

## Chapter Six

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# Strikers versus the Strip Mine

*To stand on the hillside and look out over the scene of high pressure activity is to realize that the finger of destiny is now pointing directly at Estevan and the Coalfields, and that an era of wide industrial expansion is in full swing.*

– Mercury, Estevan, 1 May 1930

*The whole disturbances and irregularities were started solely through the outside Communistic influences. The foreign element in the mines is uneducated and easily led.*

– RCMP Inspector W.J. Moorhead, 24 September 1931

*You are taking our bread and butter.*

– banner, held by the women’s auxiliary, MWUC, Bienfait,  
at the strip mine, 24 September 1931

It was just a year since the Canadian Manufacturers’ Association had heralded a new era of industrial development for the Estevan-Bienfait era. This optimism was based upon the decision of Truax-Traer Coal, of North Dakota and Illinois, to invest almost a million dollars in starting up a lignite strip mine on the coal-rich prairie two miles east of Estevan. The investment began a technological revolution in the method of coal mining.<sup>1</sup>

Instead of sinking a shaft and working underground to extract the coal and hoist it up to the surface, the new method exposed the vein of coal by stripping away the surface soil. This was accomplished by a giant electric shovel with a bucket capacity of eight cubic yards which heaped the soil on the side in slag piles thirty or more feet in height. Following