

# A Formulation for the Demographic, Sociological and Economic Dimensions of the So-called Generation Gap

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The structure of this paper is adequately described by its title. The title also summarizes its content. There is also a fourth part to the paper, which suggests such alternative explanations of the generation gap as might appear reasonable to those who agree with the three main propositions of the paper. The paper does not deal with the host of considerations outside demography, sociology and economics that are not mentioned in the title, even though such considerations could be relevant to the discussion. The paper does not deal with the psychological, certainly not with the psychiatric (Freudian and pseudo-Freudian), political, cultural and historical aspects, except in so far as they are convenient or helpful in determining the main theme of the paper. The various facets not covered have been excluded partly because of this author's incompetence in the respective fields and partly because of his lack of interest. The last phrase is a euphemistic way of saying that in this opinion many of the explanations are nonsensical, such as the son-father conflict viewed as a matter of general, inevitable, and unavoidable development and not merely as a sporadic, infrequent and individual aberration.

## The Demographic Impossibility

As a matter of exposition to a non-demographic audience it is convenient to conceive of a human population as an age pyramid. The younger ages are in the lower layers; the older ages are in the upper layers. One vertical about-half represents men; the other vertical about-half is reserved for women. The general impression is that of a Christmas tree with branches closely grown. When age reporting is of poor quality, there is typically considerable age heaping at ages ending with zero and five. The impression of a christmas tree (this time with branches not so closely grown) is then reinforced. With data available in five-year age groups, every five years a new layer is pumped

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in at the bottom of the age pyramid, while all other age groups move up by one layer. With data available in single years the process takes place annually: one thin layer is added in every year at the bottom of the age pyramid and all other years move up one year.

Actually, this description is seriously misleading in its suggestion of movement by stages. It is realistic to conceive of this movement as a continuing process: infants are being brought in all the time at the bottom of the age pyramid, with possibly some seasonal variations, more significant in some societies than in others. Among the infants there is invariably a slight preponderance of boys.<sup>1</sup> All the time, the movement up the age scale is taking place in a manner not discernible by the ordinary eye. Some small proportions of the movers fall by the roadside, the weaker males earlier than the stronger females.<sup>2</sup> There are no horizontal dividing lines, even less breaks, between any of the layers in the age pyramid. True, demographers schooled in the tradition of cross-sectional surveys have to present age groups with horizontal lines as if there were real boundaries. However, in this day and age of longitudinal observations, when the inferiority of cross-sectional surveys is clearly recognized with all their disadvantages, social scientists, other than demographers, must not take these lines literally.<sup>3</sup>

An age distribution is an extremely powerful tool of analysis and social scientists, who study societies without first enquiring into the age pyramids of these societies in considerable detail, do so at their own peril and with deleterious effects upon their work. It is illustrative in this regard to study any well-reported age distribution. As an example, the age pyramid of France in the 1970s shows four distinct troughs: for those of both sexes not born in the late fifties and since after the past World War II "recuperation" came to an end, for those of both sexes not born during World War II, for those of both sexes not born during World War I (a trough much more severe than that of World War II), and finally a very slight incline on the male side due to combat losses of World War I [17; or 21, pp. 14-15; or 20, p. 125].<sup>4</sup>

The first condition for a successful understanding of an age pyramid is to realize its dynamic, its longitudinal, movie-like nature. It is unhelpful, as

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<sup>1</sup>Empirical reports to the contrary are treated, whatever the society, by informed opinions as erroneous field work.

<sup>2</sup>Only at the highest levels of general morality does the reported female mortality appear to be more severe than the reported male mortality.

<sup>3</sup>This is not to say that an age distribution is an outdated tool of analysis. Far from it: it continues to be a useful representation of the cross-sectional situation. What social scientists must not do is to read dynamic elements in this cross-sectional presentation.

<sup>4</sup>Contrary to popular belief combat losses narrowly defined seldom show to any marked extent on an age pyramid. Even the losses of the French army in 1914-1918 estimated at 1.4 million killed [17] are not very visible. It takes losses of the extent experienced by the German army on the Russian front and by the Soviet armies in 1942-1945 to become optically impressive. Even then indirect noncombat losses and "losses" of those of both sexes not born because of the war are as great as or greater than direct combat losses.

Similarly, the indirect "losses" through those not born in Pakistan (and to a lesser extent in India) because of the dislocations consequent upon the partition of the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent in 1947 appear to have affected the age distribution more through those not born than through direct losses [15]. However, in this instance the age distribution, like that of many other developing societies, appears to be affected more by the vagaries of enumeration and age reporting than by actual demographic phenomena [16]. That requires an entirely different type of discussion from the one offered in this paper.

indicated in the previous three paragraphs, to view an age distribution as a photographic "still". Think of it as a conveyor belt taking humans to their unavoidable end. The belt is shaped like a wedge<sup>5</sup> and its movement is uninterrupted, inexorable, relentless. To talk of gaps in this imperceptibly changing and yet uniform stream is to be blind to the most obvious characteristic of human societies.

