

John Swinney becomes SNP Leader

In a move which would have been unthinkable just twelve months ago, John Swinney is on the cusp of being elected First Minister of Scotland after becoming the SNP leader.

The last minute threat from Graeme McCormick a retired solicitor was headed off by Mr Swinney reaching out to him and listening to what he and others in the party want. So the second new leader in a little over a year has been announced – standing in front of the banner Stronger for Scotland used by the SNP since 2011.

Mr Swinney made an acceptance speech at Glasgow University in the Advanced Research Centre where he said “research into the newest, leading edge technologies push back the boundaries of what is possible”. He said: “A year ago, even a week ago, I did not think my future would involve standing here accepting the Leadership of the Scottish National Party.

“Things have turned out differently and before I say any more about my leadership I want to pay tribute to Humza Yousaf.

“He has conducted himself throughout the last year with grace and dignity in some acutely difficult circumstances.

“In particular, his moral leadership on the issue of Gaza has been a light in very dark times.”

Mr Swinney repeated some of what he said during his speech in Edinburgh last THURsday when he announced he would put himself forward for leader. He said today: "My decision to stand is not borne out of long-held ambition, but rather a profound sense of duty to my Party and my country."

He has promised again to unite the party, creating an "inclusive and unified team" and enabling "open and respectful dialogue within the SNP". And he repeated reference to the Scottish Child Payment, free university tuition and the massive expansion of childcare all of which he claims are SNP policies which transform lives and lift children from poverty.

Building on his experience and his "skills honed over decades" he offers a new chapter.

And as first Minister he recognises the SNP recorded their best share of the constituency vote in the last election in 2021, but he admits that this does not give the party "a monopoly on good ideas" and he will seek solutions by reaching out to everyone to "seek compromises that serve our nation well".

With typical straightforwardness he said: "We need to stop shouting at each other and talk. More than that, actually, we need to listen. And as First Minister, I will do exactly that."

First Minister, Humza Yousaf, is expected to step down on Tuesday making way for the formal process of appointing Mr Swinney to the role which has eluded him until now.

Opposition parties comment

Conservatives say that the "coronation" of Swinney as First Minister is a "stitch up". Scottish Conservative leader Douglas Ross said: "I congratulate John Swinney on becoming SNP leader for a second time.

“We urge him to govern for all of Scotland by abandoning his relentless push for independence – but, judging by his leadership launch slogan, that looks a forlorn hope.

“As the main opposition party, we will hold John Swinney to account when he lets the Scottish people down – just as we’ve done with Humza Yousaf.

“It’s difficult to see how he can be the fresh start Scotland needs, when he’s the ultimate continuity candidate. John Swinney was joined at the hip with the disgraced Nicola Sturgeon and his fingerprints are all over her numerous policy failures and cover-ups.

“The stitch-up the SNP have engineered to ensure John Swinney’s coronation highlights the mess they’re in. Is a failed former leader from two decades ago – who, as education secretary, sent Scotland plummeting down international league tables – really the best they have to offer?

“With John Swinney at the helm, the SNP will double down on their independence obsession – the one issue they agree on – and ignore the real priorities of the Scottish people, such as fixing our ailing public services and growing the economy.

“Voters know that in key seats across Scotland, only the Scottish Conservatives can beat the SNP and get the focus back on to the issues that really matter.”

Labour continue to call for an election and also use the same phrase that this situation is a “stitch up”. Scottish Labour leader Anas Sarwar said: “John Swinney’s coronation is entirely about managing the SNP rather than running our country and delivering for Scotland.

“At a time when Scotland is crying out for change, the SNP is offering more of the same.

“John Swinney has been at the heart of this incompetent

government for 17 years and at the heart of the SNP for 40 years.

“From presiding over the exam results scandal as Education Secretary to destroying public finances as Finance Secretary, John Swinney’s record is one of failure.

“This is a stitch-up by a chaotic and dysfunctional party that is more interested in protecting its own interests than serving the interests of the people of Scotland.

“The SNP must stop running scared and gives Scots a say in their next First Minister by calling an election.

“After 17 years of SNP failure, Scotland needs change – and Scottish Labour is ready to deliver it.”

With four MSPs at Holyrood the LibDems also want an election. Scottish Liberal Democrat leader Alex Cole-Hamilton MSP said: “It’s hardly a good look for senior SNP parliamentarians to have to beg a party activist to step aside and allow a coronation because of the expense of a leadership election. John Swinney will now take the top role without any discussion of his preferred policies at all aside from breaking up the UK.

“As his party’s leader and a former wingman to both Alex Salmond and Nicola Sturgeon, John Swinney is now answerable for the SNP’s appalling neglect of public services over the past 17 years.

“He should immediately announce a plan for cutting NHS waiting lists and stopping sewage flowing into our rivers and if he can’t do that he should announce an election.”

Pamela Nash, chief executive of Scotland in Union, said: “In his short, unchallenged passage to SNP leadership, John Swinney has made his priorities clear.

“He wants to continue the toxic nationalist agenda of driving

up grievance with the rest of the UK.

“That’s because he cares only about independence, and like his predecessors won’t care if every other devolved area suffers as a consequence.

“People have had enough of 17 years of nationalist obsession and want change. It is time for their priorities, not the SNP’s.”



John Swinney announcing his candidacy for SNP leader at the Grassmarket Community Project. PHOTO ©2024 The Edinburgh Reporter