

## Chapter Two

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# John Billis and Family

MINER: *Another thing I want to explain ... we start at seven and work to six. Last winter Mr Kushner [pit boss] says, 'You come to work after supper.' I said, 'I not stay.' And he say, 'No, if you go home you don't come back,' and about three or four days we work until eleven o'clock.*

. . .

JUDGE: *Did you make any complaint about these troubles before the strike?*

MINER: *No.*

JUDGE: *You did not say anything about that?*

MINER: *Well, because you can't tell nothing before the strike ... if you tell anything else he [Mr Pierce, the mine manager] say right away, 'Take the tools out right away.'*

JUDGE: *And you did not have any committee of the men in your mine?*

MINER: *No.*

JUDGE: *You have now?*

MINER: *Yes, we have now.*

— Judge Edmund R. Wylie, chairman of the royal commission on the Estevan-Bienfait coal-mining Dispute, 1931, and John Billis, coal digger at Eastern Collieries, 14 October 1931

According to the records stored in the Saskatchewan Archives Board, one of the strikers who testified at the royal commission on the Estevan-Bienfait mining dispute in 1931 was John Billis, aged forty-one, a coal digger in the Eastern Collieries of Bienfait. Given in broken English, his testimony, lasting perhaps half an hour, was clearly that of a bold, defi-