The powerfulness of the age distribution as an analytic tool lies in its ability to describe differences in proportions between sexes and age proportions. These differences need not be large to be significant. Most of this importance will be discussed in the third part of this paper. In this part, it is enough to point out that even small analytic differences and temporal changes, whether in sex proportions or age proportions, parallel and are associated with effects in real life. This influence can be extremely significant. It is here, in real life, that different age cohorts experience different fate due to their different position relative to other cohorts and age-and-sex groups. One is tempted to suggest that shallow sociological analysis could have mistaken for a generation gap the different ways in which "fate" treated and continues to treat different age cohorts. For example, the age cohorts entering in Western type societies into the marriage market in the late 60s and early 70s find an entirely different situation from that of the age cohort appearing on the marriage market in the late 40s and 50s. The latter came after a period of declining birth rate, i.e. each age cohort was smaller (at least in a relative sense) than the previous cohort. The female members had thus a surplus of men from the immediately preceding age cohorts to draw upon. Their frustrations were limited; they remained a cheerful lot; they did not find it necessary to be aggressive.

In the late 60s and 70s females of the "baby boom" vintage have to be content with men from the previous, somewhat smaller cohorts. Actually, in the North American societies, females, being used to having their own way<sup>6</sup>, are not content with their demographically ordained fate. They have recourse to various stratagems, such as narrowing the difference in the male and female ages at marriage, known colloquially as "baby snatching", or childless marriages or unions without legal ties or illegitimate offsprings. The determination to marry shows itself in other less well known and less understood statistical phenomena. The labour force participation of young females becomes on marriage higher than that of spinsters; early marriage possible "only if wife works"—said HE. The excess of "annual" labour force over "current" labour force reaches "enormous"—says technical literature—proportions for married teen-agers; these are troublesome statistical concepts and suffice it to say that such an excess is always indicative of high turnover, recent and temporary recruiting.<sup>7</sup> These unusual sociological phenomena, though perfectly natural demographically, take place because, as will be argued in the third part

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<sup>5</sup>The wedge-like shape of the age distribution is, incidentally, not due to the ravishes of mortality, as is popularly believed. It is determined by fertility; so much so that societies with low fertility, and, as a corollary, low mortality (otherwise the society would not have survived), produce age pyramids which lose much of the wedge-like quality.

<sup>6</sup>It does not take a Tocqueville to note the powerful position of women in North American society ("the single most important influence" according to him) and the consequences flowing from this phenomenon.

<sup>7</sup>As usual, this is not a uni-causal situation. Young females are also highly responsive to transitory income and accept current income lower than "permanent" income, marriage or no marriage.

of this paper, the female entrants into the marriage market have to contend with a somewhat unfavourable situation in the labour market.

The perturbations arise because of changing *proportions* in the various age and sex groups in developed societies. Hardly does an economy or society or, to focus more specifically, the labour market, or the marriage market, or the educational institution or the welfare institution adjust to a given proportion of its clients when the proportion changes and the process of readjustment must recommence.<sup>8</sup>

The demographic situation is analytically much simpler in developing societies. The demography of these societies is more stable than that of developed societies. In demographic theory the labels of stability and quasi-stability summarize these demographies. Their essential feature is that they produce constant, *proportionate* age distributions. Under stable conditions the population has been experiencing unchanging fertility and mortality. Constant proportions were added each year at the bottom of the age pyramid in the form of births and constant proportions were taken off from each age group through mortality. The total population size was increasing (slowly) and each group was increasing (slowly), but the *proportionate* age distribution continued the same. Clearly, in such a population the various upheavals discussed in the earlier part of this section were not taking place and there was even less reason for the generation gap to arise for demographic reasons.

Under conditions of quasi-stability high fertility continues, but some destabilization takes place in mortality. Until recently an average social scientist was brought up under the impression that there were old people because the others died. Strangely and unexpectedly, this improvement in mortality has little effect on the proportionate age distribution. By and large, it does not increase the proportions at old ages. There is a vast demographic literature on this point. The age selectivity of mortality is unimportant in comparison with the impact of high fertility, all of which takes place at age zero, the bottom of the age pyramid. It is fertility that basically decides whether an age pyramid is wide-bottomed or narrow-bottomed. Crudely, but substantially correctly, mortality is like peeling an apple or an onion. A thicker or a thinner slice can be taken off, but the shape of the apple or of the onion remains substantially the same. Thus, on account of fertility there is little reason for a generation gap or any other upheaval to arise.

However, even though the proportions do not change, the numbers involved in the progression up the age dimension of the age pyramid do increase through improvements in mortality. Consequently, while the proportions remain, by and large, the same, the numbers entering or trying to enter into educational institutions, coming on to the labour market, appearing on the marriage market, and relying on the welfare institutions are increasing with each decline in mortality. In many societies, it can be shown arithmetically that the additional numbers entering the social and economic institutions due to mortality improvements are relatively small in comparison with additional numbers that come, e.g. on to the labour market due to the switch from the traditional sector of the economy to the monetized sector, and due to increased

<sup>8</sup>There are, of course, other causes of disturbances: economic, technological, political and the like. In this paper the focus is largely on demographic causes.

production of educational institutions including training abroad under international auspices.<sup>9</sup> However, these considerations belong to the second and third sections of this article.

In conclusion for this part of the paper, not only is a generation gap demographically impossible, whether in a developed or developing society, but there are real demographic forces in developed societies that influence different age cohorts differently, almost like blind "fate". This blind "fate" works in a pendulum fashion. A cohort, when disadvantaged numerically (too large relatively to others), behaves accordingly: it produces fewer children, as one of several other reactions. In turn, the offsprings of the disadvantaged cohort find themselves in an advantageous position and, among other reactions, produce more children. And so on.

