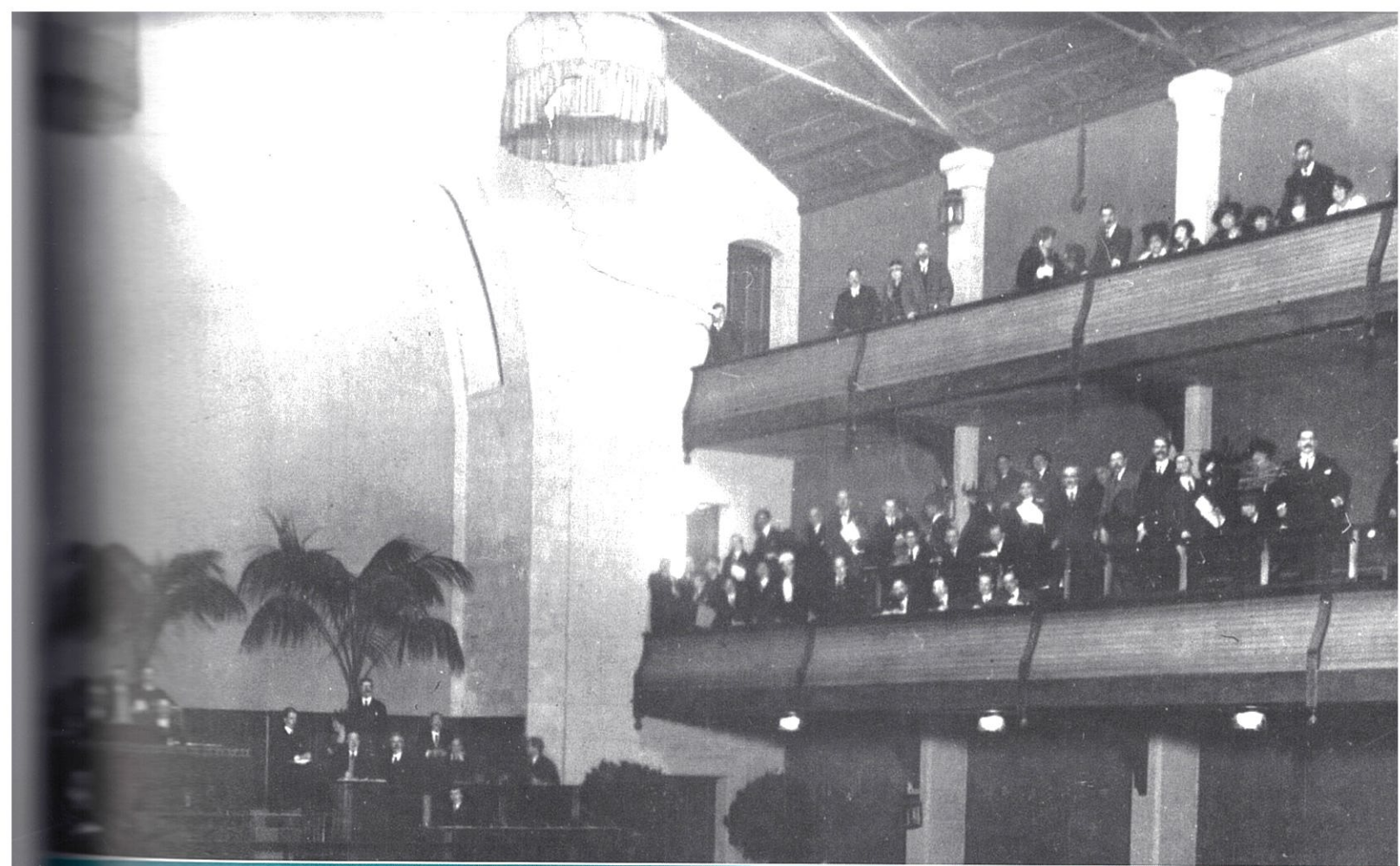




## Chapter 2, Key Question 2: To what extent was the League of Nations a success?

### FOCUS POINTS

This chapter will help you to answer these questions:

