3

91436R

Mana Tohu Mātauranga o Aotearoa
New Zealand Qualifications Authority

Level 3 History 2026

91436 Analyse evidence relating to an historical event of significance to New Zealanders

Credits: Four

RESOURCE BOOKLET

Refer to this booklet to answer the questions for History 91436.

Check that this booklet has pages 2–15 in the correct order and that none of these pages is blank.

YOU MAY KEEP THIS BOOKLET AT THE END OF THE EXAMINATION.

© New Zealand Qualifications Authority, 2026. All rights reserved.
No part of this publication may be reproduced by any means without the prior permission of the New Zealand Qualifications Authority.

INTRODUCTION: The Wellington Waterfront Strike (the "Great Strike") of 1913

The Wellington Waterfront Strike of 1913, often remembered as the Great Strike, began as a small local dispute over pay and conditions. In October of that year, shipbuilders in Wellington demanded a modest wage increase and compensation for the time it took to travel to work. When employers refused, the workers joined the militant[1] United Federation of Labour, known as the 'Red Feds'. The situation escalated quickly when the Wellington watersiders held a stop-work meeting to support the ship builders, only to find themselves locked out of the wharves and replaced by non-union labour. This act of contempt by the employers ignited a massive sympathy strike that soon paralysed ports and coal mines across New Zealand.



Wellington's streets soon transformed into a zone of open conflict. Violent skirmishes broke out at Post Office Square and Buckle Street, as strikers attempted to block the 'specials' from escorting goods to the docks. The air was filled with flying bricks and stones, met by the thundering hooves and swinging batons of the mounted constables. The violence was intense and pistols were occasionally fired by both sides. The Government held its ground, and the strike was eventually broken, through a combination of sheer force and clever legal tactics.

[1] militant — being aggressive in demanding radical change

SOURCE A: Prime Minister William Massey



William Massey is New Zealand's second-longest serving leader. He was criticised by some for crushing workers with his 'Massey's Cossacks' (strikebreakers) in 1913.

In Massey's mind, New Zealand depended on two things: the hard work and continued prosperity of her farmers, and the British Empire. Massey's Cabinet consisted of wealthy farmers, city businessmen, and lawyers. Three of the nine Ministers had been educated at Oxford or Cambridge. Two Ministers, R. H. Rhodes and F. M. B. Fisher, had fought alongside the British in the Boer War, also known as the South African War, of 1899–1902.