The concept of cohort is legitimate and logical in some situations but illegitimate in some other situations. It is helpful in technical demography.<sup>10</sup> Certainly generations play a role within families and within other social institutions, such as small bureaucracies. However, this sociological concept, valid when used to spell out relations within small groups becomes invalid when it is used to describe the larger society. It is inappropriate to talk of generation gaps in terms of a total society. Ethnomethodologists should play with it, not macro-sociologists, but more about it in the next section.

### **The Sociological Fallacy**

If we view the human scene at any one time we might say that nothing begins or ends. There is one mighty self-evolving present. There is a ceaseless flow of history. There is no perceptible break; we are confronted with a continuum and not a discrete situation. True, there is a time lag between questions and problems arising on the one hand and answers on the other. Answers seem always to be late. They have got to be later than problems and questions. This, however, has nothing to do with the generation gap. It is merely a question of change taking place fast enough or not fast enough.

There are other "gaps" in life, apart from the alleged generation gap: between high and low income groups, fast and slow drivers, different socioeconomic groups. Most statistical tests would show wider dispersions in these characteristics than in the age distribution, but except for some very special societies, there are no gaps. True, no society is uniform, and there are inter-society differences. Senior Common Rooms, like bookshops to browse in, are conspicuous for their absence in some universities, while they are the very salt of the earth in others. To call such phenomena gaps, and with value implications, is not terribly insightful.

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<sup>9</sup>Let the admission made earlier in the text be repeated once more: there are exceptional situations when mortality becomes age-and-sex selective in a manner sufficiently powerful to affect the proportionate age distribution, but these exceptions (Russian and German World War II losses) should not blur our understanding of the fundamental importance of fertility.

<sup>10</sup>Demographers do use in their technical exercises the concept of generation. For example, they calculate the length of a generation, approximated by average age of child bearing. With the same reproductive power a population experiencing a shorter length of generation grows faster than one with a longer length of generation. However, this is an analytical, technical, arithmetical concept and there is no suggestion that discrete, distinct generations produce each other.

There is one simple sociological answer to the demographic argument. Anthropologists lend assistance by bringing in birth cohorts from societies where the same name is given to all members of a cohort as they pass through the various rites of passage together. We then have a generation, but a generation in quite a meaningful term. There are well identified sociological principles which bind certain groups together so that they talk of themselves as "we" and others as "they". However, it is unhelpful and not illuminating to lump that type of gap with a generation gap. The study of gaps between, say, new recruits and NCOs with several years of training and experience is a legitimate sociological pursuit, but labelling the gap as a generation gap is beclouding the issue.

Much of the sociological case for a generation gap has been shattered if we accept the validity of the previous demographic argument. Without a demographic base there can be no generation and without generations there can be no generation gap, even though there might be other gaps. However, let us continue looking at some of the alternative ways in which the generation gap has been defined.

Some illustrative examples can be singled out for attention.

The anthropological "generation" with same tribal name has already been declared by us irrelevant to our current argument. Another and frequent meaning of the generation gap is of the ridiculous kind. A provincial newspaper reports a generation gap in the Salvation Army (*Edmonton Journal*, Dec. 20, 1969). The ruling general declares that he will not abdicate his authority. In this age of increasing democratization there are pressures everywhere for the decentralization of powers. This is part of the generally prevailing philosophy and only journalists desperate for a title would label it a generation gap.

One popular explanation of the generation gap is the generational conflict. It is a psychological interpretation. In some versions, one comes across the psychiatric explanation that sons attack (they "must" attack) the authority of fathers and their power. The impulse for this attack is routed in psychic rather than social relations, and is based on some kind of hatred, which is asserted rather than explained. Alternatively and confusingly, it is also said that fathers' jealousy interferes with the development of sons. With this shaky assertion, an explanation seems to have been provided for all sorts of relations, including the animosity between Freud and Jung.<sup>11</sup> One has to have a stomach for that type of explanation. Popular as it may be with some, it does not appear very reasonable to others. A more reasonable model is due to Malinowski. In his society stresses are caused by authority and power rather than by psychiatric factors. According to his model, in societies where young people enter responsible roles early in life we see fewer illustrations of rebellion against authority than in those societies where entrance into the adult world is denied to young people physically and mentally able to perform

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<sup>11</sup>John M. Billinsky in *Andover Newton Quarterly*, 1970.

adult roles. However, there is no automatic emergence of the generation gap. It needs to be nursed by other societal features.<sup>12</sup>

In any case, whatever the validity of the explanation in any particular case, it does not operate with generality. It is common ground that the various alienations are not effective in *every* generation. We must, therefore, look elsewhere for an explanation. We have to ask ourselves what it is that destroys the generational stability which prevails in some generations but not in others. It appears that the sporadic attacks of sons against the authority and power of fathers occur when fathers are "de-authorized" in the eyes of sons.

