

E.R.

CONFIDENTIAL

① Mr Bell *31/3*
② POL *461/3*

Mr Wyatt

PS/Mr Alison (B & L)
PS/PUS (B & L)
PS/Mr Bell —
Mr Blelloch
Mr Marshall
Mr Moriarty
Mr Ranson
Mr Burns
Mr Palmer
Mr Blatherwick
Mr Jackson
Mr McKay

ROBERT SANDS, ELECTION CANDIDATE

Mr Palmer, in his minute of 30 March, raises the question of access to Sands by representatives of the media. I have discussed this with Mr Palmer and agree with his paragraph 6. While my own view is that we must be very firm on regarding Sands as a convicted criminal, I anticipate very strong arguments being put forward on his behalf in favour of his being allowed to present his case to the media.

This opens up a very large can of worms. Are we preventing a potential Member of Parliament from putting his case to the electorate? Are we therefore subverting the democratic process? Would he have a case if, following the election, assuming he were defeated, forgoing to the High Court and claiming that he was prevented from carrying out his election campaign? Could he in fact delay the election if such a case were put before 9 April? These are questions to which I do not know the answers, but so far as the media are concerned, I believe we must regard Sands primarily as a convicted criminal who is, while in prison, subject to the same prison rules and discipline as any other person. While a Member of Parliament may have privileges, a person who is simply running for Parliament presumably does not.

I have already refused a formal request from BBC 2 "News Night" to (a) interview Sands as a candidate; (b) film Sands without an interview; or (c) take still photographs of him in the prison. Subject to views, I propose for the immediate future to maintain that line in the face of what I would forecast to be a considerable number of such requests.

D Gilliland

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31 March 1981

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