

# Disorder on the Rand 1913/14

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## BACKGROUND

South Africa's mining industry has historically faced racial inequality, with white workers being allowed to hold skilled positions and black and coloured workers in low-skilled, poorly paid jobs. This imbalance has led to skilled workers being overwhelmed by unskilled and underpaid workers, causing a workforce imbalance. The first two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw frequent strikes and industrial unrest, aimed at protecting the rights of white labourers. It intends to pressurize management to abandon employment of black workers in white positions to cut costs.

This disparity created discontent with management among white workers.



The aftermath was the realisation by labour activists of the potential to involve black and coloured workers in labour activities. This awareness played an essential part in the future of Political and Labour history in South Africa.

## CAUSES OF THE 1913 STRIKE

The discontent of the white workers came to a head in May 1913 at the **New Kleinfontein** mine in Benoni. Management introduced changes to working hours and five underground mechanics refused to comply. They were dismissed and left the mine on 10 May.



Where it all started - The New Kleinfontein Gold mine, Benoni  
*Real Photo Postcard published by "SAPSCO"- Box 5792,  
Johannesburg, DB in black*

On 26 May most of the white workers at the mine voted to support the five men. A white mineworker strike was declared with a strike committee appointed.

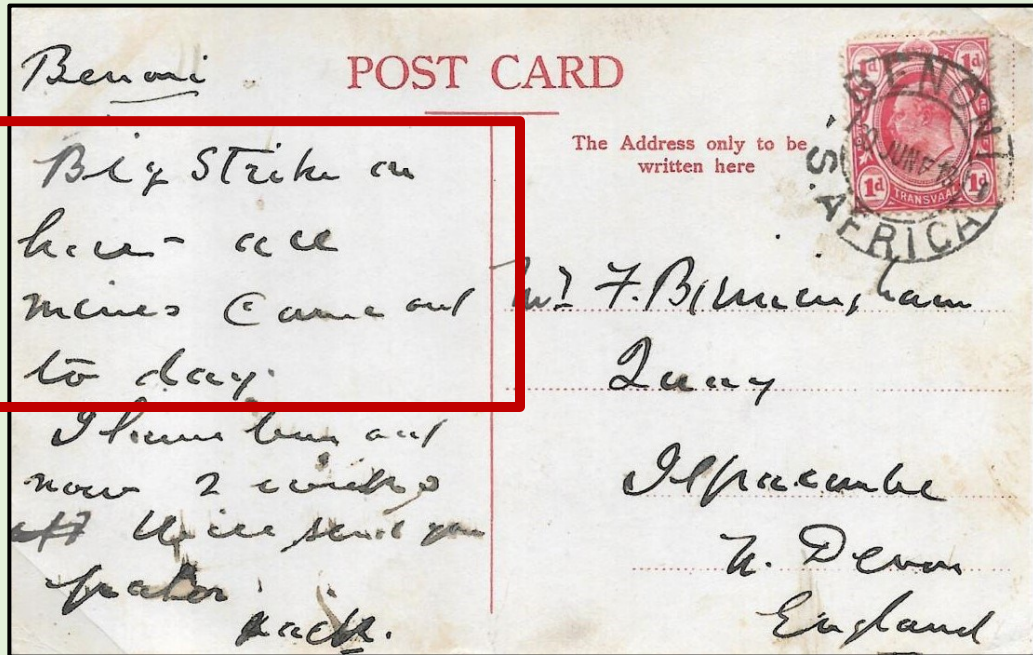


Black mine workers were used as strike breakers to keep the New Kleinfontein mine open  
*Sallo Epstein & Co., Johannesburg no. 2072, DB in green  
"Phototyped in Prague"*

Management decided not to reinstate the strikers and opened the mine on 11 June 1913 with the assistance of mostly black strike-breakers. Confident that the concerned parties would resolve the dispute, the government adopted an impartial attitude, holding the directors of the New Kleinfontein mine responsible for the disturbance.

## DEADLOCK

The strike spread to mines across the Rand, accompanied by growing violence. Government takes the first steps to intervene. General Jan Smuts, the then Minister of Interior, Defense and Finance met with mine management and strike leaders on 22 June. Unsuccessful in resolving the deadlock between the two parties, Smuts feared that the police would not be able to cope with the situation and mobilized some 5 000 men from the Imperial forces. Beginning of July, no resolution to the dispute was reached and some 19 000 white mine workers went on strike.



Date: 30  
June 1913

← 'Big strike on here - all mines came out today'



Mounted troops patrolling in the streets of Johannesburg  
No information relating to the publisher, photographer, or printer. Blank back - Nr 1 of series 2

The strike committee arranged for a mass demonstration on Friday 4 July at 2 p.m. at the Johannesburg Market Square, what would become known as "**Black Friday**".

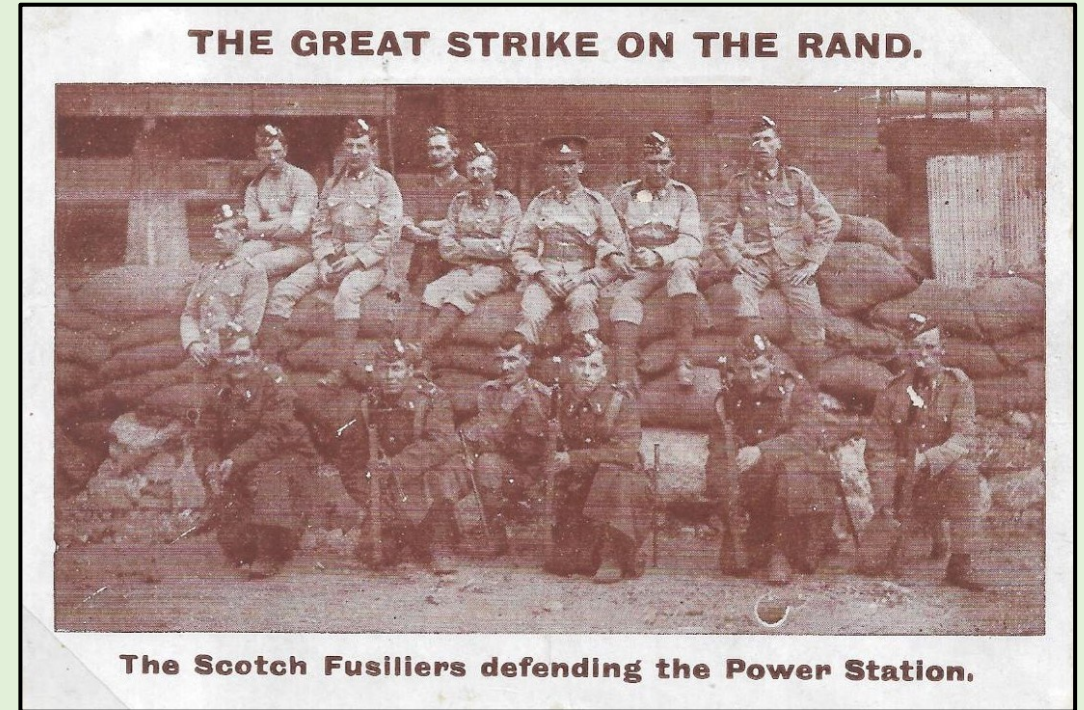
## "BLACK FRIDAY" 4 JULY 1913

At a very late stage the government banned all public gatherings, proclaiming martial law at 1:30 p.m. Miners from Benoni and Brakpan, flouting the declaration of martial law and joined by others, were marching on to Johannesburg, determined to hold the meeting. *The wave of anarchy had begun...*



