

Attack victims seek new rules

By David Hewson

The two working Yorkshire miners who were the victims of pit strike attacks over the weekend yesterday called for a revision of the union rules to topple the NUM president, Mr Arthur Scargill.

Mr Stuart Spencer, aged 32, whose £40,000 home was gutted in an arson attack on Saturday, went to Pontefract general hospital to visit Mr Michael Fletcher, aged 24, who suffered a broken shoulder, broken ankle, bruised ribs and other injuries when he was beaten by six masked men on Friday.

Both men urged the NUM to change its rules, and Mr Fletcher said: "All our fellow miners should get back to work and change the union rules so

that the NUM president has to be reelected every three years." Mr Spencer said that striking miners had threatened to kill his two-year-old daughter Rebecca days before the fire at his home in Upton, near Pontefract, West Yorkshire.

"They emphasized they would kill my daughter and the main target in this blaze was her bedroom. That sums it up.

"They openly told me they would kill my daughter and they have tried to do just that. What they have done to Michael is disgusting."

Both men had returned to work the previous Monday, and shortly before the attack Mr Spencer had moved his family to a secret address.

Nine men are to appear in court today charged in connection with the baseball bat attack on Mr Fletcher, police said last night.

The men, being held at several police stations in West Yorkshire, have been charged with offences including aggravated burglary, affray and assault. They will appear before magistrates at Pontefract.

Police said that forensic tests had confirmed that the fire which destroyed Mr Spencer's home was caused by arson.

In North Wales, the area's NUM national executive member Mr Ted McKay, who spoke out against picket line violence last week, called police

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after a noose was hung from NUM offices opposite his Wrexham flat.

Mr McKay said: "I will not stand for any more intimidation. I can make a plea to all decent-minded people in Britain to stand up and stop the evil that is happening.

"People cannot be terrorized in their own homes, not by the NUM, because this isn't the NUM, this is Scargillism."

Lancashire miners had occupied the offices last week, but they moved out on Saturday and the building is now in the hands of local strikers.

In Scotland five people, three miners and two miners' wives, are due to appear in court today in what is expected to be the first in a series of court cases linked to attacks on working miners and their homes.

Central Scotland police said the charges arose from an incident at a working miner's house in Alloa in which a brick was thrown through a window and a woman slightly hurt.

Three striking miners have also been arrested after an attack in which a working miner was slightly hurt in Tillicoultry near by.

Mr Scargill, in a BBC radio interview, denied that the NUM was organizing violence, and said that no-one in the union would subscribe to attacks on people's houses.

"I will not subscribe in any way to condemning miners who are demonstrating on picket lines for their right to work. That is their only crime," he added.

Mr Spencer and Mr Fletcher had met in the same National Coal Board van taking them home from work from collieries a mile apart in West Yorkshire earlier in the week. Both said that they intended to return to work as soon as possible.

A get-well card to Mr Fletcher, signed by a striking miner, said: "All the best to a very brave man who deserves a medal and all the miners' thanks. The rest of us are too scared but you have shown the way. From another miner on strike but not as brave as you."

Mr Chris Butcher, the NUM back-to-work campaigner nicknamed "Silver Birch", said yesterday that the union's militants were using "IRA tactics" in their attempts to intimidate working miners.

"People are terrified. They are absolutely terrified because we have never seen anything like this before in this country."