

# Ministers step up attacks on pit violence

By Philip Webster and David Felton

The Government and National Coal Board, disappointed by the response to Mr Ian MacGregor's appeal to the striking miners to return to work, yesterday intensified their condemnation of the violent intimidation of working miners which they believe prevents many others going back.

As Mr MacGregor, the coal board chairman, accused the National Union of Mineworkers' leadership of orchestrating the intimidation, Mr Leon Brittan, the Home Secretary, spoke of the insidious violence directed at miners and their families and called on Mr Arthur Scargill to disown the thuggery.

On Saturday, Mr Peter Walker, Secretary of State for Energy, pinned on Mr Scargill the sole blame for the failure to resolve the dispute and said that the striking miners and workers in other industries were the real victims of "Scargill's strike".

The strong language of the two ministers most closely involved in the dispute and the clear attempt to isolate Mr Scargill appeared to mark the start of a new offensive by the Government in the 16-week-old dispute aimed at speeding up a return to work.

Ministers and the board had hoped that more miners would respond to Mr MacGregor's letter sent to 180,000 miners appealing for a return from last Monday. The coal board's figures showed that only 700 responded.

With most pits closing for the summer holidays in two weeks, ministers and the board fear that the momentum will be lost unless there is a noticeable increase in the numbers going back this week and next.

To counter the alleged threats of violence to miners who want to work the board has in some areas bought unmarked buses, fitted with wire mesh screens, to take workers through the picket lines.

Mr Brittan, speaking in his constituency in Richmond, North Yorkshire, said that in villages close to working collieries the houses and cars of miners had been daubed with paint, cars damaged and windows smashed. Miners had

received threatening telephone calls and been assaulted on their way to work.

He confirmed that teams of CID officers were investigating such incidents and that more uniformed police had been deployed in villages where there was known to be much intimidation.

Mr MacGregor, interviewed on *The World This Weekend* on Radio 4, said the NUM leadership was orchestrating intimidation of miners who were either going to work or feared to do so because they were worried about the safety of their wives and children.

Mr MacGregor said that he had noticed increased intimidation in areas where there were signs of a growing return to work. Nothing happened in the dispute without the central union organization knowing about it.

Mr Scargill, NUM president, appearing on the same programme, said: "Mr MacGregor is talking absolute nonsense and he has no evidence to back that statement up... I will not accept that my members have been in any way involved in intimidation. My facts show to me very clearly that the people guilty of intimidation and violence in this dispute have been the police."

In his speech Mr Brittan gave examples of what he called "this peculiarly repulsive form of thuggery." One man had been convicted of blocking the waste pipes leading from a working miner's home, which flooded his house. Two men arrested after a "marauding rampage" through a Derbyshire village were carrying pieces of wood wrapped in barbed wire. One working miner attacked outside a public house was so badly beaten that a leg was broken.

The Home Secretary said: "Thuggery of this kind has nothing to do with legitimate industrial action. It is crime." He said that no responsible trade unionist would defend these intimidatory tactics.

"One would hope they were not done in the name of the NUM; perhaps Mr Scargill will put that beyond doubt by disowning them. So far he has signally failed to do so."

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