Market Square with General Post Office - Johannesburg

Breeding ground of the anarchy - Johannesburg market square  
P.S. & C, Box 1205, Cape Town no. 982 at the back, DB in green



**The Scotch Fusiliers defending the Power Station.**

Further duties after putting the Power station back to work  
Publisher unknown, no serial number and DB in brown. Nr 1 of series 1

Around 4 p.m. several strikers held up tramcars and rode to the Power Station where engines were stopped, and all work ceased. After a short time, they left, believing that the city would be in darkness.

The Scottish Fusiliers moved in to protect and put the station in working order again.

The Police and Imperial forces kept patrolling the streets and dispersed several crowds from vandalising property. By 8 p.m. a dense crowd had gathered in President Street next to the Post Office. Several speakers preached an open revolt and incited the crowd to loot gun shops to arm themselves.



Outside the shops of Messrs. Walshe and Bright where two men were shot.

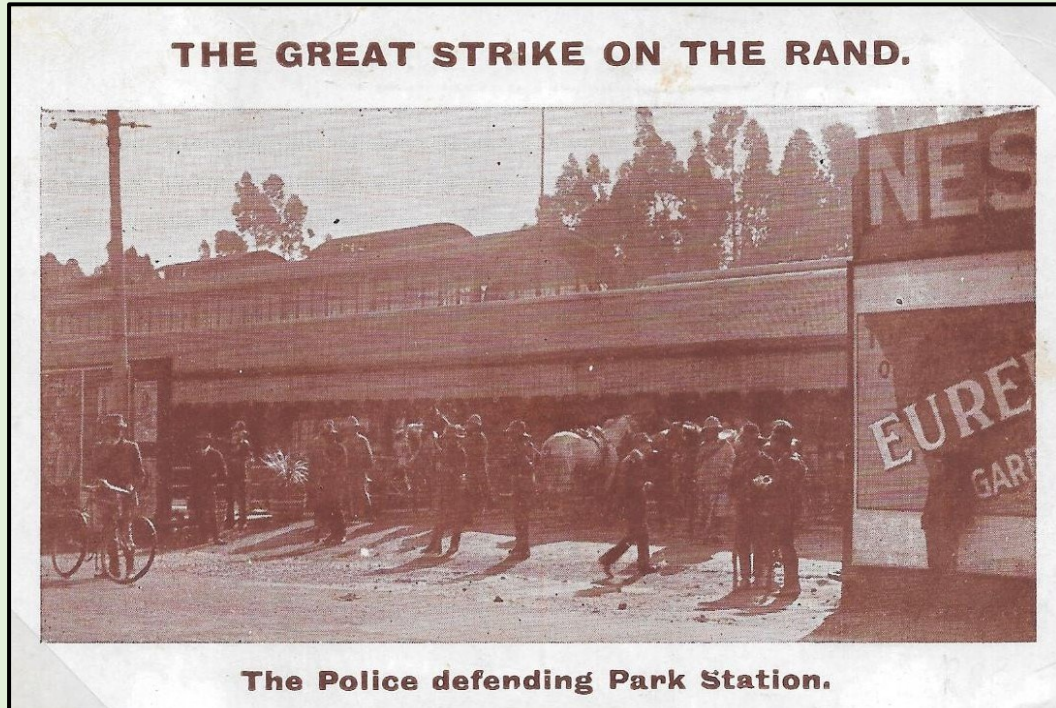
Bystanders in front of one of four looted gun shops  
Original print image of the strike from "The Illustrated Star: Town and Country Journal" of 19 July 1913



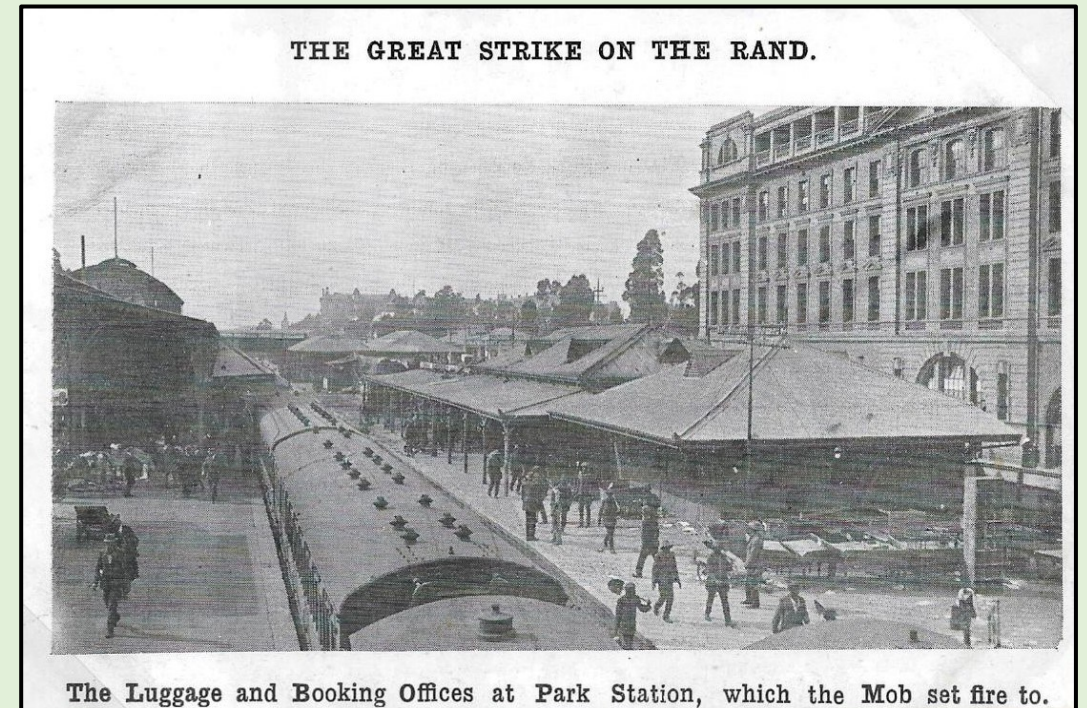
Park Station with the Railway Head Office at the back  
*Real Photo Postcard by R O Fusslein, Box 2262, Johannesburg, caption in manuscript and serial number 21, DB in black*

The emerging violence lead up to the first instance in South Africa's history in which there was a spilling of blood because of Industrial disturbance...

