

## Chapter Five

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# September: On Strike

*The miners have a perfect right to strike for better conditions.*

– H.N. Freeman, manager, National Mines, Bienfait, 19 September 1931

*If this was in the States it would soon be settled ... the strikers would be mowed down with machine guns if they carried on the way they do up here.*

– C.C. Morfit, president, Southern Saskatchewan Coal Operators' Association,  
16 September 1931

*I am of the opinion that the operators wish the Police to start something.*

– RCMP Inspector F.W. Schutz (secret), 20 September 1931

The strike got off to a solid beginning. Bouyant with expectation, the miners and their families turned out in near unanimity and with great determination. The local paper observed that 'the streets of the village seem to have become the meeting place of the strikers,' in 'the first strike in the history of the Coalfields.' The strike was widely recognized in the province with a banner headline on the front page of the *Leader-Post* – 'Six hundred Estevan mine workers quit' – and in the telegram that the Southern Saskatchewan District of the RCMP sent to the Commissioner, General J.H. MacBrien, in Ottawa: 'President Sloan of the Mine Workers' Union called strike of all miners in Estevan District this morning. Stop. Approximately 500 miners laid down tools. Stop. No disturbances have yet occurred.'

Twelve of the small mines owned and operated by town councillor Harry Nicholson, Thomas McLean, Sr, and other prominent citizens of Estevan agreed to recognize Local 27 of the MWUC. Initial strike-relief