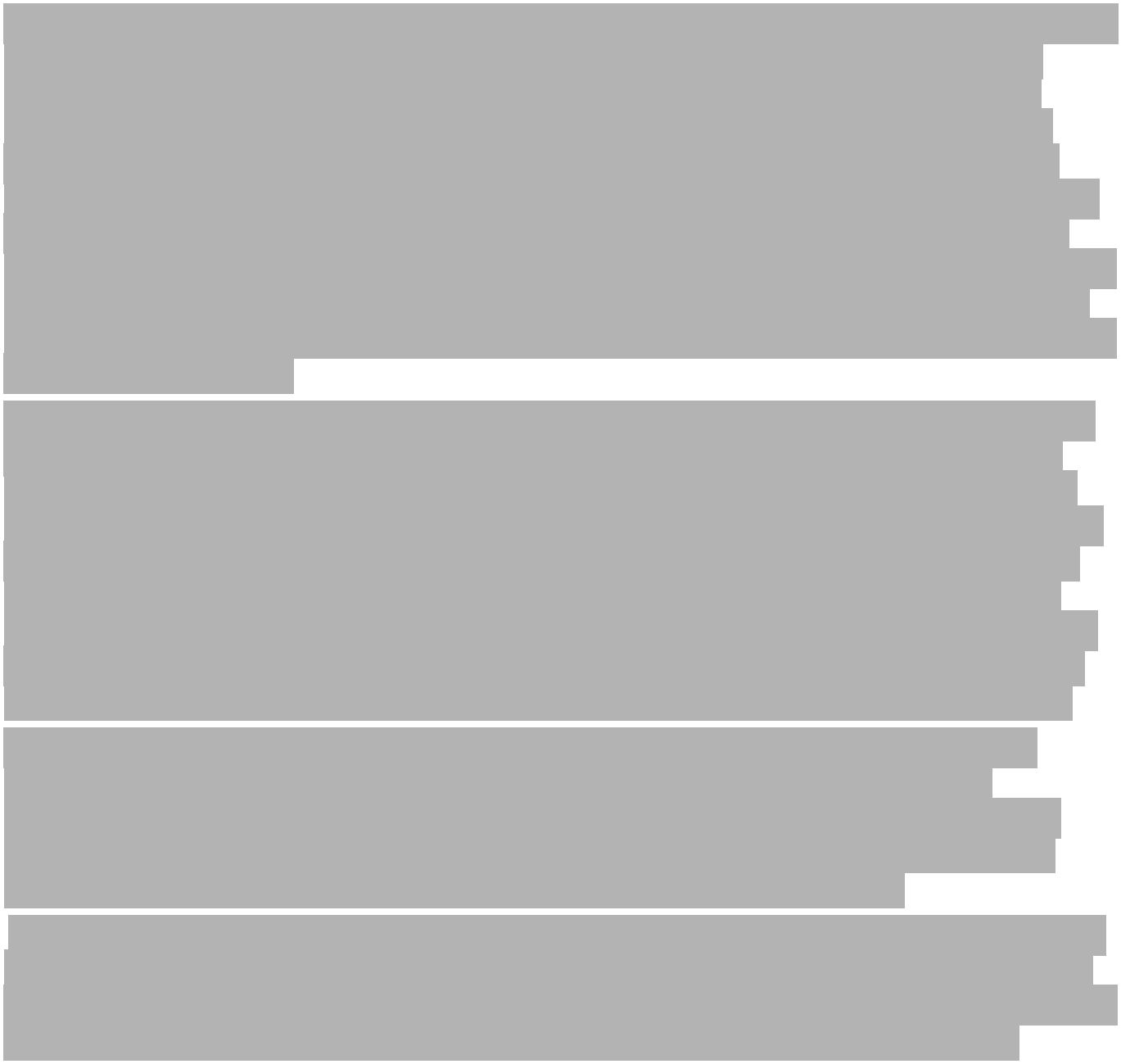
Massey was not a Prime Minister who could be expected to sympathise with the difficulties of town workers or the ideas of trade unions. People who could not keep up with the new standards felt very resentful.

Source (adapted): Bassett, J., Sinclair, K., & Stenson, M. (1998). *The Story of New Zealand* (Rev. ed.). (pp. 127–128). Reed.

Image: Unknown photographer. (*ca*. 1920). *William Massey* [Photograph]. Manatū Taonga – Ministry for Culture and Heritage. https://nzhistory.govt.nz/media/photo/william-massey

SOURCE B: The Great Strike on the waterfront

The Great Strike of 1913, which shut down practically every major port in the country but began, and was most violently conducted, in Wellington, has all but vanished from national memory. Yet at the time, depending on one's sympathies, it was either the fulfilment of a dream or the ultimate nightmare: the takeover of the most vulnerable and vital link in the country's economy by militant workers. …