At Park Station the frontline of the defiant rebels met with the police. The mounted police charged and scattered them in all directions. The crowd started to curse and stoned the police, driving them back into Klein Street, away from the station. Some of the rioters emptied their revolvers at the police, wounding one. About thirty men managed to take possession of the station, setting the booking office and goods shed on fire.



Mounted police in front of the entry to the Railway Station  
*Publisher unknown with DB in brown. Nr 2 of series 1*



The two Railway buildings that was set on fire  
*No information relating to the publisher, photographer, or printer. Blank back . Nr 2 of series 2*

The perpetrators, in their vandalism, were not confronted by the police as they were held back by the crowd in Klein Street.

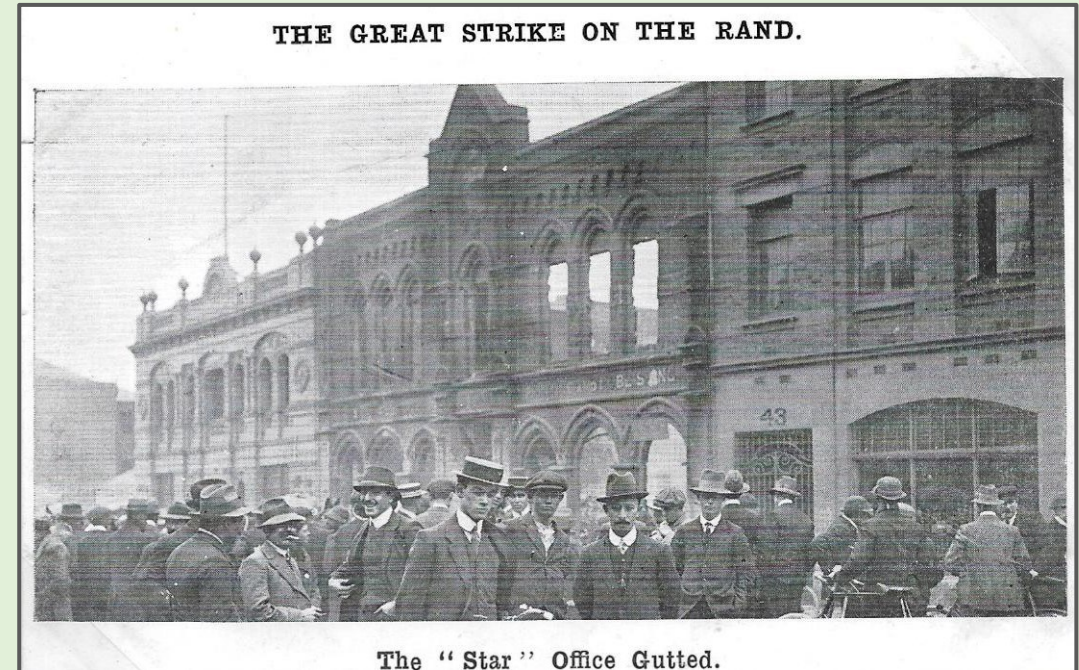
Law abiding onlookers should have sensed disgust at the spectacle of a score of ruffians, many of them youngsters, destroying property which they were helpless to stop.

With the Railway station well ablaze, and in high spirit of their first success, the mob proceeded to the offices of The Star newspaper in President Street.



View of the ruined Railway goods shed

*Publisher unknown, no serial number and DB in brown. Nr 3 of series 1*



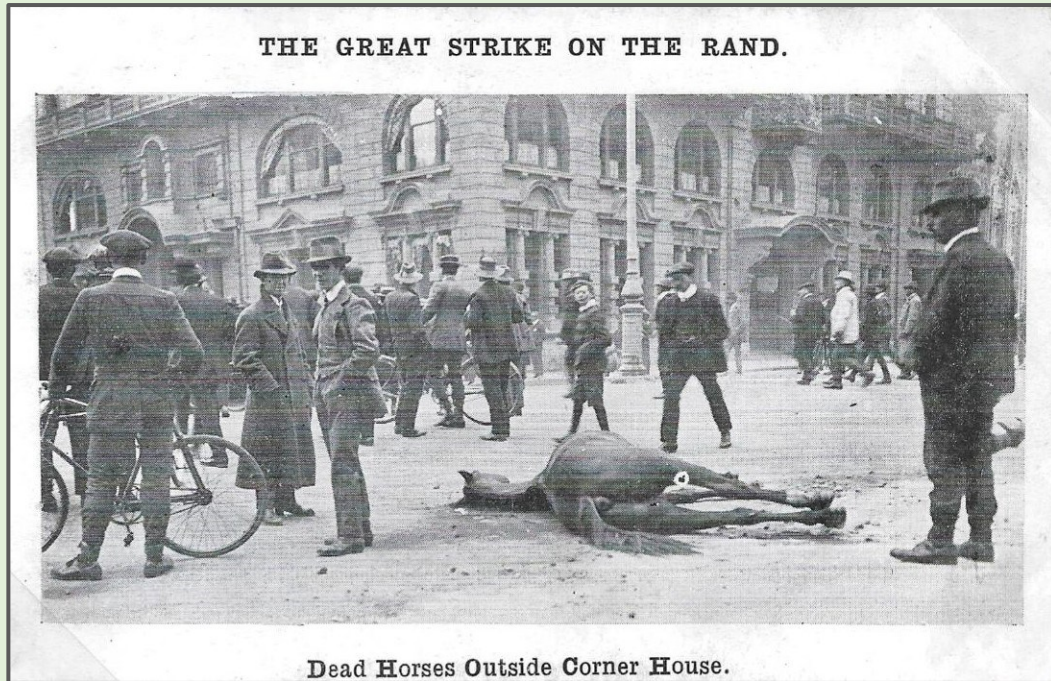
Ruins of the Star office

*No information relating to the publisher, photographer, or printer.*

*Blank back. Nr 3 of series 2*

The Star was regarded by the strikers as the mouthpiece of the Chamber of Mines and more interested in the well-being of black workers than that of white workers. The attack started with a fusillade of stones, truncheons, and revolver shots. Two charges of dynamite exploded on the ground floor and the office was looted and ruined by fire.

At some stage it seemed that the offices of another newspaper, The Transvaal Leader, in Harrison Street. They then threatened to attack "Corner House", the mining house of H Eckstein & Co, whom the strikers considered to be a symbol of capitalism. On the way the picketers met with reinforcements from the Military and Cape Police who were deployed to assist the Police.



