

Edward Snowden elected Rector of Glasgow University

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20 February 2014

Students at the University of Glasgow in Scotland voted Tuesday to elect Edward Snowden as Rector of the University, in a powerful display of opposition to attacks on democratic rights by the NSA and Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ).

The former National Security Agency consultant and whistle-blower received 3,124 votes, more than double his nearest challenger, Kevin Holdsworth, a local clergyman and gay rights campaigner. Snowden received 51 percent of the vote, and will serve as Rector for three years.

Although the election took place in Glasgow, Scotland, there is not a university, college or school on the planet where a similar outcome could not be anticipated. For a large section of workers and young people, Snowden has become a symbol of opposition to surveillance, of resistance to arbitrary authority, of principled, clear-headed bravery in defence of the elementary democratic rights of the world's citizens.

"I am humbled by and grateful to the students of Glasgow University for this historic statement in defence of our shared values," Snowden said in response to the election. "We are reminded by this bold decision that the foundation of all learning is daring: the courage to investigate, to experiment, to inquire," he said.

"If we do not contest the violation of the fundamental right of free people to be left unmolested in their thoughts, associations, and communications--to be free from suspicion without cause--we will have lost the foundation of our thinking society. The defence of this fundamental freedom is the challenge of our generation," he said.

Snowden concluded "This election shows that the students of Glasgow University intend to lead the way, and it is my great honour to serve as their Rector."

"We are incredibly delighted to see Edward Snowden elected as the new Rector of Glasgow University," said the Edward Snowden for Rector campaign in a statement. "We have a proud and virtuous tradition of making significant statements through our Rectors and today we have once more championed this idea."

"Our opposition to pervasive and immoral state intrusion has gone down in the records. What is more, we showed Edward Snowden and other brave whistleblowers that we stand in solidarity with them, regardless of where they are," the group added. "In the following weeks we will continue to campaign for the NSA and GCHQ to cease their assault on our fundamental right to privacy and for Edward Snowden to be recognised as the courageous whistleblower he is, rather than a traitor."

Media coverage of the campaign insisted repeatedly that the "campus was split" over whether Snowden was a "hero or a traitor". His election by an absolute majority is all the more extraordinary given the vilification, and slander directed against Snowden by the political and media establishment.

The election is a devastating rebuttal of the Conservative and Liberal Democrat government, the Labour opposition and the Scottish National Party government in Scotland, all of whom have agreed with, or maintained silence in the face of, the attack on Snowden, his supporters, sympathising journalists and the *Guardian* newspaper. It testifies to the profound gulf between all these parties and the great majority of young people.

The campaign also encountered bitter opposition from right-wing forces on the university campus. Campaign posters were slashed or torn down the first night they were put up, while the university authorities banned any more being put up for the duration.

Snowden's supporters were continually attacked for putting forward a candidate who was not a “working Rector”, a charge that originated with the aspiring bureaucrats and pundits of the Students Representative Council (SRC). Another candidate, author Alan Bissett, advanced himself as “a working Rector”, while making a pledge to “Improve gender equality on campus” his central demand in order to curry favour from feminists prominent within the SRC.

Two of these, Louise Wilson and Hannah McNeil, are writers for the student paper, the *Glasgow Guardian*. In the aftermath of Snowden’s election, they became the poster children for quotes supposedly expressing more widespread student hostility to the result.

Louise Wilson is quoted by numerous newspapers proclaiming, “It sucks. It’s very disappointing but not surprising in the slightest. I’m all for political statements, but at a time when the university and students need the biggest say with all the cuts it’s just not appropriate not to have a working Rector.”

Hannah McNeill declared, “I’m furious. I think most people here are very upset about the result. We need an active Rector.” The invocations of a “working Rector” are only a device for opposing Snowden’s election and nothing more.

Previous Rectors, include Adam Smith, Edmund Burke, and not a few British Prime Ministers. Since African National Congress leader Albert Luthuli’s election in 1962, Rectors have tended to be more popular political or media figures. Stalinist shipyard leader Jimmy Reid was elected in 1972, Winnie Mandela in 1987. Popular comedy actor Richard Wilson held the post from 1996. Mordechai Vanunu, who exposed Israel’s nuclear power program, was elected in 2004.

As for the incumbent “working Rector”, he is Charles Kennedy, former leader of the Liberal Democrats, whose party is in coalition government with the Conservatives and has launched assault after assault on students—including reneging on campaign pledges in order to support a trebling of tuition fees.

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) circulated a leaflet in support of Snowden, writing that, “Presented as part of the so-called ‘war on terror’, dragnet surveillance is in fact being used to profile working people, students and youth to criminalise political opposition and dissent.

“The turn to totalitarian forms of rule reflects the unprecedented levels of social inequality generated by capitalism—85 individuals now control more wealth than the bottom 50 percent of the population or 3.5 billion people!

“The wealth and power of this global plutocracy are incompatible with democracy. The defence of Snowden and democratic rights is possible only on the basis of a mass socialist struggle to break their stranglehold over the world economy and place it under public ownership and democratic control.”

The leaflet concluded with a call to make “Glasgow University a focal point for mobilising the broadest possible support for Snowden amongst students and young people internationally.”



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