The de-authorization of fathers can, according to the proponents of this explanation, be caused by a variety of circumstances. One of the triggering off circumstances can be a lost war and the major frustrations related to such a loss. Thus, in this explanation, it is not the generation gap as such, but the previous generation disgracing itself. The explanation appears to be consistent with events in Japan but not with those in Germany. Such German students as tried to influence the political situation did so without major effect. Ineffective on the political scene, they became cruel extreme and irresponsible at the Universities. Could it be because the politicians were less compromised than the University professors through the willing cooperation of the latter with the Hitlerite regime? That is to say, the professor-fathers were particularly de-authorized. The student political unrest in the United States against the non-victorious war in Vietnam has taken a long time to develop and one wonders whether these pressures would have been avoided by a victorious or speedy conclusion. Again, it is not the generation gap *per se* that does the job but a combination of other situational features.

Members of not many societies manage to display the forbearance of a London "bobby" when confronted with provocation. Obviously, inadequate training and poor discipline of the forces of public order must not be labelled a generation gap, but lack of patience with unorthodox behaviour comes closer to it. A minute by minute report of the killings during the Kent State University riots in 1970 discloses and records the quite incredible hate and anger that the behaviour of the students provoked among the town people [19]. The present writer remembers from his Cambridge, England, days the surface underlying tensions between "town and gown", fairly reminiscent of the student riots in the medieval university towns of Europe. If one is to take contemporaneous reports seriously, the young people in the past may not have displayed their rebellion quite so publicly, but their covert behaviour seemed to have been even more vicious and less considerate than it is today. Is this the same kind of thing, or is the difference of degree getting so great that it becomes a difference of kind? Maybe that this is a generation gap, but at least historically it is not very new. We had it all before. Or did we? Michener reports additionally a strong underlying sexual bias to the bloodshed. Women of the town were particularly vehement in calling for more blood-letting among the students.

<sup>12</sup>According to some, this argument for the generation gap is actually much stronger than allowed for in the text. There is considerable literature to the effect that adolescence in Western-type societies is a relatively recent phenomenon. Structural changes taking place in society seem to require that young people postpone entrance into the adult world. One need not agree with this argument to say that, if correct, it actually supports the title of this article. It is not the generation gap as such (fallaciously conceived according to this article) but peculiar societal features that are necessary for the sharpening of the conflict.

They resented the "bra"-lessness and supposed bedhopping of female students. The men of the town, on the other hand, envied the alleged sexual freedom they did not know in their youth. Nothing apparently quite so enraged the trigger-happy guardsmen as the middlefinger gesture of lady students, their obscenities, and their appearing naked in male dormitory windows shouting to the troops "make love, not war".

Were they different generations that were lined up against each other over this brief battle? Maybe it would be wiser to see in them different social groups with different privileges, different responsibilities and different backgrounds. Even if one sees a generation gap separating the two sides on the Kent State University battlefield, one must distinguish between the views that adults hold of young people and the actual fact. Does the "older generation" always view "the world going to dogs" and "the youth going to hell"? If so, we may at one remove throw doubt on the historical opinions reported by "town" about their "gown" adversaries and arrive at the uninteresting position that nothing changes much. This will still not fit the generation gap model. Something else is always necessary. We already referred to the students in Germany (and Austria). Once more awed by professors than in North America, they reacted more violently when the occasion arises than students in North America.

The question also arises whether a collapse of our basic social institution, the family, is necessary for a generation gap to arise. In any case, in line with our earlier argument it would be a generation gap at the familial rather than societal level. In France it has been reported that half of the workers aged 15 to 24 take their salaries home and pool them with their parents (*L'Express*, 1 August, 1971, p. 30). Would this proportion be much lower in the North American societies? If so, is the familial generation gap in the North American societies, therefore, much greater and the societal collapse that much nearer?

Another cause of the de-authorization of fathers can be the economic crisis of the dimensions experienced by the world in the pre-Keynesian days. Here we must notice that no such economic crisis was experienced for almost 40 years. Amongst the causes of de-authorization mentioned in literature are instances or accusations of racism, genocide, imperialism, aggression and colonialism in the meaning of selfish manipulation of the subject people. These are all influences which currently have a strong pejorative meaning and it is noticeable that they are being applied indiscriminately to circumstances, which they fit, as well as to situations where they are misleading labels. But fashionableness is not enough to prove the existence of a generation gap.

In developing societies the student role was shown here and there to perform a positive function when they, the students, were the only effective voice against local dictatorships. On the other hand, these pressures by students were sometimes in the nature of short cuts destroying workable and working constitutional means of changing the society. However, these issues of constitutional procedures are not ordinarily problems of the generation gap. It requires an extreme situation to create anything resembling such a gap. In the new society of Israel "a veritable chasm" has been reported. But, there "the ruling elite is almost entirely made up of men and women now in their 60s and 70s, who were born in Europe" (*Time*, 30 April, 1973, p. 35). A careful analysis of the Indian situation produced a taxonomy only partly related to a



possible generation gap. Three groups were identified among student rebels: those whose futures were so secure that they were not intimidated by possible punishment (equivalent of the playboys of Paris detested by trade unionists and the children of the "red bourgeoisie" in Eastern Europe carrying the anti-Russian banner), those who had become "professional" students and were making a career of being student agitators (also with exact counterparts in the Western world), and finally those who felt themselves overwhelmed by problems in achieving satisfactory life career [22]. Only in the last category can a trace of the generation gap be identified.