Contrary to the caption only one carcass can be seen  
*No information relating to the publisher, photographer, or printer. Blank back. Nr 4 of series 2*

The crowd became demonstrative, attacking the troops and revolver shots being fired.

To restore order the Police opened fire and shoot down three assailants.



"Corner House" - regarded the symbol of capitalism  
*Braun & Levy, Johannesburg with number 792. DB in brown*

After this incident fighting and hostilities by the strikers subsided but was far from over.

## SATURDAY 5 JULY 1913

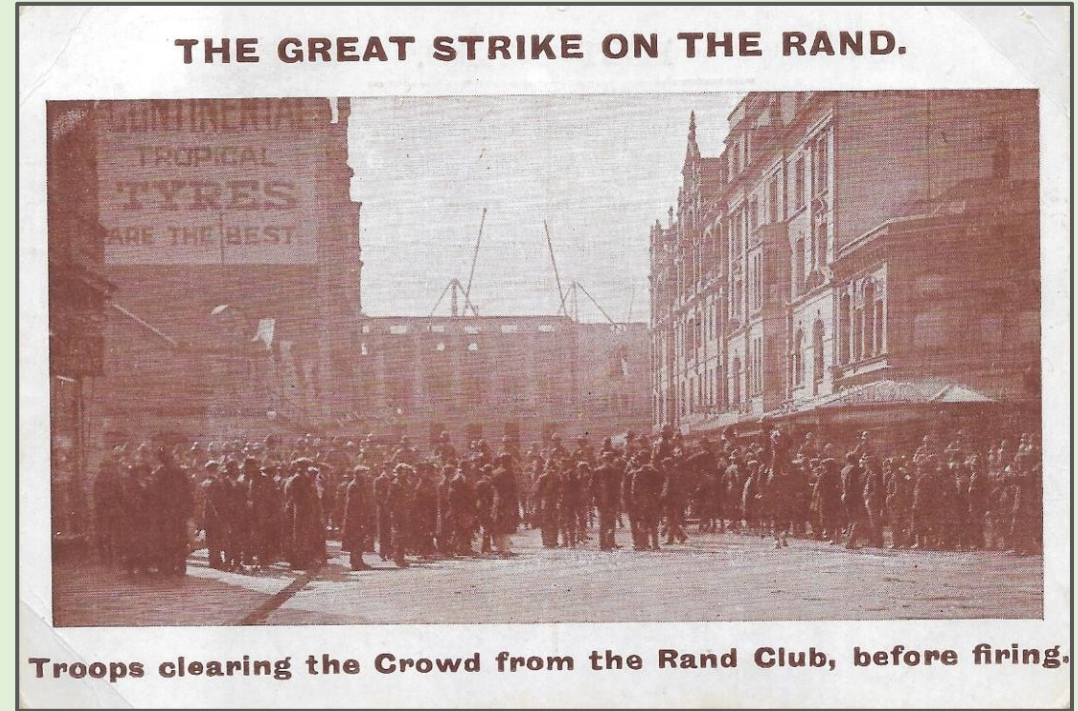
On Saturday morning 5 July the lawlessness started again.

Reports indicated that the strikers were on their way to burn down the Rand Club, in their view "*the haunt of the capitalist classes*".



The Rand Club, corner Commissioner and Loveday Streets RPPC with no. 364 by "SAPSCO", Box 5792, Johannesburg, DB in black

The violence that roamed the city reached its climax during the luncheon hour with an attack on the Rand Club.

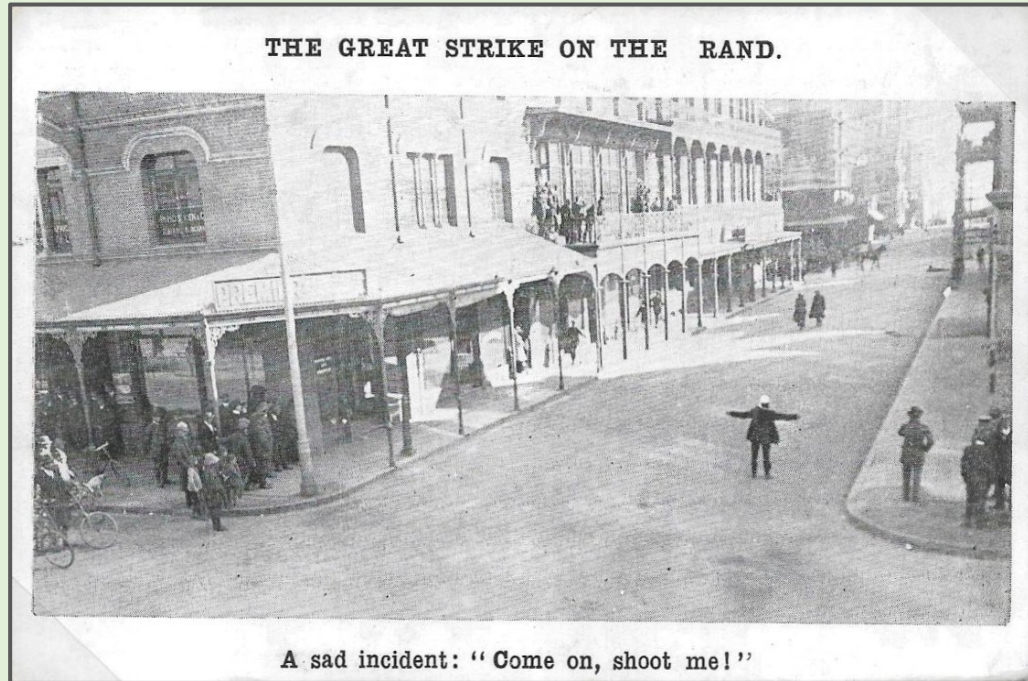


The beginning of the end of the 1913 strike  
Publisher unknown, no serial number and DB in brown. Nr 4 of series 1