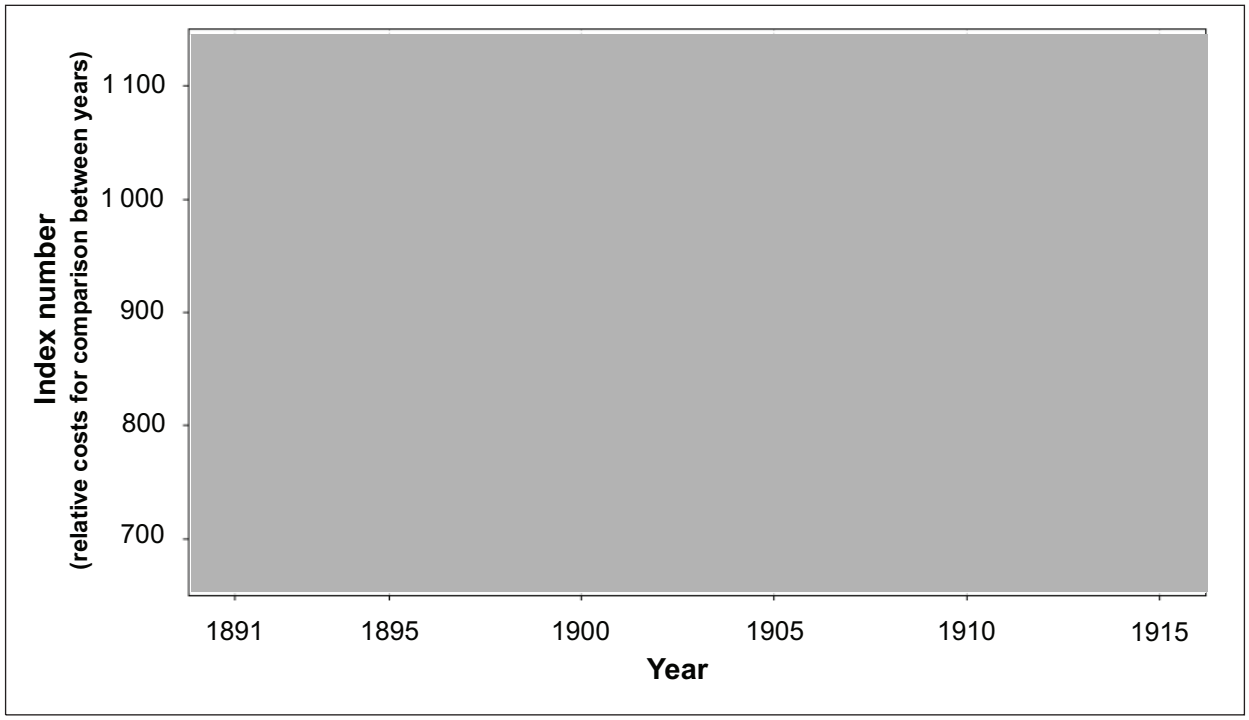
Just over the road from the square, and clearly visible through the gates, harbour-board staff in brass-buttoned uniforms, accustomed to issuing orders from their desks, were carrying out the wharfies' manual work. It was a volatile situation, and one which didn't last. The few nervous policemen guarding the gates were no match for the several hundred wharfies who soon stormed the wharves and manhandled the strike-breakers down the ships' gangways before barricading themselves in.

The unthinkable had happened. The workers had overrun their workplace and now controlled one of the largest and most strategically important industries in the country. The strikers were exultant. One union bulletin proclaimed: "We will have the old red flag over the top of Parliament Buildings yet, as the sign that New Zealand is the first socialist republic in the world".

[1.] eschew to deliberately avoid, shun, or abstain from something

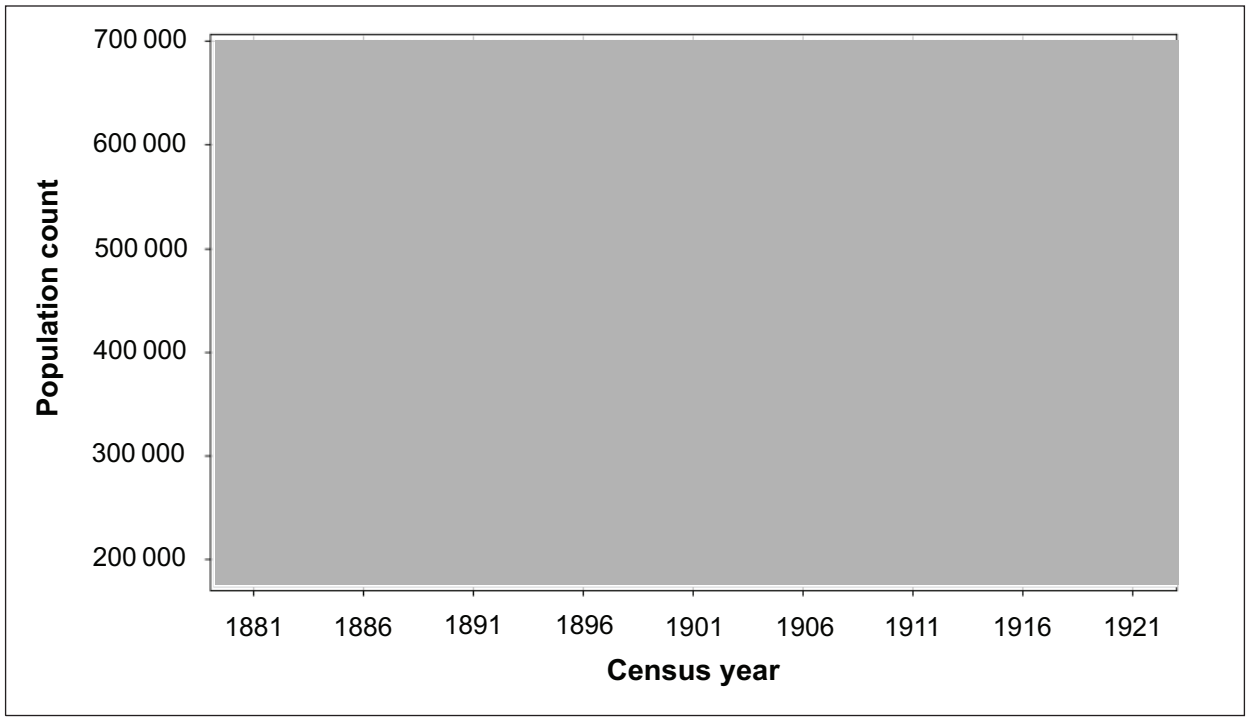
Derby, M. (2006). On the waterfront. Wellington at war – the 1913 Strike. *New Zealand Geographic, 80.* https://www.nzgeo.com/stories/on-the-waterfront/