It is readily granted that there is an intense purity of idealism in many sections of student movements whether in developed or developing societies. However, in a superior society, such as the Canadian society, there is little occasion for the purity of idealism to display itself. There just are not enough issues. True, there is the problem of the native Indians, but the white society developed feelings of guilt, without student pressure. These feelings are so intense that the society is ready, indeed most anxious, to give in to any articulated demand. The difficulty lies in the articulation of demands. Canada has also the right to feel satisfied with its role in the world at large, in the field of international politics and in technical assistance. Some might actually question the sophistication and the effectiveness of Canada's foreign aid, but not the motives.<sup>13</sup> However, students do not demonstrate for efficiency.

Another explanation of the conflict between generations advanced by social psychologists is the ideological gap between the generations: the gap in social and ethical consciousness. The suggestion is made that in simple decency the younger age cohorts are so much superior, or at least different, from older age cohorts that the difference produces a generation gap. Some empirical investigations would have to be undertaken before the impressionistic suggestion could be accepted that somehow the proportion of louts, frauds, fascists, zombies, careerists and dilettantes is age-selective. This explanation would also have to give an answer to the demographically unanswerable question of where a generation begins and where it ends. Admittedly, the younger age groups have in some societies more vociferous, colourful, and frequently less effective ways of going about the business of expressing their concern with matters as they stand or affairs as they are run. All this is not enough to prove the generation gap.

In short, the suggestion of inherent moral superiority of youth is unproven historically and remains to be proven currently. As a matter of general proposition, it cannot be accepted that youth has a monopoly of idealism. At the time when the older age groups abolished in some developed societies the barbaric societal custom of taking life in punishment, the younger age groups are not conspicuously absent from ratings of the more gruesome TV shows. As a matter of record, numerous historical incidents suggest that youth is as ready to jump in favour of progressive and liberal attitudes as in favour of regressive and illiberal attitudes. After all, the main support for Hitler came from youthful circles. One understands the armies of unemployed and the riff-raff of the stricken towns, but why the doctors of philosophy and

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<sup>13</sup>On the other hand, when Canada does not play its full role, as it did not with the withdrawal of Canadian forces from NATO, the shield of the free world, there were no articulated protests from idealistic, youth groups.

sociology? Disgruntled, stupid, dishonest, power-hungry? Which? Which-ever—neither idealism nor wisdom is the hall-mark of any age cohort. Today, when students accept seats on Boards of Governors and Senates, they engage in what was known in the bad old days as syndicalism. The confused intellectuals (e.g. calls for student power accompanied by demands for libertarian decentralism) fall easy victims of the commercial world. All over the world fortunes are made on the efforts of Allen Ginsberg, Bob Dylan, Leonard Cohen, Daniel Cohn-Bendit, Tariq Ali, and Che Guevara. The toleration and permissiveness of the modern society contained the movement, such as it was, by corruption. The society has shown effective means of halting the rebellion. In another field with regard to manipulating one's associates (one of the more repulsive features of modern society) the younger cohorts appear to be no more lily-white than the older cohorts [10].

### **Economic Necessity**

For the purposes of the third section of this paper it is necessary to introduce a new concept, best described as opportunity pyramid.<sup>14</sup> The opportunity pyramid tends to parallel the age pyramid in circumstances of a stable or a "steady" development when year after year similar numbers of similarly trained new entrants enter the labour market and join the labour force in similar conditions of technology. Even if technology changes, many a change affects all the age groups in a roughly similar manner so that the relative advantages of age-and-sex groups do not change.<sup>15</sup> The promotion ladder is such that all age groups in due course have the chance of making their way up and that generally no particular age group finds itself at an advantage or disadvantage, because it is particularly large or particularly small or because the impediments to its progress are particularly large or particularly small.<sup>16</sup> Interesting things begin to happen when the opportunity pyramid gets out of line with the age pyramid.

It is illustrative of the concept, and of its relationship with a demographic age pyramid, to describe briefly the influences that are prevailing currently on the labour market in developed societies, and compare them with the labour market after World War II or, say, a generation ago. Thirty years ago it was easy to make a "career" in most of the developed societies. All those trying to make it were the products of the low birth rates of the '20s and '30s while those who were blocking their careers were more numerous, at least in relative terms. It was, therefore, natural that industry competed for new entrants and that the salaries and other emoluments were increasing at a pace twice as fast as that of the salaries and employments of the older age groups. In the '70s the situation is just the opposite. The new entrants into the labour market are the products of the very fertile late '40s and early '50s. On the other hand, progress along the opportunity pyramid is blocked by the limited openings created by the earlier age groups. Thus, the promotion and progress opportunities are

<sup>14</sup>The time is ripe for a rigorous definition of this concept, but in the absence of such a rigorous definition we must be satisfied with a prosaic explanation. Writers in the field of social indicators should feel encouraged to come up with suggestions.

<sup>15</sup>Some technological changes, combined with the social pattern, do favour particular age-and-sex groups. The typewriter might have increased opportunities more for women than for men.

<sup>16</sup>For reasons external to demography, age-and-sex specific advantages may arise. Technology, as already pointed out, or the social system may change in a manner favouring some age-and-sex groups. Upon improvements in irrigation, the shepherding of larger herds may become possible in one area. This might increase the demand for older, more experienced shepherds, and lessen the demand for younger, less experienced shepherds.

smaller than they were twenty-five years ago. Consistently, unemployment hits the young ages more severely than the older ages.