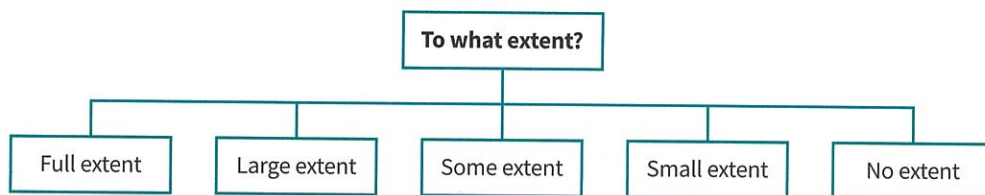
- How far did weaknesses in the League's organisation and membership make failure inevitable?
- How successful were the League's attempts at peacekeeping in the 1920s?
- How important was the League's humanitarian work?
- How far did the Depression make the work of the League more difficult in the 1930s?



## 2.0 What is this enquiry about?

In all the treaties that resulted from the Paris Peace Conference after the end of the First World War, US President Woodrow Wilson had insisted on including a reference to the League of Nations. This was to be the organisation that ensured the 1914–18 conflict really had been a ‘war to end all wars’.

Your challenge in this chapter is to decide *to what extent* the League of Nations was a success. Questions that ask ‘To what extent . . . ?’ or ‘How far . . . ?’ are asking you for an opinion, and you should present evidence that shows how you reached that opinion. This diagram shows a range of options for expressing *extent*. Where will your judgement lie on this spectrum?



### FOCUS TASK 2.1

Your judgement is the final part of the enquiry. Before you get there, you need to collect evidence. Copy this table and fill it in as you work through this chapter.

| Focus question                                                                              | Judgement: to what extent? | Evidence |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|----------|
| How far did weaknesses in the League's organisation and membership make failure inevitable? |                            |          |
| How successful were the League's attempts at peacekeeping in the 1920s?                     |                            |          |
| How important was the League's humanitarian work?                                           |                            |          |
| How far did the Depression make the work of the League more difficult in the 1930s?         |                            |          |
| <b>Overall judgement on the success of the League of Nations</b>                            |                            |          |



## What were the aims of the League of Nations?

The two main aims of the League of Nations were:

- to maintain world peace through collective security by dealing with disputes among nations
- to encourage international cooperation to solve economic and social problems, thus improving living and working conditions for all people.



**Figure 2.1:** Forty-two nations were represented at the first session of the League of Nations in 1920

## The Covenant of the League of Nations

One factor to consider when judging the League's effectiveness is its Covenant, the rules that set out how members should behave. As you look at each of the issues the League addressed, decide which articles of the Covenant were triggered. If the League was successful then the articles were followed and the action resolved the dispute.

| Article of the Covenant | Action                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|-------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Articles 8 and 9        | Members must promote disarmament so that countries will only have enough military strength to maintain national security.                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| Article 10              | Any member that is attacked will have the support of all League members.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| Article 11              | Any member can ask the League for help if it fears attack.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| Articles 12–15          | Disputes will be settled by a process: investigation of the issue, discussion in the League, then putting the issue before an international court, or going to <b>arbitration</b> .<br>Members pledge not to go to war until three months have passed from the date at which the dispute was brought to the League's attention. |
| Article 16              | Members agree to take prompt action against anyone going to war. Such an attack will be seen as an act of war against all other members. It could lead to economic <b>sanctions</b> such as the cutting of trade links and, possibly, military action of some kind.                                                             |

## KEY TERMS

**arbitration:**

a method of resolving a dispute peacefully using an independent, neutral authority that listens to evidence like a judge and then issues a ruling

**sanctions:** penalties or punishments imposed by an official body such as a court of law, intended to affect the country's decision-makers so they change their policies. A typical sanction in international relations is a ban on trade

## ACTIVITY 2.1

- What difficulties would you expect the League to face in trying to use these articles to prevent conflict or stop it once it started? In pairs, role play a dialogue between a representative of the League of Nations and a representative of a country that has broken one of the articles of the League Covenant.
- Join up with another pair. Take it in turns to read the dialogue again while the listening pair assesses how well you have understood the articles and sanctions of the Covenant. Give feedback in the form of three 'what went well' (WWW) points and two 'even better if' (EBI) points.

