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TERRORISM AND THE MEDIA

Thatcher calls for a 'voluntary' code

MRS THATCHER has suggested that the media should agree a voluntary code of conduct denying publicity to terrorists and hijackers.

"We must try to find ways to starve the terrorist and the hijacker of the oxygen of publicity on which they depend," she told the opening assembly of the American Bar Association at the Royal Albert Hall in London.

Terrorist acts made good copy and compelling viewing, she said. The hijacker and the terrorist thrived on publicity.

"In our societies we do not believe in constraining the media, still less in censorship. But ought we not to ask the media to agree among themselves a voluntary code of conduct under which they would not say or show anything which could assist the terrorists' moral or their cause while the hijack lasts?"

Mrs Thatcher was applauded when she declared that the Government would not give in to terrorist demands.

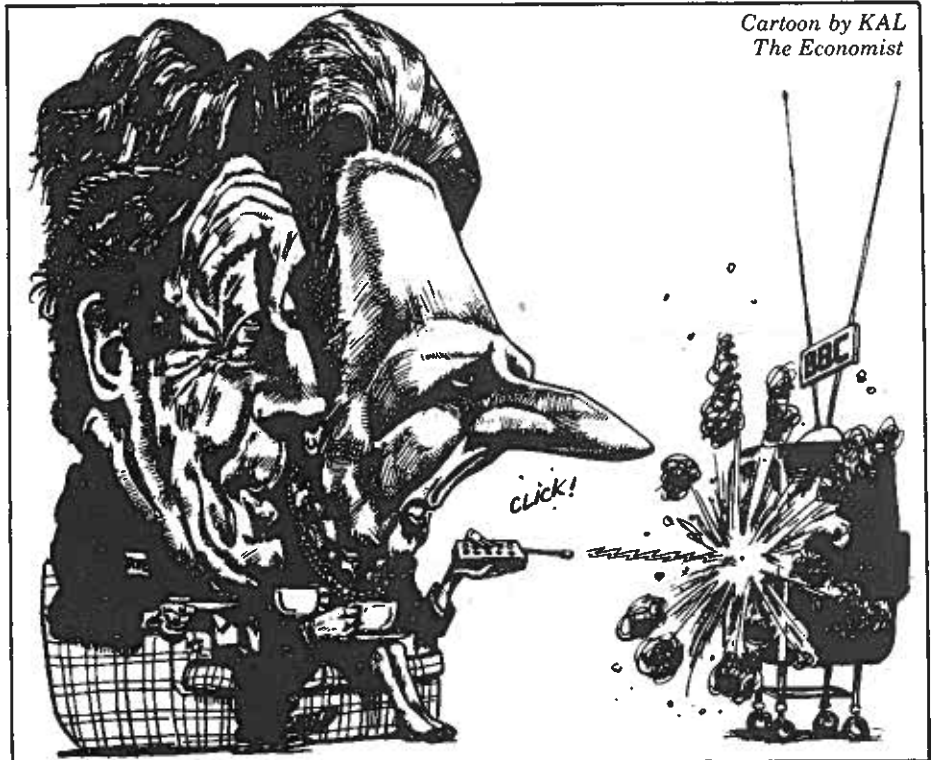
"Prisoners will not be released. Statements in support of the terrorists' cause will not be made. If hijacked aircraft land here they will not be allowed to take off.

"For in conceding terrorist demands the long-term risks are even greater than the immediate dangers."

She said justice demanded that those in public life repudiate what she described as fashionable heresies.

The first was that if a determined minority gathered in large enough numbers to bully or intimidate others, law would not, or could not, be enforced.

There was, she said, no collective immunity from the legal process, whether for football hooligans, political agitators industrial pickets, or terrorists.



Cartoon by KAL
The Economist

The recent spate of terrorist activities around the world has sparked a highly-controversial debate on just how the media, especially, television, should cover the events. The British Prime Minister, Mrs Margaret Thatcher, has herself called for the terrorist and the hijacker to be starved of publicity and her call is now being debated at length from editorial offices to government boardrooms. In this especially extended issue (beginning on page 12) we examine the aftermath of the TWA hijack and look behind the scenes at the recent BBC one-day strike in protest at government pressure to ban a programme on terrorism in Northern Ireland. We also look at the view from Spain, a country with a long-history of terrorism, and a highly-controversial case against the leading daily, *El Pais*, which has now been dropped.

ON OTHER PAGES:

World News	2
Broadcasting	5
USSR	6
South Africa	7
South Korea	8
Japan	9
British Printers.....	10