

Chapter Four

August: Gaining Momentum

Saskatchewan is cursed with a swarm of yelpers, crepe hangers, organizers of despair, clamoring for jobs, doles and hand-outs. The whole world is hearing the wail of distress from Saskatchewan, where there is no real distress. The time and emergency call for apostles of faith to restore sight to the blind and put new guts in the faint-hearted.

– *Mercury*, Estevan, 12 March 1931

The unemployment problem will disappear before snow falls and there will be no dole or unemployment insurance in Canada.

– Senator Gideon Robertson, minister of labour, quoted in *Mercury*, 30 April 1931

The deplorable wages and working conditions in the mines are the worst in Canada.

– James Sloan, president of the Mine Workers' Union of Canada, 26 August 1931

By 6 August 1931, the WUL district office in Winnipeg heard that 'the miners and unemployed at Bienfait, Sask., are in revolt,'¹ and Joe Forkin, area organizer in Regina, hurried down to Bienfait to carry on where Sam Carr had left off three weeks earlier.²

Martin Joseph Forkin, thirty-one, the eldest of seven children in a Brandon, Manitoba, family, was an even-tempered man, tall, and slight of build but with abundant energy and possessed of a keen political sense. Although he was not an orator, he was persuasive and his direct manner inspired confidence. As a three-year veteran of the Canadian Expeditionary Force in the First World War, followed by a year's service in the RCMP and then ten years of participation in the labour move-