These demographic difficulties have been sharpened up in some countries through age selective and extreme war losses, such as in the Soviet Union and other countries of Eastern Europe, particularly in the German Democratic Republic. In the latter, these were further increased by the outflow of refugees before 1961. Until the Berlin wall was built the GDR was one of the very rare instances of a country experiencing a population decrease. All these losses were highly age-selective (*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 18 Aug. 1971, p. 9). With a shortage of labour in selected age groups of that kind there is official and unofficial pressure to ensure that the failure rate at training institutions is reduced to a minimum; no more than 3 percent has been reported (*ibid*). Even departments of sociology at most North American universities show more. We have then a deterioration of educational standards due to insufficient labour supply and independent of any consideration relevant to a generation gap. A secondary deterioration takes place when the expanded universities find themselves short of recruits and lower their admission standards formally or informally.

With the advent of independence many a new country has experienced a similar double deterioration, though for somewhat different reasons. Even modest increases in trained labour force were sometimes more than the economic sector of the country was able to absorb. In Morocco, as an example, where the production of the educational institutions is more carefully adjusted to the needs of the market than in most developing countries, the concern for the unemployed is considerable and continuing (e.g. *l'Opinion*, Rabat, 5 May 1971). That national problem occurred in most countries and became a continental problem. In the francophone parts of Africa it was given the elegant, nevertheless depressing, label of "descolarisation". The problem is reported under some such heading as "Eight African Countries Facing their Youth" (*Le Monde*, 18 July 1972). In some territories, where positions of importance were occupied before independence by expatriates, these were filled by candidates from the bottom of the age pyramid, but at the top of the opportunity pyramid. Thus, their followers, one or two or five years younger, have no chance of promotion until their predecessors leave the stage in... thirty years.

What happens in such societies? Military officers have the alternative of overturning each other's government. It is illuminating to recall that emperors and kings of the XIX century were guaranteeing each other thrones through "Holy Alliances" and other means. Today "Colonel by Grace of God so and so" makes a similar deal against an internal coup d'état with a neighbouring "General by Grace of God so and so". What are the openings available to the non military: international organizations take up some of the slack, but they soon run out of any given quota; the increasing number of new countries and regional organizations provide opportunities for new ambassadorships and related positions, but we are close to a limit in this respect; emigration abroad by high level manpower is probably the most coveted outlet, but to conceal its true origin is labelled "brain drain" to suggest that somehow the guilt is on the receiving side; finally, new institutions, boards are being created to deal with the alleged complexities of modern life and to sidetrack the queueing segments of the generation without hope for thirty years.

Developing societies are not the only ones where important posts are being filled by people who were at the right place at the right time, but they provide an excellent illustration of stresses caused by an interaction of different factors. It can be seen that we are confronted with a complex set of demographic, sociological, economic, political, historical, and accidental considerations. To give them the journalistic label of "generation gap" is singularly misleading, and also unhelpful in identifying the real causes and in designing, hopefully, remedial action. We need to guard against the use of concepts, however valid, that are applied unprofitably in some situations, and reserve their use to instances when they can be utilized profitably. If developing societies had colonized slowly and allowed in their social structure for the creation of generation gaps for economic purposes of regulating promotions on the opportunity pyramids, many of their stresses would acquire less extreme forms.

In developed societies, the affluence in the young market for luxury goods does not seem to be the same it used to be. Advertising agencies for motor manufacturers have switched their theme from shrill colours and heady words to muted colours and sober assurances. Male car models are made to trim their sideburns and pose in conventional clothes (*Time*, 9 February 1970, p. 56), but film producers look to the youthful market (*ibid*, p. 62); either they cannot afford as good demographic advice as the car industry or the youth, after a flush of affluence, had to revert to movies, the least expensive form of entertainment. The effects of the demographic wave are felt in almost every walk of life. School pupils tend to stay in school (and students in the university) and the proportions of drop-outs is declining when there is high unemployment in the relevant age group (*Edmonton Journal*, 16 December, 1969).

A double-humped curve of female labour force participation was an outstanding feature of the Canadian society in the '50s. Some 15 years behind the United States, it was caused by the second-phase recruitment into the labour force of married women after their children went to school. There two humps seem to be becoming less significant, possibly because the first phase of labour force participation by women before child-bearing is becoming overwhelmingly important.

Emoluments, in particular salaries, which were telescoping and narrowing the age differential are now spreading apart. The proportionate increases for older ages, currently taking place, are higher than those for younger ages. There are other changes in the situation apart from the purely monetary one. Twenty-five years ago the new entrants into the labour market were better educated than the older age groups to a marked degree. Today the younger age groups are still better educated but not to a marked degree. In addition, but this is more subjective, their education could be of lower quality and less relevant to the requirements of the society. The quality of university education, having been subject to an expansionist and egalitarian influence, may not be quite what it used to be. Additionally, it may be that a higher proportion of university education relies on less well defined specialities, for which the demand of the society seems to be less immediate. Furthermore, in the earlier parts of this section we suggested that the production of universities has outrun demand. It would not be the first time that the manpower needs were not synchronised with labour force supply. This writer is consulting from time to time with a research institution in New York. For quite a time now the whole secretarial force is university degreed. This model could be followed

in other countries or the production of Universities could be curtailed severely. In either case, the imposition of a generation gap on the opportunity pyramid would avoid undue stresses. In some ways, India is ahead of developed countries in this uncomfortable but avoidable development. The quantity production of its universities is already ahead of needs. The imbalance seems to be lying at the roots of much of the student and other unrest [22].