SOURCE C: Average weekly rent across the four main New Zealand cities, 1891–1915



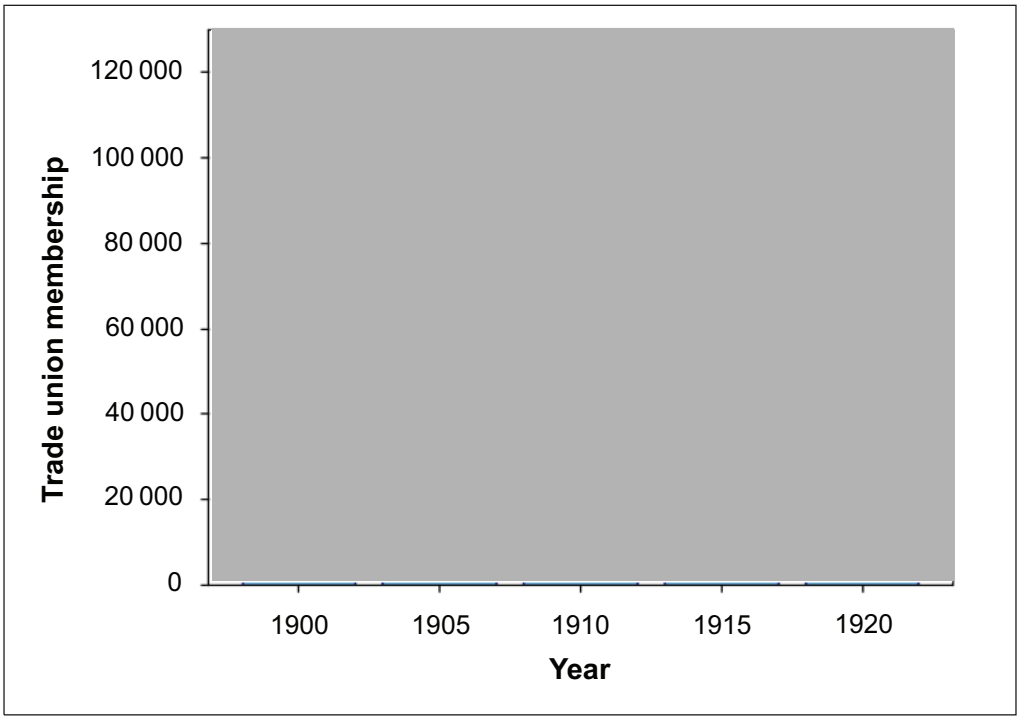
Source (adapted): Fraser, M. (1920). *Prices. An inquiry into prices in New Zealand: 1891–1919* (p. 88). New Zealand Government. https://www3.stats.govt.nz/historicalCPIpublications/x01-inquiry-nz-prices-1891-1919.pdf

SOURCE D: Changing rural and urban populations of New Zealand, 1881–1921



Source (adapted): Stats NZ. (1990). *The New Zealand Official 1990 Year Book: Table 5.5. Urban-rural population, 1881–1986 Censuses*. New Zealand Government. https://www3.stats.govt.nz/new_zealand_official_yearbooks/1990/nzoyb_1990.html#idtable_1_28262

SOURCE E: Trade union membership in New Zealand, 1900–1920



Source (adapted): Farmer, J. A., Scott, G. C., Deeks, J., & Roth, B. (1978). *Industrial relations in New Zealand*. Methuen Publishing.

