

# Exhibit in Geneva Recalling Era of the League of Nations

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GENEVA, Nov. 15 — Sixty years ago today, cheering crowds massed in the streets of Geneva as church bells tolled throughout the city to welcome world statesmen attending a ceremony to officially open the forum that would end all wars — the League of Nations.

But the last echoes of the cheering crowds and the oratory had scarcely faded from the banks of Lake Geneva before the hopes that accompanied that opening began to dissipate.

Although President Woodrow Wilson had been one of the League's most enthusiastic exponents, the United States Senate refused to join. And with the emergence of Fascism and Nazism in Italy and Germany, the mechanism for holding their dreams of empire in check was a mockery.

Perhaps the most poignant commentary on the ineffectiveness of the League to deal with aggression came 16 years later when Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia appeared before it to plead for help against the invading armies of Mussolini's Italy. The slight and frail Emperor warned the democracies of Europe that they would be next unless they acted then to stop the march of Fascism. But the diplomats ignored his warning, and he was jeered as he spoke.

## Recording Part of Exhibit

A recording of Haile Selassie's speech is part of an exhibit that has been organized to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the founding of the League, the predecessor of the United Nations.

In the recording, Italian correspondents in the press gallery can be heard whistling, booing and shaking rattles as the Emperor began his address. To the din was added the protest rising from the assembly floor at the demonstration of the Italians.

This correspondent, then a newcomer to the press gallery, spotted Nicolas Titulescu, the Rumanian delegate, jumping

to his feet and shouting, "Throw out the savages!"

Although the League did not formally declare itself dead until 1946, after the founding of the United Nations, Hitler's march into Poland in 1939 and the start of World War II rendered it lifeless. But a collection of satirical cartoons at the exhibit trace the start of the League's demise to the early 1930's.

## A Collapsing House of Cards

One cartoon depicts the League as a house of cards collapsing because a hand is pulling out a swastika-marked card. But Hitler's withdrawal from the League in 1933 had been preceded by Japan's resignation on being called an aggressor for its 1931 invasion of Manchuria.

In 1935 the League adopted what quickly proved to be ineffective economic sanctions against Italy for its invasion of Ethiopia. The move provoked a defiant Mussolini, aptly portrayed in another exhibit cartoon as sneering at the League, to order his delegation to quit Geneva.

A French journalist was believed to be the first reporter to learn of the Italian withdrawal because he happened to be staying at the same hotel as Baron Aloisi, leader of the Italian delegation. He spotted the Baron in the hotel lobby standing besides his bags, preparing to leave for the train station.

Staying at the same Hotel des Bergues on Geneva's lakefront was Pierre Laval, the French statesman who was later executed by a French firing squad as a Nazi collaborator during the war. He was generally held responsible for having doomed the first attempt to enforce "collective security" by deviously working to nullify the sanctions against Italy.

Nearly always wearing a white tie and carrying a cane, Mr. Laval could be seen out for strolls that sometimes took him across the Mont Blanc Bridge that spans the lake in front of the Hotel des Bergues.

Those were more relaxed times, when ministers could move about here without

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Aral Press Service, 1936

## Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia addressing League of Nations in Geneva

uniformed policemen mounting guard with submachine guns and without being cordoned off from reporters.

The Globe Restaurant, which no longer exists, was popular for lunch with both the delegates and the reporters who gathered in Geneva for the League's assembly and council meetings. The Aga Khan, India's wealthy League representative, was particularly found of the Globe's poule au riz.

Seldom would a correspondent covering a League session dare call it a night before having dropped by the Bavaria, a sort of beer hall still displaying caricatures of League notables by the Hungarian team of Derso and Kellen. There were sure to be ministers and other delegates there, as well as colleagues who might have information or rumors to share. But the common meeting ground that the Globe and the Bavaria played has now disappeared from the Geneva scene.

The exhibit does not chronicle the dramatic protest against the rising tide of Nazism and Fascism of an Austrian-born Jew, Stefan Lux, who committed suicide in a public gallery at a 1936 League session.

The crack of the pistol shot could be heard in the press workroom behind the press gallery. Menachem Kahany, an observer for Jewish organizations who was sitting in a public gallery opposite Mr. Lux, recalls that "attendants carried him out so quickly that few people in the hall realized just what had happened."

Also overlooked by the exhibit was what many considered to be a major political achievement of the League. This was the accord that created the first international peacekeeping force. Consisting of British, Swedish, Dutch and Italian troops, the force was sent to the League-administered Saar, in turmoil because of

the strong-arm tactics of Nazi sympathizers, to police the 1935 plebiscite that restored the territory to Germany.

Exhibit photos show the parades, flag displays and speechmaking that marked the enthusiasm with which Geneva received the news that allied diplomats in Paris on April 28, 1919, had chosen Geneva as the League's home.

It was President Wilson who had insisted on the small city in neutral Switzerland in preference to any European capital, and Geneva's admiration for Wilson was undiminished by his country's failure to join the League.

An exhibit chart shows that Switzerland itself narrowly missed being absent from the League's inaugural session on Nov. 15, 1920, despite Geneva's enthusiasm. A national referendum barely gave the required approval, 13 to 12, of a majority of Switzerland's cantons for Swiss adherence to the League's charter.

The vote explains why the Government today still hesitates to seek from the Swiss, always wary of foreign entanglements, the authority it would like to have to join the United Nations.

When the League opened the Palace of Nations for its headquarters here in 1937, Vernon Bartlett, a British journalist and one-time League functionary, was already wondering whether the big marble edifice was "anything more than a magnificent tomb for a great idea."

The League died, but the idea survived with the United Nations, which took over the palace as its Geneva office. Geneva is no longer the principal international political capital, but the United Nations activities here far outweigh — at least in the number of personnel, conferences, meetings, delegates and resident correspondents — anything the city knew when it was the League's host.