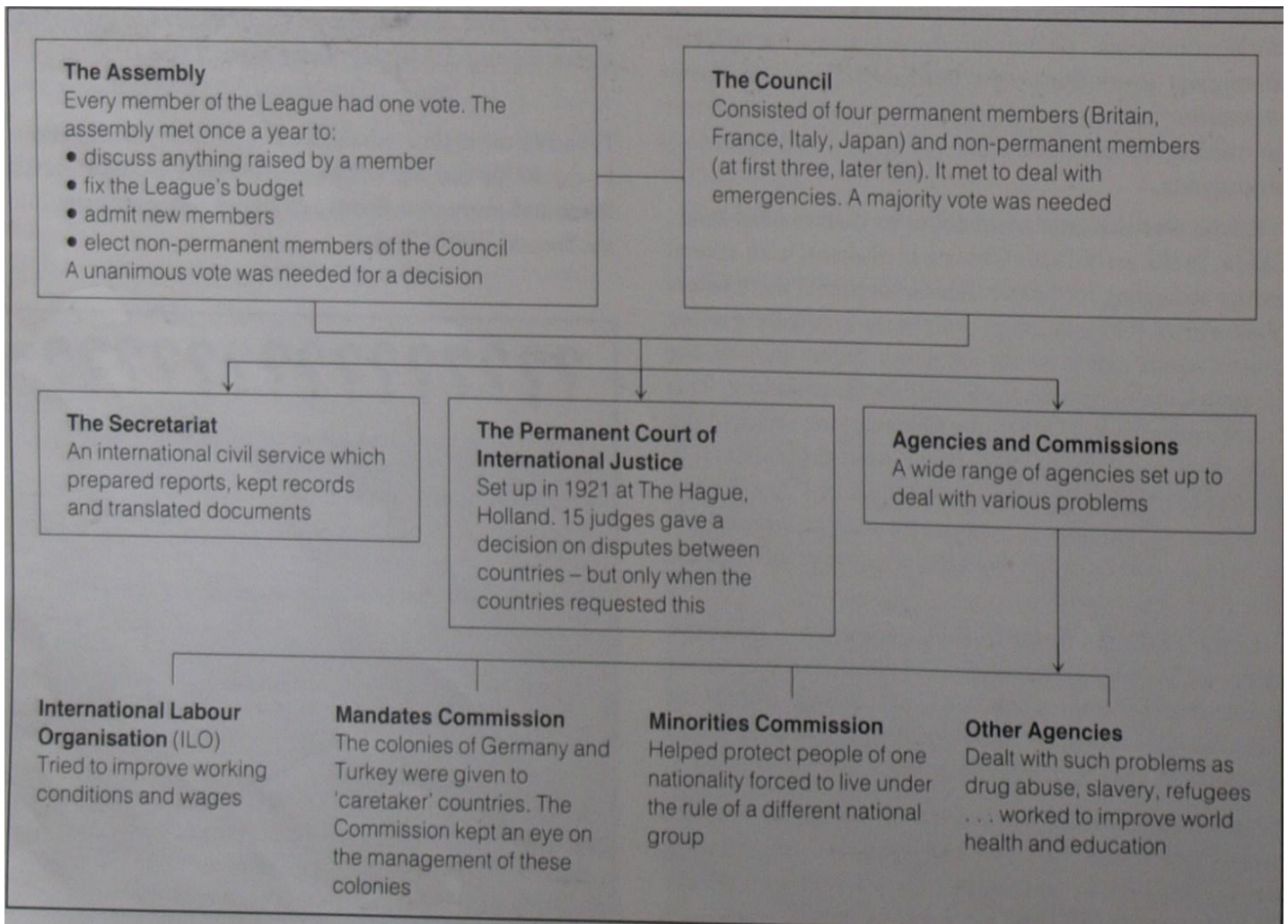
Wilson believed that his League could stop future wars. The organization was founded to: “*To **promote international peace and achieve international peace and security**; to accept the obligation not to resort wars. Members agree that when a dispute arises between them they shall submit the whole matter to arbitration. Should any member resort to war, it shall be deemed to have committed an act of war against **all** members of the League.*”

2. Disarmament
3. Encouraging cooperation
4. Improving living and working conditions for all the people

Bodies of the League of Nations:

The headquarters of the League of Nations were located in **Geneva, Switzerland**.

