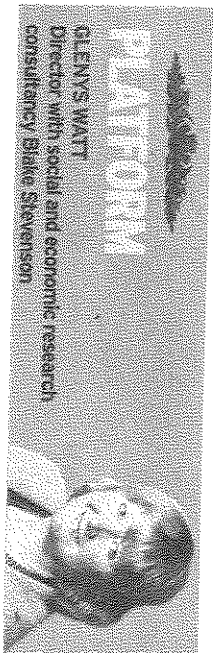


Join the debate to make sense of changes that cannot be ignored

WH can doubt this week of all weeks, that social change happens? In 1961, the year Barack Obama was born, a black man in the United States could not go to the same school or restaurant as a white man – or sit in the same section of the bus.

Segregation between white and black people was alive and kicking (literally). Nearly 50 years later a black man enters the White House. What a symbol of the power of social change.

There have been many other examples of major social change over the same period. In the 1960s around 35 per cent of women worked in the UK. Today that number has doubled to 70 per cent. In the wake of this change has come the growth of paid childcare, leading to fur-



GLENNIS WATT
Director with social and economic research consultancy Blake Stevenson

ther employment opportunities still seen as mainly for women.

Who in 1960, when gay sex was a criminal offence, could have guessed a mere five decades later that gay relationships would be recognised in law?

More recently, the community buy-outs of land in Scotland, for example the Isle of Eigg, have overturned centuries of land ownership in the hands of the rich few.

What or who made these and other social changes happen?

Looking back there seems to be a mixture of elements in these major changes. Strong leaders, willing even to give their lives for what they believe in, play an important part. Around them has come the growth of movements – civil rights, feminism, gay rights – gatherings of people who are prepared to say “enough, things must change”.

Somewhere in the mix is technology: new devices to clean homes and make meals freed up women’s time (and it was

women who did the cleaning and cooking back in the 60s); new forms of mass communication have allowed more people to learn about what is happening and to support change movements. And eventually (but often not at the forefront) come those politicians who have been willing to pass legislation that sets social change in law.

So what are the social changes we look for and need over the next 50 years in Scotland and in the world? What are the issues about which we feel so passionately that we will weep with joy, as many black and white people wept this week, when that change is finally visible for us all to see?

Several issues spring to mind that demand strong leadership, a people’s movement and even-

tually change. On the world stage, climate change and the eradication of poverty loom large.

Here in Scotland there are many areas where social change is needed: for starters, the way we treat our young people, especially those who offend; the way we tackle the emotional, financial and physical abuse suffered by many elderly people; and arching over all of these, linked to the global challenges and the credit crunch, the need to find a way to live our lives differently so we consume less, share more and ask ourselves whether the pursuit of growth at the expense of happiness is worth it.

Should we instead be copying Bhutan, where gross national happiness is the main measure of wealth?

We will pose these and other questions to a panel of social change experts next Wednesday. At this, the last of *The Scotsman* Debates series, we will debate what social changes we are looking for – and how to bring them about.

With me on the platform will be Susan Deacon, professor of social change at Queen Margaret College; Alastair McIntosh, author of *Soil and Soul*; Mel Young, founder of the *Big Issue* in Scotland; and Peter McCall, a student representative and youth activist. In the words of the new president-elect: “This is our time for change.”

● To reserve seats for the debate, to be held at Albert Hall, Striving, 7pm-8.30pm on Wednesday, 12 November, e-mail scotsmandebate@scotsmam.com