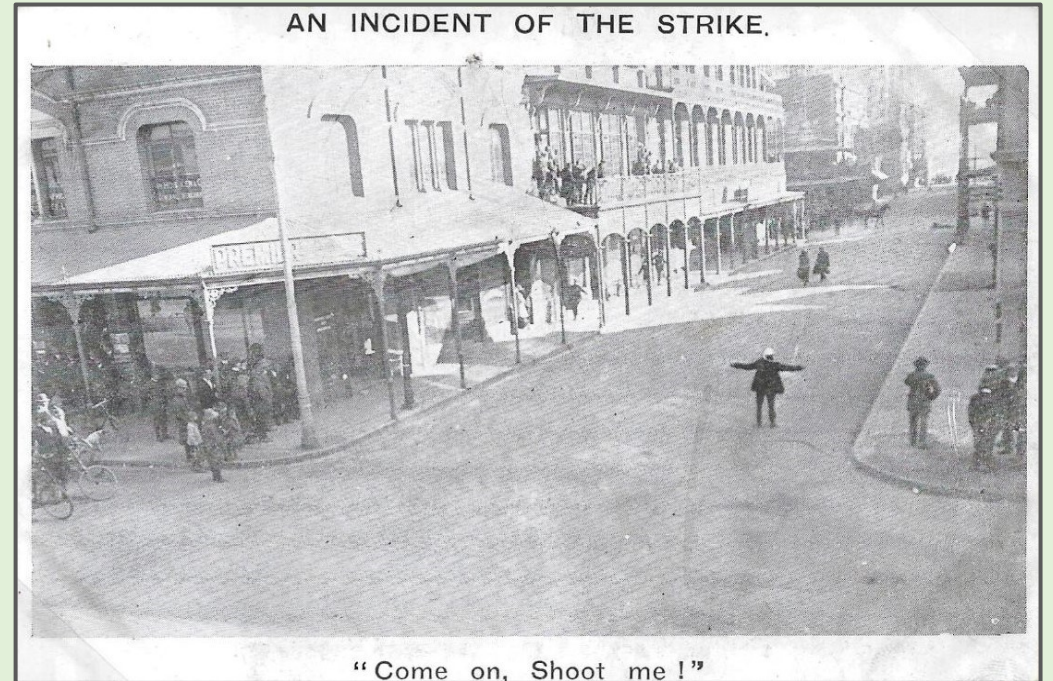
People gathered outside the club and a small group entered and vandalized the club, trying to set it alight. Revolver shots from the crowd damaged windows.

The police and military arrived and, what was described by some as "*a battle to protect the Rand club and Johannesburg*", commenced.

In an unfortunate incident a young miner, Mr. J L Labuschagne, appeared in the street and *shouted "Come on! Shoot me if you dare!"* upon which he bared his chest. A volley of bullets followed, and he was fatally wounded. The incident is portrayed with two postcards with the same photo but with different headings and captions. These differences indicate that it was most probably published by two different publishers, or two printings.



*No information relating to the publisher, photographer, or printer.  
Blank back . Nr 5 of series 2*



*No information relating to the publisher, photographer, or printer.  
Blank back*

According to Oscar Norwich the gentleman is standing on the corner of Fox and Rissik Streets outside the Hosken Building on the left. The Rand Club is situated on the corner of Loveday and Commissioner Streets. He asserts in view of these differences; it has been suggested by some that the photographer set the scene up after the event.

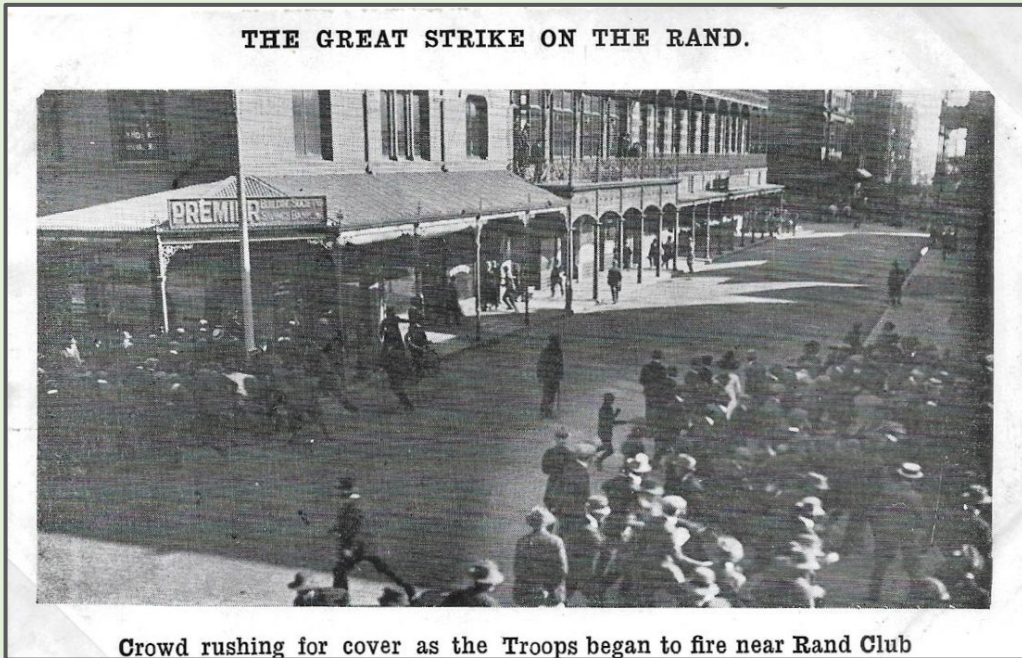
However, the photo is taken from the exact spot from where the photo was taken for Postcard "*Crowd rushing for cover as the Troops began to fire near Rand Club*" (see page 11).

## STRIKERS WON THE DAY

Crossfire between the armed forces and strikers followed, killing more people. The strike went beyond control with fear that Johannesburg and its mines would be destroyed.

Alarmed by these reports of violence and deaths, Generals Botha and Smuts arrived in a violence torn Johannesburg on 5 July 2013 to intervene.

They met with the mining executives and leaders of the demonstrators in the Carlton Hotel to negotiate a truce.



Last conflict of the Strike

*No information relating to the publisher, photographer, or printer. Blank back. Nr 6 of series 2*

Most of the strikers' demands were met and the strike was called off.

*The strikers won the day!*

It was inter alia agreed that:

- All strikers would be reinstated
- Government would appoint a judicial committee to investigate the strikers' grievances
- Strikebreakers would be dismissed by mine owners but were to be paid a year's salary of 300 pounds by the government.

