

Warning

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(McLintock, A. H.,
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RIOTS

1913

The Waterfront Strike, 1913

Several serious riots occurred in Wellington during the waterfront strike of 1913. The strike started on 22 October, but Wellington was reasonably peaceful until the arrival of mounted special constables from the country districts in the early hours of 30 October. That morning the strikers attacked a troop of “specials” near the Post Office stores in Waterloo Quay and put them to flight. Towards evening, the “specials” retaliated by charging the crowd in Post Office Square. In the mêlée that followed, several “specials” took refuge in Whitcombe and Tombs's store which was besieged by angry strikers and defended by the staff with drawn revolvers. Sir Joseph Ward questioned the Prime Minister about the provocative behaviour of the special constables, but more serious incidents were to follow.

On 3 and 4 November there were riots in Buckle Street, around the Mount Cook Garrison Hall where the special constables were quartered, and around the Royal Tiger Hotel. Dozens of people were injured, including a man and a boy who suffered bullet wounds. The following day, 5 November, saw the “Battle of Featherston Street”, when the strikers tried in vain to prevent the shipment of racehorses to the New Zealand Cup meeting at Christchurch.

The next fortnight was fairly peaceful but there were new disorders in Wellington on 18 and 19 November, after the police had been instructed to break up meetings in the Post Office Square. Minor incidents occurred in other centres during the strike but nothing approached the violence which reigned in Wellington and which Sir Joseph Ward described in Parliament as “a system of Mexican revolt and civil war, a system of our own kith and kin from the country being brought down against our own kith and kin in the town to use force for the settlement of an industrial dispute”. On several occasions in Wellington, Magistrates were said to have been ready to read the Riot Act. About a hundred people were prosecuted and sentences ranged up to 11 months' imprisonment. The strike, which was called off on 20 December, ended in the complete defeat of the unionists.

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Next Part: [The Depression Riots, 1932](#)

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