The crises and conflicts where the League of Nations intervened or attempted to intervene that you will examine in this chapter are:

- Vilna, 1920
- Åland Islands, 1920–21
- Corfu, 1923
- Greece versus Bulgaria, 1925
- Japanese invasion of Manchuria, 1931
- Italian invasion of Abyssinia, 1935.

## REFLECTION

In which part of Activity 2.1 did you feel you learnt most effectively? When creating the dialogue, or when listening to and assessing someone else's? When working in pairs or in groups of four? Why? How was your initial response improved when you formed groups and gave feedback?

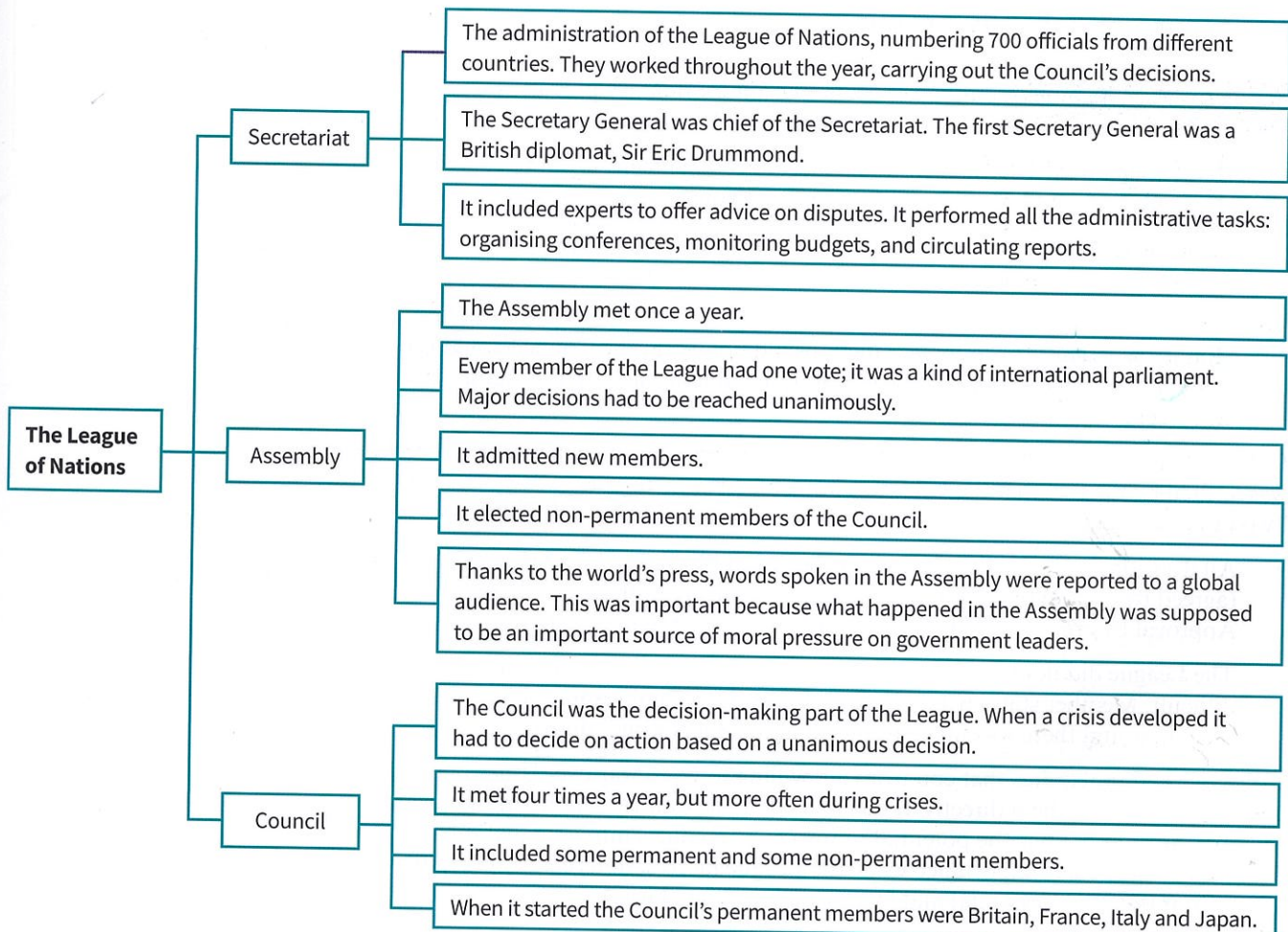
## FOCUS TASK 2.2

To meet the challenge of this enquiry you will need to keep a record of what the League tried to do, its successes, and its failures. Copy and complete this table as you learn about each of the crises the League dealt with.

