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Robert SANDS: Election Address

" On behalf of the 426 blanket-men and the women on protest in Armagh prison and my three comrades on hunger-strike, Patsy O'HRA, Francis HUGHES and Raymond McCREESH, I appeal to the people of Fermanagh/South Tyrone to vote for me on Thursday 9 April.

I thank Noel MAGUIRE and Bernadette McALISKEY and the other political parties for withdrawing from the by-election to allow the focus of national and world media to spotlight the present hunger-strike and general plight of Britains political prisoners.

My address is not confined solely to the nationalist people of Fermanagh/South Tyrone because I abhor the sectarian divisions that rent this country. To the Protestant community I say you have nothing to fear from me as a Republican. A vote for me will help create better prison conditions for all prisoners, irrespective of their political background.

The issues at stake in this by-election are not the traditional issues of unemployment or other social evils visited on you, the people of this constituency. Not because I am not concerned about such issues but because this election is not typical in that sense.

There is but a single issue at stake, the right of human dignity for Irishmen and women who are imprisoned for taking part in this period of the historic struggle for Irish independence.

For several years now I and hundreds of my comrades have been beaten, half-starved and at times almost frozen to death, to force us to surrender to the tag of criminal. This we will never do. We are not elitist, we do not seek different status to that afforded the ordinary prisoner because we frown upon them.

Our protest and this hunger-strike is to secure from the British Government an end to its policy of labelling us as criminals. This can be done by them conceding to us the same status that several hundred men in the cages of Longkesh and three women in Armagh prison have.

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The eyes of this nation and many parts of the world will be on the people of Fermanagh/South Tyrone on polling day. I am convinced that on that day the people will do the right thing and vote me in."

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