

# Scargill attacks TV pit strike coverage

From David Hewson, Edinburgh

Mr Arthur Scargill criticized the BBC and ITV yesterday for "doing the National Coal Board's job" in attacking striking miners.

He brushed aside two opinion polls which claimed that most people believed coverage of the dispute had been fair. He went on to tell an audience of broadcasters that they were the target of rising and justifiable anger for the way they had reported the miners' fight for jobs.

It was this anger, and not a desire for truth and balance among broadcasters, which had resulted in his invitation to address the Edinburgh Television Festival, he said.

The miners' leader singled out a handful of programmes, including *Channel 4 News*, *Panorama*, *Newsnight* and *Sixty Minutes*, for praise, but described both sides' news broadcasts as, "not news at all. It is pure bias which reaches millions of people too busy or too tired to catch more than the headlines".

The union had released more than 100 press releases since the dispute began, but few were mentioned.

The coal board had stopped producing information weeks after the strike began, yet its figures were used by the media when discussing the success of the return to work campaign.

NUM actions which were not ignored were distorted, he said. He cited the example of coverage of the NUM annual conference which referred to the introduction of a "Star Chamber" for working miners. However, what enraged miners most was the lack of coverage of police violence against them.

"On the picket lines in our villages we have encountered police violence the like of which I have never experienced in my lifetime", he said. It was carried out by a "National police riot force imbued with para-military techniques". Yet all that television interviewers asked was whether the NUM was willing to condemn violence.

Mr Alastair Hetherington, the former editor of *The Guardian* and controller of the BBC in Scotland, who is now Professor in Media Studies at Stirling University, said that Mr Scargill was adept at putting up a smokescreen to confuse the media whose job it was to penetrate such a camouflage.

He cited Mr Scargill's complaint to the conference that television, in referring to working miners in Yorkshire, never mentioned the fact that there was an 86 per cent majority in a ballot for striking against closure. The ballot had actually taken place in 1981, Mr Hetherington said, and a lot of things had happened since then.