SOURCE F: Stupidity, vanity, and obstinacy

PLACING BLAME ON THE RIGHT SHOULDERS

By Telegraph–Press Association.
Dunedin, Tuesday.

Speaking at Mosgiel last night, the Prime Minister replied to remarks made at Auckland by Sir Joseph Ward, in regard to the strike.



It had started as a strike, but had ended as an exhibition of the revolutionist tactics of a foreign organisation, known as the Federation of Labour.

Source: (1914, April 1). Stupidity, vanity and obstinacy. *Waikato Argus, XXXV*(5572), 2. https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/WAIGUS19140401.2.28

SOURCE G: Industrial War at Wellington

THE WORKERS ARE NEVER WRONG

The workers are at grips with the masters. [redacted] They may err in their tactics, but that is their business. To us

THE WORKERS ARE ALWAYS RIGHT

They are right because they are the wealth producers who don't get all the wealth they produce; they are right because they are seeking to end the robbery from which they suffer; they are right because they are of our class, and are fighting the same grim fight for eternal justice that we fight. [redacted] Let us ever keep in mind the undying words of William Lloyd Garrison: "Enslave the liberty of but one human being and the liberties of the world are put in peril".

Source: (1913, October 29). Industrial War at Wellington. *Maoriland Worker, 4*(143), 4. https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/MW19131029.2.17

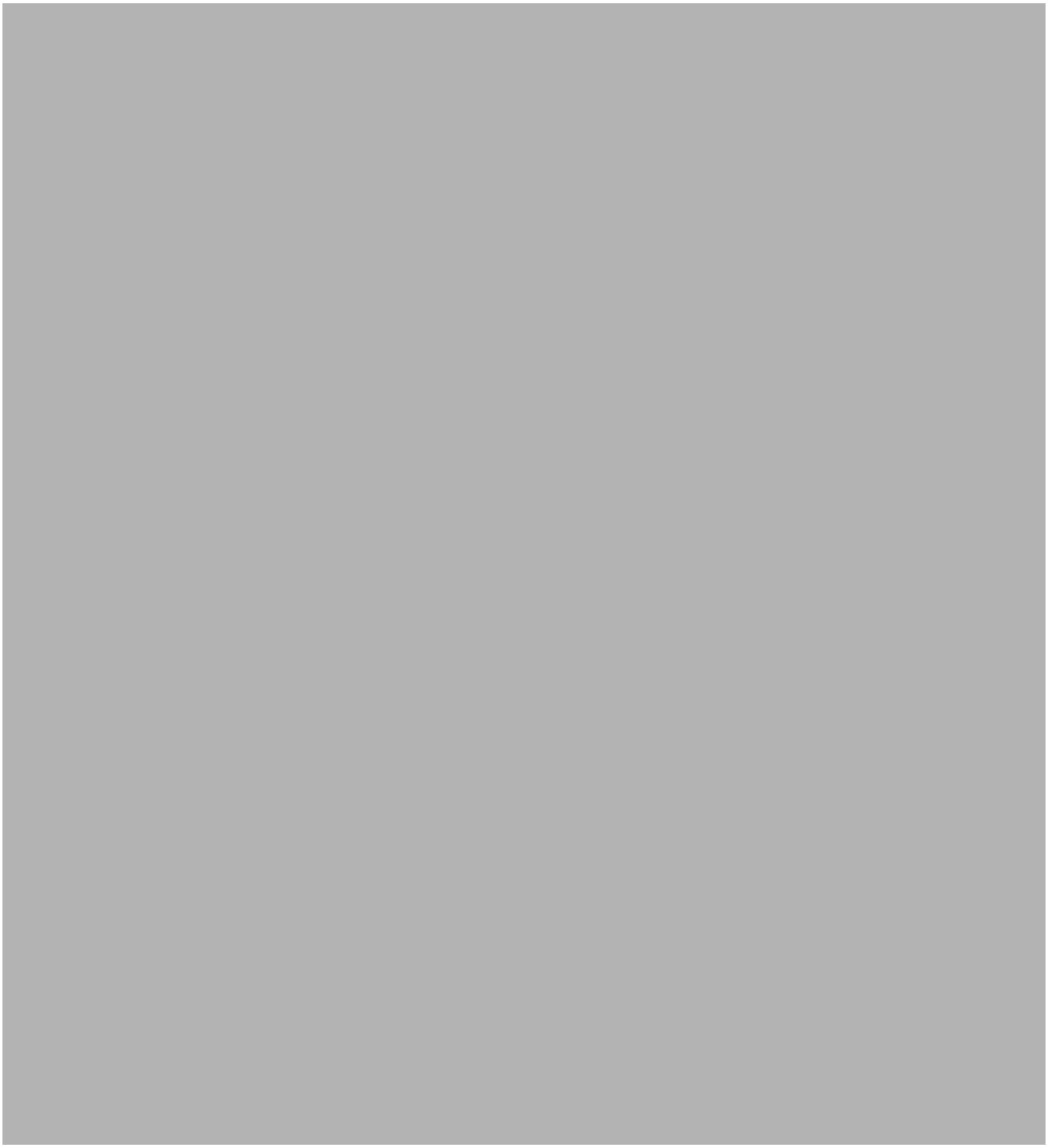
SOURCE H: When capital and labour disagree