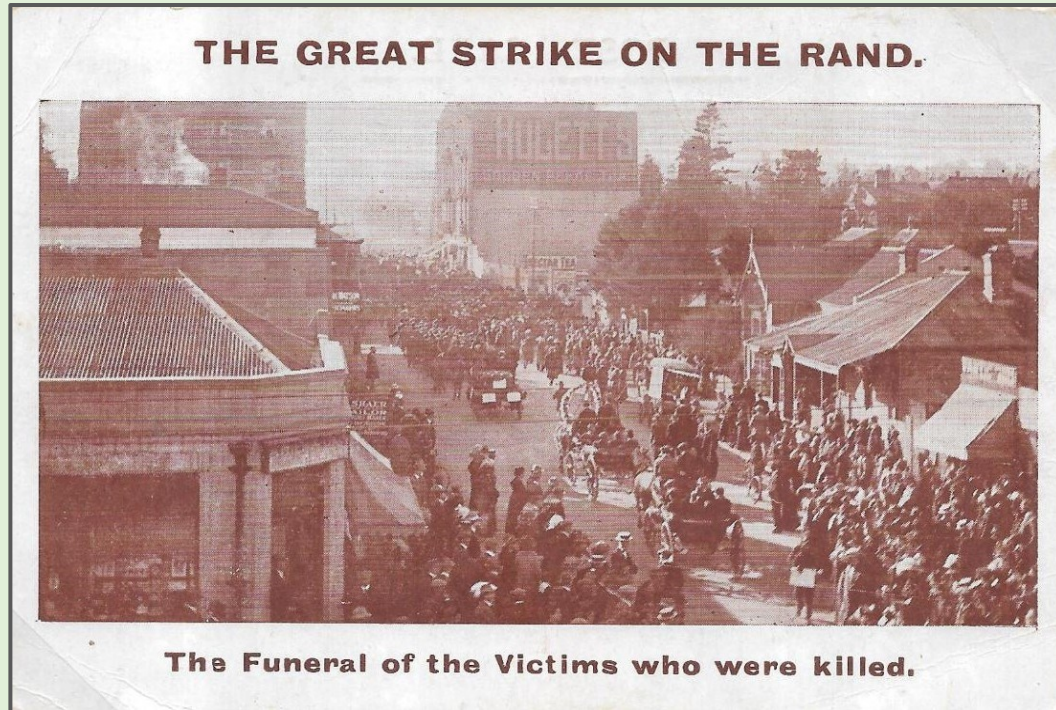


Prime Minister, General Louis Botha  
*Hallis & Co., Port Elizabeth. Printed in Saxony  
with DB in brown*

## VICTIMS FUNERAL - MONDAY 7 JULY 1913

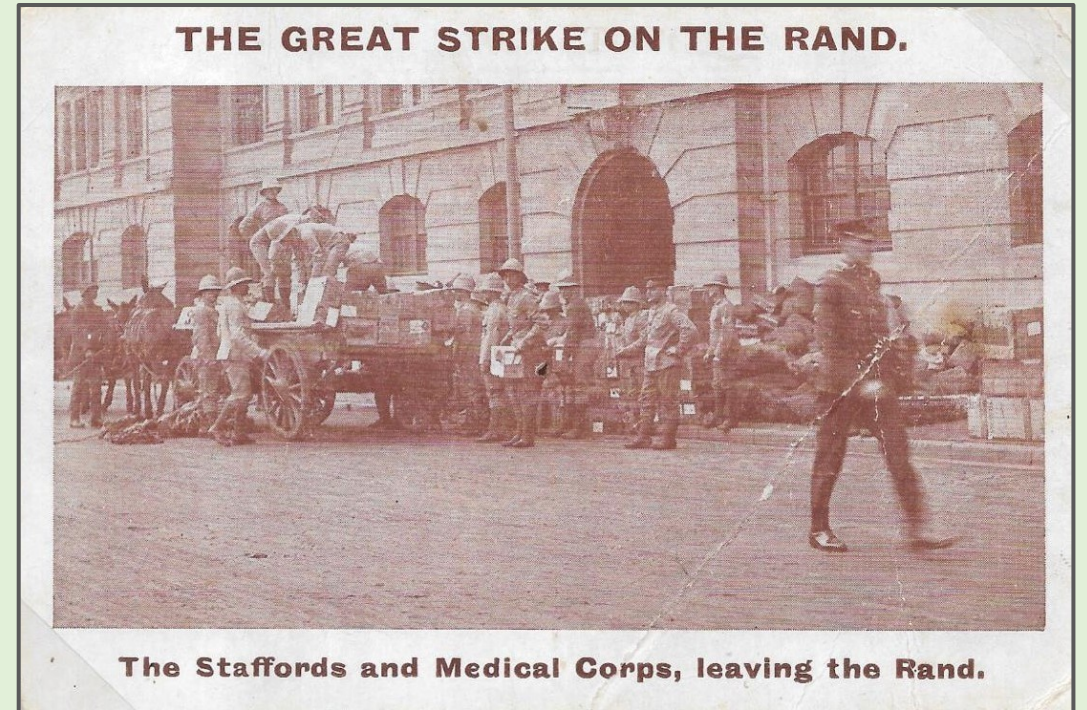
Including the police and military, twenty-one people were fatally wounded and more than 200 injured.

A funeral for most of the victims was held on Monday 7 July 1913, which was attended by about 60 000 people. For days after the settlement, the Police searched offices and houses of the strike leaders, strikers and agitators, making numerous arrests.



Anarchy and its cost

*Publisher unknown, no serial number and DB in brown. Nr 5 of series 1*



The order had been restored

*Publisher unknown, no serial number and DB in brown. Nr 6 of series 1*

Noteworthy is the fact that while Johannesburg and the East Rand were in a state of anarchy, the West Rand enjoyed immunity from disorderliness.

## AFTER EFFECTS

In the months following the 1913 strike, it became apparent that the strike had been no victory for the white workers.,

Date: 4 November 1913



Klip River - Ladysmith

Klip River, Ladysmith  
Publisher unknown illegible, Numbered 286. Printed in Dresden, UB in red.

11.  
Published in Dresden  
a good time  
in England.  
The <sup>UB in red</sup> miners here  
in Johannesburg were  
on strike - and were  
called out: It was  
quite a serious  
affair. Am glad  
to say everything  
seems quite  
calm again.  
I have been away  
to Vryheid, and had  
a good time. We  
also went to the  
Hot Springs, but  
did not stay there  
long. But the way,

## BUILDUP - 1914 STRIKE

Industrial relations remained tense and Railwaymen became disgruntled with planned retrenchments.