The *Assembly*, The *Council*, The *Secretariat* (responsible for preparing the agenda for the Council and Assembly and publishing reports of the meetings and other routine matters), The *Permanent Court of International Justice in Hague*, other agencies and bodies: *International Labour Organization*, other Commissions to end slavery, illegal drugs, to prevent and control the spread of disease,...



What could the League do?:

Any member with a dispute was to bring the matter to the Assembly, instead of resorting violence. If the Assembly was unable to prevent conflict, then the smaller Council would take action to implement collective security. The main power of the Council was to give a pressure of **world opinion**, if necessary, the imposition of **economic sanctions**. If these failed, then the force could be used, but **the League was never given its own army**, so this sanction depended on the more powerful nations agreeing to use their own troops.

3 forms of sanctions were used: 1. moral sanction: where the League would use world opinion to persuade the offending power to accept a settlement. 2. economic sanction: where the League would cut off world trade with the offending nation. 3. military sanction: where the League would impose its will by force.

The problems of the League:

1. Britain and France were in charge, but neither country was strong enough after the War to do the job properly. Unfortunately, these two countries **often disagreed over what they did**.

The attempts to strengthen the League's ability to guarantee the terms of the 1919-1920 peace treaties failed. In 1923, a draft *Treaty of Mutual Assistance*, suggested by France to give the League powers to take rapid military action in the event of unprovoked aggressions, was **blocked by Britain**. Britain feared that the powerful League would be used by France to push its own interests in Europe.

2. Important Great Powers (Germany, Japan, Soviet Union) only belonged for brief periods. This reduced the League's authority. In some areas the League had little influence. **The USA never entered the League.** Without the USA France felt insecure and the League did not have the power in the Pacific to counter Japan's aggression.

3. Most countries were **still busy rebuilding after the War.**

The Depression meant that Governments were preoccupied by problems at home. This helped make some countries unstable – helped Hitler come to power.

4. The League had **no army of its own**, and most members did not want to commit troops to war. Members never used military sanctions, only economic sanctions. Aggressors came to believe the League was not prepared to stand up to them.

5. In the Assembly an unanimous vote was needed for any decision. This made the **Assembly very hard to operate.** Plus, the Assembly could only advise, recommend. Only the Council could make the decisions.

The Corfu Incident in 1923 shows that **unanimous-decision process was used as an obstruction:** This incident was settled in Italy's favour. **France**, which saw Italy as an important potential ally against Germany, **did not want to upset Mussolini**, the Italian leader, and so **blocked any action** against Italy by the League. Italy had earlier cooperated with France over its invasion of the Ruhr.

Also, **British** government had been advised by experts that applying economic and naval sanctions against Italy would damage British interests. So both the unanimous-decision process and the use of sanctions were shown to be ineffective in practice, when effective collective action was required.

6. The League was bound to uphold terms of the Treaty of Versailles, but some terms were not satisfactory and needed to be changed. This weakened the authority of the League. Some countries, such as Germany and Japan, which broke the terms, saw the League as an enemy.

7. The League was **unable to bring about disarmament.** The existence of communist Russia and the power vacuum in central and Eastern Europe meant that many states, such as Poland and Czechoslovakia, were reluctant to disarm.

More importantly, France was extremely concerned about disarming, given Britain's refusal to give the League real military powers, and the refusal by both Britain and the USA to give any military guarantees. Because Great Britain refused to allow the League to have any of its own military forces, the French government wanted Britain and the USA to give it definite promises of military assistance if Germany should ever try to undo any part of the Treaty of Versailles. When such promises were not made, France felt insecure. France's fears were also linked to the fact that Germany possessed greater industrial resources and had a population of 66 million compared to France's 39 million.

The final meeting of the League of Nations: was held in April **1946** in Geneva, Switzerland. This session concerned itself with liquidating the League.

The League of Nations was a brave experiment to protect peace by collective security and reducing armaments. Although it failed in these aims, it did **have some success in improving working and living conditions.** League agencies did much good work – **providing medical help, improving international transport and radio communication, and trying to stop slavery.**