It might be readily concluded by some readers that this seesaw, pendulum-like change in the relative advantages and disadvantages of age groups is bound to continue indefinitely. This will be so until humanity adjusts itself to the carrying capacities of the globe, and the human specie reaches a zero rate of growth. Such a development, inevitable as it is in the long run, will nevertheless require tremendous adjustments in our social matrix. The adjustments will demand the eventual creation of an age pyramid which will look like a bullet: young ages at the base not very different from older ages higher up the scale. Some human societies are already experiencing, though not completely, such an age distribution (e.g. Austria). A past President of the Population Association of America, who otherwise is very much impressed with the necessity to introduce effective family planning for most of humanity, was so perturbed by the adjustmental difficulties arising out of zero population growth that he advocated a temporary agreement to continuing population growth [7]. He felt that the capitalist system cannot, for the time being, face up to a stationary population size.

Such a solution, or more appropriately, such an inevitable outcome, will introduce gerontocracy as a permanent feature of human society.

There is a seeming contradiction. We argued previously that small numbers and proportions coming on to the labour market enhance the bargaining position of young cohorts vis-a-vis the older cohorts. Now, we foresee the dawn of gerontocracy in spite of the small numbers and proportions coming on to the labour market. The contradiction is only apparent and the explanation lies in the "steady" state, which will prevail with zero population growth. The society, and more specifically its economic base, will happily adjust (and better swiftly, otherwise the capitalist system will go bust) to the smaller recruitment. It is the relative changes between cohorts which were increasing or decreasing the power of the new recruits rather than differences in absolute numbers. Thus, far from juvenocracy, recently called for, the opposite would prevail. Once more the importance of the age pyramid will reassert itself.

In view of this presentation, it could very well be that this section of the paper should be called "economic unavailability" rather than "economic necessity". The pendulum swings to both extremes with an inevitability, which is fatalistic, and will be fatal, unless humanity reaches a zero population growth rate. The end of swings will mean the end of the variations in the proportions coming into the educational institutions, on to the labour market and the marriage market. In the resulting "steady" state none of the symptoms suggesting a generation gap on account of demographic factors will arise.<sup>17</sup> Thus, the economic necessity or unavailability will fade away. Only journalists

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<sup>17</sup>Zero growth is not a necessary condition of the "steady" state, but it is sufficient. A steady state is also compatible with what demographers call stable growth. The symptoms, which misleadingly give some credence to the generation gap, would disappear with either zero growth or stable growth.

and the more stubborn sociologists will chase the echoes of what they thought, were the generation conflicts of the past, but were merely outcomes of changes in the age pyramid when compared with the opportunity pyramid.

It is sometimes said that populations mature like individuals. Some of our cultures, or at least populations more exposed to this maturing process, have reached now one of the declining stages. In other words, these cultures may be coming to an end. The extraordinary outbursts of younger cohorts and the extreme tolerance of these outbursts by the older cohorts could be viewed as a sign of a declining culture.

It has been pointed out that the '60s in the United States were different from the '50s on account of the military draft. The absence of the draft is thus the explanation of the tranquility of the '50s. However, the '60s were also different by having had an unvictorious war. More damaging to the generality of this explanation, many countries without wars, other than the United States, are supposed to experience the generation gap.

Then the point could be made that the present generation is the product of the care-free breeding by their parents in the late '40s and early '50s. Stresses arise because the sons cannot themselves breed off-springs as recklessly as their parents. This they cannot do because of the previously explained interplay of economic and demographic forces on the marriage market and labour market. They are quite unprepared for restraint [1].

Ignorance of history of literature and of the development of the human thought and culture is another source of the belief in the uniqueness of the present pains, while in fact Werner's *Weltschmerzen* have been with us for many generations. "The electrifying influence exercised on a whole generation... by *Demain* is unforgettable... this... work... struck... a whole youth generation [after the first World War]... [14, p. ix]. It will be recalled that the problems of the hero arose out of the fact that for reasons unclear to at least one reader, the hero boasted untruthfully that he was stealing apples from a neighbour's tree. Something like viewing in a campus skirmish another *Goetterdaemmerung*.

Still another explanation: "Students who lash out at the institution within their reach are but acting out in life what their parents pay good money to see acted out on the stage" [4]. It is seldom that they even get an inkling of the life led by their contemporaries in truly planned and regimented societies. The fact that many of our "worries" are like a charade, like a visit to the theatre for a show, which, it is known, will come to an end before midnight and we will all go back to our cozy homes, has other strange corollaries or associations. The suicidal compulsion to shun practical tactics, the use of politically unsaleable formulations, the self-destructive acts of violence, the intellectual nihilism, extreme demands for juvenocracy; all are meant to ensure that ideas propagated through such means are not acceptable to the society at large.