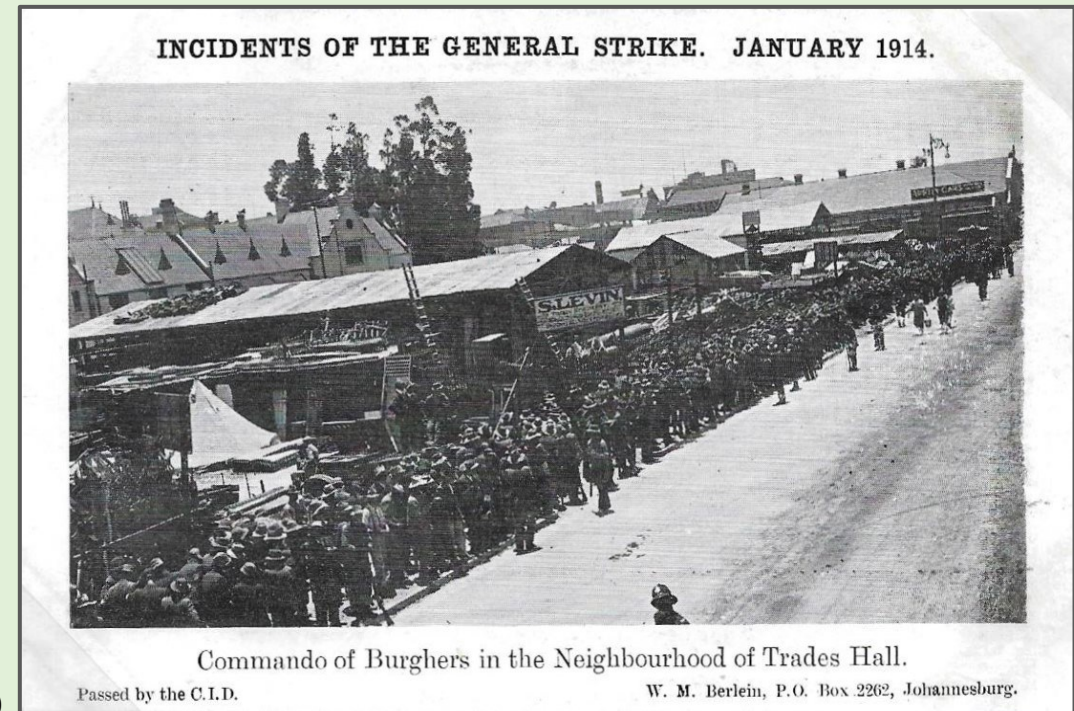
On 6 January 1914 it was decided to call a national strike of white Railway Workers from 8 January. Other Industries joined in, and Trade Union leaders utilized the Trades Hall in Johannesburg as Head Office.

The strike leaders exploit the white goldminers which resulted in unrest on the Witwatersrand - *Johannesburg became the main theatre of the strike.*



The Trades Hall, Cnr. Commissioner and Small Streets  
*Braune & Levy, Johannesburg with serial no. 1 000. DB in brown.*

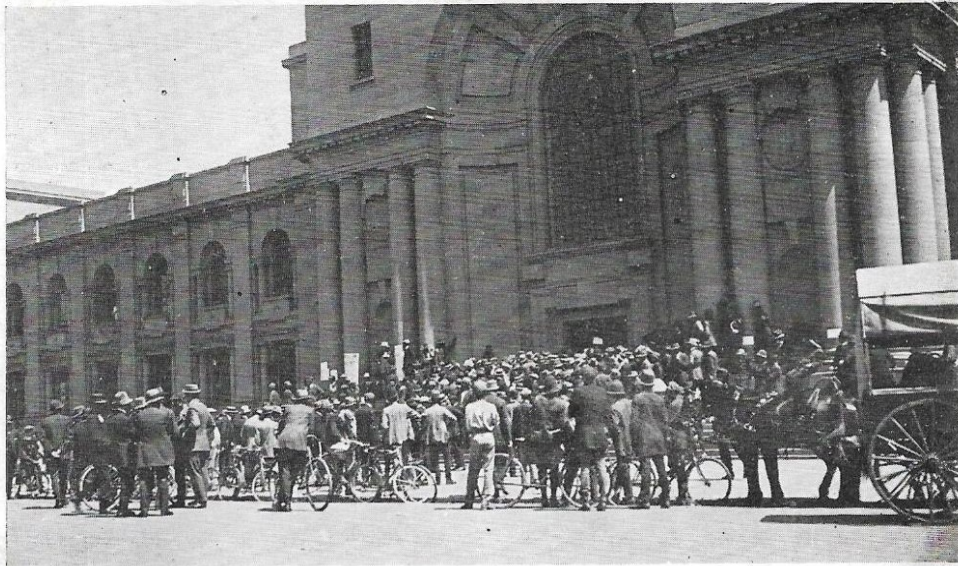
Units of the Active Citizen Force, police forces, as well as special constables and volunteers - in all 10 000 troops - were mobilized in the lead up to the strike.



Citizen force members on patrol  
*W. M. Berlein, P.O. Box 2262, Johannesburg. Passed by C.I.D. (Criminal Investigations Department). Not numbered, Blank back. Nr 1 of series 3*

On 13 January, the Transvaal Federation of Trade Unions called for a general strike to start on 14 January. At midnight on 13 January the government proclaimed martial law. Authorities engaged in extensive arrests of strikers and strike leaders' country wide. On 15 January, the strike committees in Pretoria and Johannesburg, as well as many strikers on the Rand were arrested.

INCIDENTS OF THE GENERAL STRIKE. JANUARY 1914.



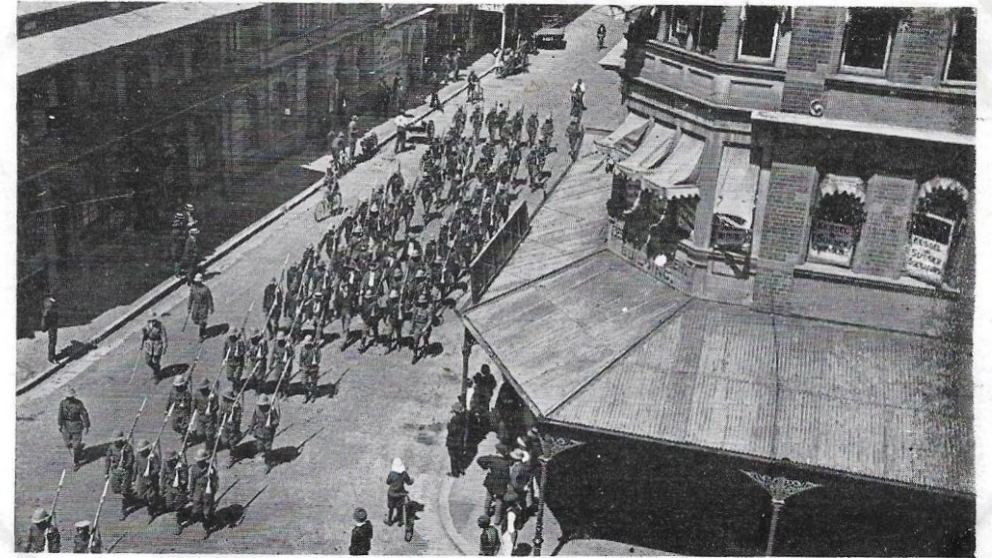
Crowd Waiting for Permits Outside the Lawcourts.

Passed by the C.I.D.

W. M. Berlein, P.O. Box 2262, Johannesburg.

Some of the main strike leaders had barricaded themselves in at the Trades Hall and threatened not to give up without violence.

INCIDENTS OF THE GENERAL STRIKE. JANUARY 1914.



Trades Hall Captures being marched to Marshall Square.

Passed by the C.I.D.