| Where was the crisis? | When was the crisis? | What was the result: success / failure / mixed? | Why was that the outcome? |
|-----------------------|----------------------|-------------------------------------------------|---------------------------|
|                       |                      |                                                 |                           |

## 2.1 How far did weaknesses in the League's organisation and membership make failure inevitable?

The new international organisation had three main parts: the Secretariat, the Assembly and the Council. These are the functions of each one.



## ACTIVITY 2.2

- a Look at the structure of the League of Nations. In pairs, discuss these questions.
  - In which part of the League were all the members represented?
  - Did smaller powers have equal status with the Great Powers?
  - Why could all members not be part of the League Council?
- b Create a poster summarising the organisation of the League and annotate it to identify any potential areas of weakness.
- c Research the structure and organisation of the **United Nations** that exists today. How does it compare to the structure and organisation of the League of Nations? What are the differences and similarities? Create a short slide presentation for the class.

## KEY TERMS

**United Nations:**

an international organisation founded in 1945 to promote development, peace and human rights, replacing the League of Nations

**boycott:** to refuse to take part in something as a way of expressing disapproval

**credit:** the ability to buy goods but to defer payment until an agreed date in the future

**veto:** an official power or right or refuse to allow something

## What were the League's weaknesses?

### The failure of collective security

The idea of collective security was essential for the League to maintain peace. Acting together, members could place economic and/or military pressure on aggressors. There were three processes by which the League could try to stop wars:

- **Moral disapproval:** The Council would meet to condemn any act of aggression. The aggressor would cease its military actions knowing that the world was watching.
- **Economic sanctions:** If moral disapproval failed, then the Council could exert pressure using economic sanctions. This could mean a trade **boycott** and refusing **credit**.
- **Military sanctions:** If economic sanctions did not work, the Council could use military sanctions. This might involve sending military help to the victim of the attack.

Collective security sounds like a sensible way to stop war, but its potential for success was limited by the fact that the USA was not a member of the League of Nations. Two other problems restricted the collective security approach:

- All decisions taken by the Council or the Assembly had to be unanimous (agreed by everyone). It took only one **veto** to ensure nothing got done. Approval by even a majority of members was not enough to act.
- The League did not have its own army, so imposing military sanctions would be difficult. Member states would have to send soldiers and resources. This would take time, and there was no guarantee that members would do so.

Collective action requires that countries are willing to go to war over issues that might otherwise not affect them directly. It demands that all countries maintain significant military forces and it has the potential to turn local conflicts into global affairs. This was of particular importance when the League faced serious challenges in the 1930s from Italy (in Abyssinia) and from Japan (in Manchuria).

## Organisational issues

The Treaty of Versailles had many flaws, but in spite of these the League was supposed to enforce it. Germany hated the treaty and Italy and Japan disliked parts of it, so the League was not fully supported in its efforts to implement the terms of the treaty. Another issue was that even when decisions were made, the League had no army to enforce them. Its main 'weapons' were moral condemnation and economic sanctions – and these were not effective punishments for aggression. In addition, the League's membership did not include all countries that had the economic and military potential to cause trouble.

Despite these weaknesses, the League could have been a stronger force for peace if the Great Powers had wished. The articles of the League Covenant provided for economic and military sanctions against aggressors, but the Great Powers were often not willing to give up national self-interests for the sake of peace. The French and British governments were not inclined to use their military strength against aggressors because it went against popular opinion. Once it became clear that the USA would not be part of the League, Britain and France were much less interested in its role as peace-keeper.

