



Was the League of Nations a villain in the crisis?

In 1919, 32 nations met in France to create the League of Nations. The League's covenant declared it would take action to prevent wars. An attack on a League member would be considered an attack on all members, who would take joint action against the aggressor.

Italy was a founder member of the League. It attacked another member nation, Abyssinia. The League did impose some sanctions on Italy, but this was not enough to stop the war.

Some historians believe that the Abyssinian crisis destroyed the credibility of the League of Nations. This war suggested that the ideals of peace and collective security, upon which the League had been founded, were now abandoned. It has even been argued that after the triumph of Italy in Abyssinia, Hitler could feel confident about carrying out acts of war in Czechoslovakia and Poland.

Britain and France have been singled out for particular criticism. They were dominant members of the League. They supported some sanctions against Italy, but they dithered about closing the Suez canal to Italian shipping and France also resisted oil sanctions. It was the British and French foreign ministers, Hoare and Laval, who secretly planned to carve up Abyssinia and give a chunk of the country to Mussolini. Hoare and Laval lost their jobs because of this idea. Both nations were anxious about the balance of power in Europe. They thought Italy was an important ally against Germany and so didn't want to offend Mussolini.

Perhaps the reason why Mussolini triumphed in Abyssinia was as much to do with the weakness of the League of Nations as the strength of Italy. Was the suffering of Abyssinia entirely Mussolini's doing? Or should the rest of the League of Nations share the responsibility?



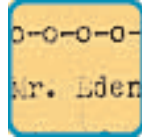
HEROES & VILLAINS

Mussolini & Abyssinia > League of Nations

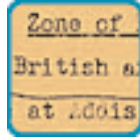
Examine these sources to find out more:



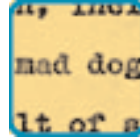
Film showing Italian rule in Abyssinia



The League of Nations' response, 1935



The Hoare-Laval plan, 1935



Meeting between League & British PM, 1935



Telegram on French attitudes, 1935



Italian letter on Italian-German relations, 1936



Cartoon: 'The man who took the lid off', 1935



Photos of Mussolini & Haile Selassie with troops