W. M. Berlein, P.O. Box 2262, Johannesburg

The effect of Martial law

*W. M. Berlein, P.O. Box 2262, Johannesburg. Passed by C.I.D. Not numbered, Blank back. Nr 2 of series 3*

Approaching the end of the strike

*W. M. Berlein, P.O. Box 2262, Johannesburg. Passed by C.I.D. Not numbered, Blank back. Nr 3 of series 3*

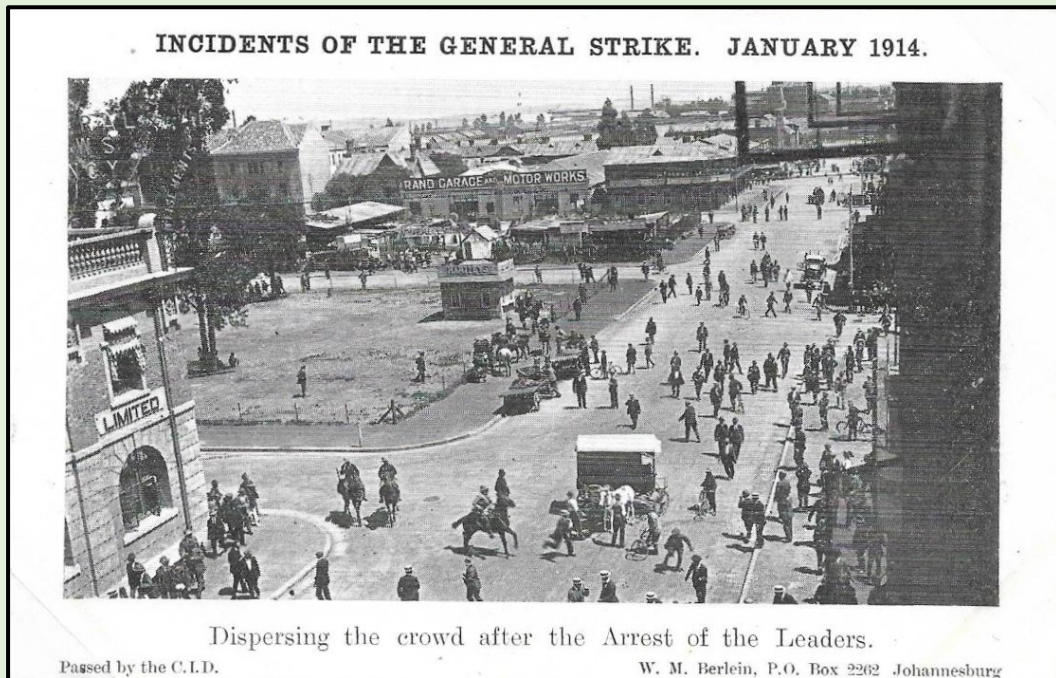
On 17 January hundreds of strikers were arrested countrywide. Troops surrounded the Trades Hall and trained a field gun on it.

An ultimatum was issued to the strike leaders to surrender, which they did and were arrested.

## CRUSHING THE STRIKE

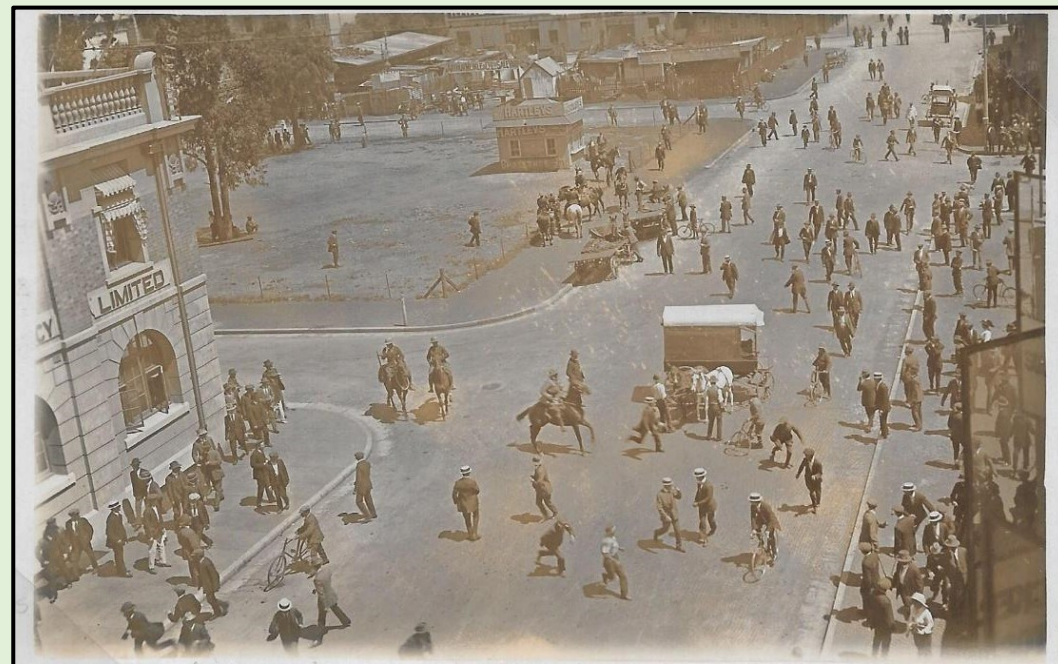
The general strike of 1914 never really got off the ground. The unions involved had not done the preparation and organization necessary for a successful strike. The government, by contrast, was well prepared.

Contributing factors were the early imprisonment of leadership. In terms of martial law, picketing and mass meetings were forbidden. Contact and communication between various centres became impossible.



Spectators observing the arrest of strike leaders  
*W. M. Berlein, P.O. Box 2262, Johannesburg. Passed by CID. Not numbered,  
Blank back. Nr 4 of series 3*

It proved to be a total defeat and by 18 January 1914 the strike had been crushed with the loss of two lives.



Real Photo Postcard with identical image as above and hand stamped "STRIKE" in purple at the back  
*Publisher unknown with no serial number and DB in black*

Although the government forces gained the upper hand, General Smuts overestimated the limits of his powers under martial law.

This resulted in the illegal deportation of nine foreign born strike leaders to England without trial.

## AFTER EFFECTS

The nine foreign born strike leaders were detained at Marshall Square Police Station in Johannesburg. They were secretly removed from their cells and taken to Durban where they were forcibly put aboard the steamship Umgeni, which sailed from Durban to London, on 30 January 1914.

This arbitrary action by government caused an outcry in labour circles in South Africa and Britain. Smuts justified the action by claiming that the strike leaders were dangerous men with revolutionary syndicalist ideas, aimed at agitating the overthrow of the government.



Marshall Square Police Station, Johannesburg

*Published by J. Barnett & Co with serial number 286. Printed in Leipsic. UB in red.*



Postcard with caption: "The 9 South African labour leaders who were deported by General Botha and whose arrival in England aboard the "Umgeni" took place recently"  
*Publisher unknown. DB in black. "Absender", "Wohnort" and "Straße" printed at the back*

After a couple of months, the deportees were returned to South Africa and remained active in labour issues.