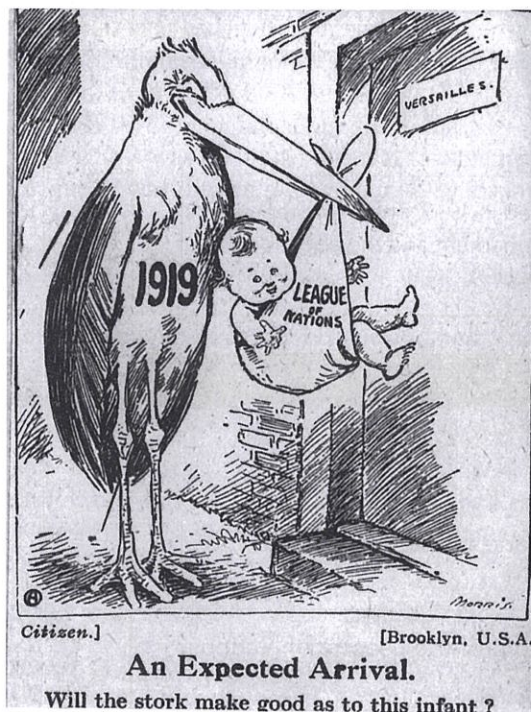
## Financial issues

The League of Nations was always run on very little money and this restricted what it could achieve. Between 1921 and 1927, it cost just \$4 million per year. Britain was the biggest contributor (\$550,000 per year), while others contributed what they could. With so little funding, when crises arose the League had to ask members for extra money. Sometimes it took a long time for governments to respond, so the League often turned to charities like the American Red Cross or Save the Children to react quickly to **humanitarian** disasters.

### KEY TERM

**humanitarian:**  
relating to actions aimed at improving peoples' lives and reducing suffering

### SOURCE 2A



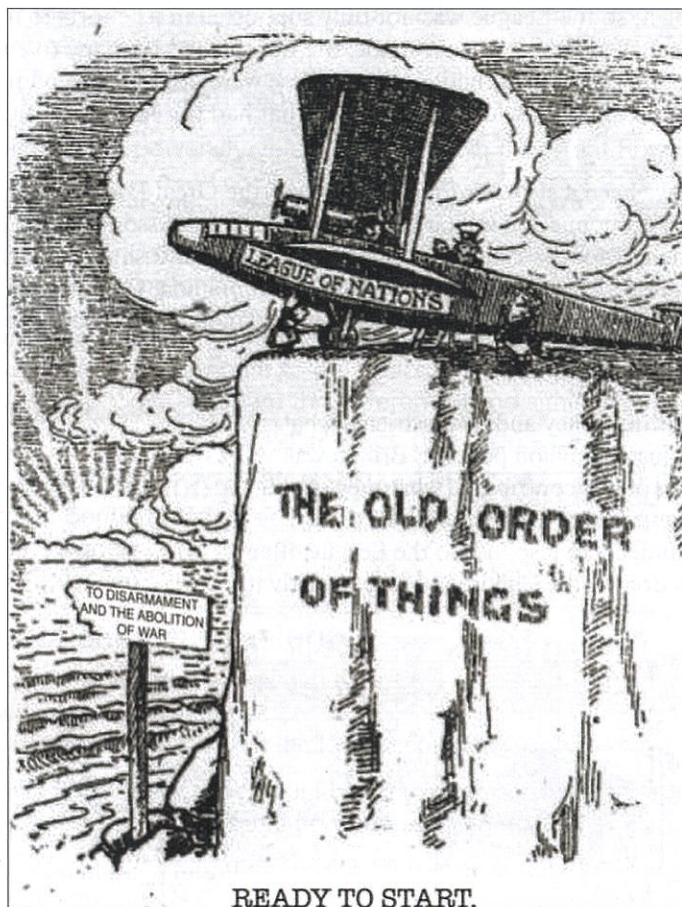
**Source 2A:** 'Birth of Hope', a cartoon published in the USA in 1919. It shows the formation of the League of Nations after the First World War. The caption reads. 'Will the stork make good as to this infant?'

### SOURCE ANALYSIS 2.1

Study Source 2A.

- What does the phrase 'make good' mean?
- Why were the stork and the baby 'expected'?
- What suggests that the League of Nations had not yet started?
- What is the message of the cartoon?
- Can you tell from the source if the cartoonist was in favour of the US joining the League of Nations or not? Explain your answer.