The figures are labelled "Trust", "The Public", and the "Union" (from left to right).

Source: Unknown artist. (1913, January 1). *When capital and labour disagree* [Cartoon]. New Zealand Graphic, XLIX(1), 2. https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/periodicals/NZGRAP19130101.2.2.1

SOURCE I: The farmer to the rescue



New Zealand (to the farmer): "Mob rule threatens my towns. On you I rely in this emergency. Take this baton and uphold law and order."

Source: Unknown artist. (1913, November 8). *The farmer to the rescue* [Cartoon]. The Free Lance, XIV(697), 1. https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/free-lance/1913/11/08/1

SOURCE J: Marjorie Lees remembers the special constables

The following is an extract from a Radio New Zealand Spectrum *programme, 'Two Wellington Childhoods', which was broadcast on 18 March 1972. In this segment, Marjorie Lees recalls her experiences of the 1913 strike in Wellington.*

Marjorie Lees Of course, my father was enrolled as a special constable, and I believe there was some sort of riot in which the strikers attacked the special constables after they'd been issued with batons, and they were marching down from the barracks, and there really was quite a nasty riot. [redacted] He never took any notice of me, but my little sister had curly hair and was very pretty, and he used to give her rides on his horse, and I was very miserable about that.

Interviewer You were very jealous?

Marjorie Lees Yes.

Interviewer Now your father's attitude was that it was the French Revolution, but can you remember his political feeling about there being a strike?

Marjorie Lees Well, of course, the waterside workers were less than the dust, it was absolutely wicked of them to strike, they were damaging the country. They had no case at all as far as he was concerned. …

Interviewer And can you recall your own reaction to this? Did you take father's viewpoint as a matter of course – it didn't occur to you to question it?

Marjorie Lees No, I thought the strikers were evil too. And apparently the special constables rode about all through the town, especially up in the slums where most of the waterside workers lived, and their wives would empty chamber pots over them and various things like that. … You heard about the wicked strikers and so on.

*Freyberg would win multiple decorations for bravery during World War I, including the Victoria Cross. During World War II, he commanded the New Zealand Division and was also Governor-General of New Zealand from 1946 to 1952.

Source (adapted): Faulkner Blake, J. (Interviewer). (1972, March 18). *Two Wellington Childhoods* [Radio broadcast transcript]. In *Spectrum (12)*. Radio New Zealand. https://nzhistory.govt.nz/media/sound/remembering-1913-strike

SOURCE K: Four of Massey's special constables



Four of Massey's special constables, in uniform, during the Great Strike of 1913.

Source: Andrew, S. P. (1913). *Four of Massey's special constables* [Photograph]. Ref: 1/1-014887-G. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. https://natlib.govt.nz/records/22749299

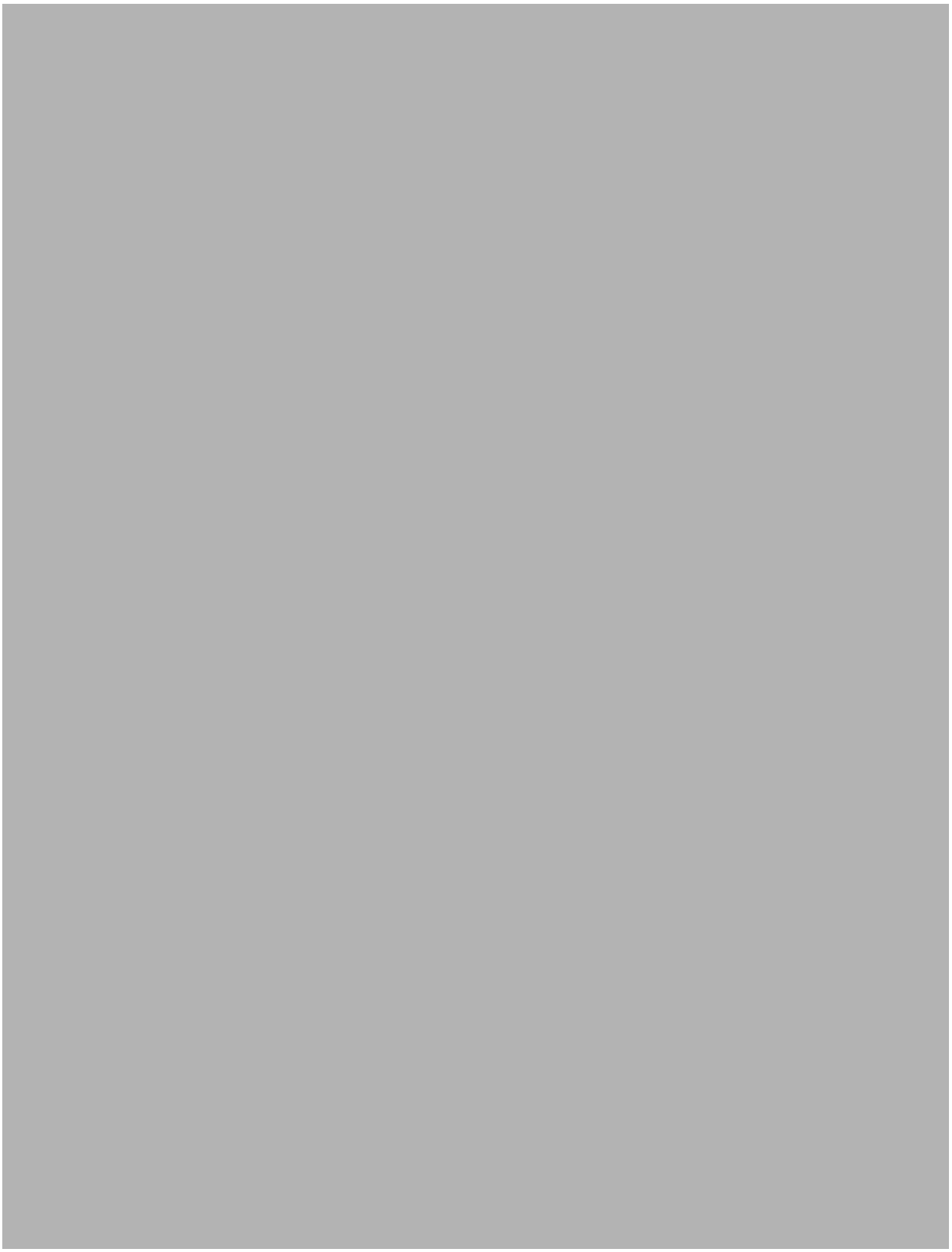
SOURCE L: ‘Specials’ from Levin

A list of men with horses to leave Levin by special train at 3:00 p.m. Sunday 2 November 1913 to act as ‘special constables’.

Name	Occupation	Address	Age

Source (adapted): 1913 Strike. (2013). *Special constables from Levin* [Photograph]. Flickr. https://www.flickr.com/photos/1913strike/10605379035

SOURCE M: Special Constable White's baton



Carved into the baton by Special Constable Hugh Macalister White was the slogan "Society Combats Anarchy Brutality Syndicalism", along with "Waterside Workers Strike Ended".

Source (adapted): Special Constable's baton, 1913, by Hugh White. Gift of Mr Hugh White, 2005. CC BY-NC-ND 4.0. Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa (GH011601). https://collections.tepapa.govt.nz/object/737112