SOURCE 2B



**Source 2B:** 'Ready to Start', a British cartoon published in 1919. The plane represents the League of Nations and the signpost says 'To disarmament and the abolition of war'. The figure in the plane is Uncle Sam, representing the USA.

SOURCE ANALYSIS 2.2

Study Source 2B.

- a** What does 'The old order of things' mean?
- b** Why do you think the cartoon shows the plane on the edge of a cliff?

Compare Sources 2A and 2B.

- c** Which one is more optimistic about the future of the League of Nations? Explain your answer.
- d** How far do the cartoonists agree about the future of the League?
- e** To what extent do these sources provide evidence that the League was doomed from the start?

## Who joined and who left the League?

Was the League seriously weakened as a peacekeeping organisation by its membership? Both the Assembly and the Council were weakened because not all of the Great Powers were members.

### The USA

Although President Wilson was a key supporter of the League, the US Congress voted three times between November 1919 and March 1920 not to join. Many Congressmen were worried that US involvement in the League would lead to its involvement in future wars. 116 516 US soldiers had died fighting in the First World War and there was no enthusiasm for more blood to be shed. So, despite Wilson's ambition for the USA to play a major part in the League, it did not join at all.

### Germany

The Allied Powers at the Paris Peace Conference refused to allow Germany to join the League when it started. They wanted Germany to prove that it took a peaceful approach to international relations before it could be granted membership. Germany joined the League in 1926 and became a permanent member of the Council. Adolf Hitler (see Chapter 3) saw the League as a club for 'winners' in the First World War and in 1933 he decided to take Germany out of the League.

### The USSR

This USSR was not invited to join the League because it was a communist country. **Communism** stood against **capitalism**, which frightened the other, capitalist, League members. The USSR was not interested in joining what looked like a capitalist club run by the very powers – Britain, France, the USA and Japan – that had invaded the Soviet Union during its **civil war** (1918–20) in a failed attempt to destroy the new communist government. By 1934, the USSR was no longer a threat to capitalist countries and it was admitted to the League. It was thrown out again in 1939 for invading Finland at the start of the Second World War.

### Japan

Japan was one of the original members of the League and had a permanent seat on the Council. However, it left in 1933 following a highly critical report from the Lytton Commission over its invasion of Manchuria (part of China).

### Italy

Italy was one the Great Powers, and an original member of the League of Nations. However, it left in 1937 after the League imposed economic sanctions after Italy invaded Abyssinia in East Africa.

### Britain and France

These were the only two Great Powers who remained members during the League's entire existence. Reluctantly, Britain and France carried most of the responsibility for making the League work. Britain was anxious about its empire, and France was most worried about the border with Germany. In the official circles of these Great Powers, however, the League of Nations was an afterthought. Instead of using the new mechanism for resolving disputes, Britain and France relied on the traditional methods of **bilateral** talks.

#### KEY TERMS

**communism:** an economic and social system in which property and economic activity are controlled by the state. In communist countries, religion is banned and the media is censored, and everyone works for the state

**capitalism:** an economic and social system in which property is privately owned, the role of the state is small and people enjoy freedom of expression and religion, and have a choice of political parties to elect as the government

**civil war:** a war in one country between two or more sides from within that country

#### KEY TERM

**bilateral:** involving two countries or sides



**Figure 2.2:** A photograph of the Council of the League of Nations meeting in 1936

### FOCUS TASK 2.3

How weak do you think the League was because of its organisation and membership?

- a** In pairs, reach a judgement through a strategy of 'supposing'. First, think about the League's membership. Go through each of the countries that were not members of the League at the start (the USA, the USSR, Germany) and ask: *Suppose . . . (the USA, for example) had joined the League – would its membership have made much difference to its success?* Create a chart noting your judgement and your explanation against the country name. Then think about the League's structure and organisation and repeat the task.
- b** Team up with another pair to discuss your findings. Do you agree with each other? If not, try to convince the other pair of your viewpoint to reach a shared conclusion.
- c** Present your ideas to the class and invite questions and feedback.
- d** At the end, use your notes and the consensus of the class to write a paragraph in response to the question.