Or: large numbers enter universities for non-academic reasons, such as lack of alternatives, to escape the draft, to comply with parental desire, and so on. They are what the President of Yale University, Kingman Brewster, Jr., called the "involuntary campus" (*U.S. News and World Report*, 12 January 1970, p. 29). In this milieu, university programmes have been spun out

into years and years.<sup>18</sup> Staying at a university has become a way of life [2, p. 97], secluded from the crude, ruthless, and impersonal demands of the cold world outside. We hinted earlier that structural societal changes have delayed the giving of adult responsibilities to young people and might be even responsible for the very creation of adolescence. It is difficult to know which is the egg and which the hen. They seem to be feeding on each other. The apparent horror of adulthood is accompanied by the development of a morbid interest (and expertise) in procedural questions in the hope that these will serve as substitutes for real life, for performing a real role in the society. If any of these hypotheses are realistic, much campus unrest—and much of the generation gap?—could be traced back to these developments.

Another edition of the unreality or charade argument runs as follows. In the past, younger generations were confronted with “real problems”. The youth of the Tsarist Russia had the oppressive, autocratic government and contributed to the various anti-Tsarist movements. Earlier, the youth of Germany helped to unite Germany. Somewhat later, but long before Hitler, German youth—still in the same nationalistic spirit, it will be noted—developed anti-semitism. In the '30s there was the small, but nevertheless sufficient, satisfaction of the hunger of pre-Keynesian economic crisis and the possible and real complaints about the failings of the then-prevailing capitalist system. Only slightly later, there was the revulsion against Franco and Stalin. Then, during the World War II there was the knightly crusade against evil.<sup>19</sup>

What of today? Today the youth has the atomic bombs to worry about, but this worry involves them in a most direct manner. This is not a one-item list. With problems of food supply, population, pollution, and depletion of resources in addition, humanity is confronted with dangers of magnitudes hitherto unknown. But there is nothing generational about these dangers (Trueman [23], was confused on this point). What is new is the realization that “time has run out on the age old ideas that human progress means more people and more energy. This is the very crux of what has put the youth of the world in revolt against science and technology” [9]. In other words, the world might have reached a turning point and it will never be again the same, but the fact that there may be different generations on each side of the corner is purely accidental. It still remains to be shown that the new values will withstand unemployment of 8 percent in the vulnerable age groups. With regard to the pollution issue it is apparent that, contrary to general statements, sizeable proportions of the young age groups seem to be unaware of the “cynicism displayed by many polluters, including some in agriculture who have fought government regulations while abdicating self-regulations” [5].

<sup>18</sup>A contradiction is arising in this section to an extent greater than in others. On the one hand it is argued that there can be no generation gap, because there are no generations. On the other it is said repeatedly that many of the symptoms, which appear to the present day observers, have been occurring over and over again, that is with each cohort. It is readily admitted that the subtlety of the argument is occasionally finer than the dexterity of this pen.

<sup>19</sup>No doubt universities, which teach ill-defined answer-avoiding non-subjects, are responsible for prevailing confusion in the young minds joining them. However, no doubt a very great majority of university teachers know what they are teaching. Not that there is anything new in these concerns. What is new is the suggestion that they have arisen only recently. “The great problems of education seem to be as unsolved now (wrote Stephen Leacock in 1936) as they were half a century ago” [3]. Already three centuries ago a noted Czech school reformer Jan Amos Comenius was asking himself XX century questions.

In short, it is the worry about their own survival. It is not the concern about the right and well-being of others only. It is this basic situation which deprives the movements of young cohorts of the feeling of uninvolved idealism.<sup>20</sup>

It is not a part of this paper to suggest that all the theorizing about the generation gap is faulty. Some societies seem to be experiencing changes with a considerable contribution from the younger age groups. There are some indications, subject still to confirmation, that Cuba is developing a society superior on all human and humanistic grounds, however inefficient economically. There is the example of Korea, where several interesting developments are taking place simultaneously. Possibly due to large scale migration, induced by the vagaries of the war, the proportion of blue collar students at the universities is the highest in the world, or at least the highest out of countries with acceptable statistics. It is also a feature of the Korean society that, alone among the countries with family planning programmes, and ignoring the special case of the Chinese fringe societies in East Asia, it can show success attributed directly to the family planning programme.

In the developed world and over the recent past there has been a prevalence of peace. It is puzzling to some and satisfying to others. Let us suggest a few *ad hoc* ideas. Peace prevails now as a result of the embarrassment caused by the somewhat exorbitant behaviour of some sections of the younger cohorts. There seems to be a "perceptible conscious reaction against the cult of bad manners and violence" (*The Economist*, 22 November 1969, p. 47). It might be no more than a pendulum reaction. It is possible that it is over-reaction to the crude words and coarse behaviour. It might also be that the insufficient certification by universities, that is, insufficient to employers in the sane outside world, will have a solitary effect on the varying and uncertain purposes of university programmes.<sup>21</sup>

Finally, it could simply be that there is an awakening that not all the products of universities can be engaged directly on the labour market. There are still elites coming out of some of the universities, but the rapid increases in the number of universities and in the size of universities, results in basic changes in the nature of the product with all the attendant consequences. One of the consequences could be a switch in university education from an investment good to a consumption good. The resulting frustration of products aiming at invest-

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<sup>20</sup>The crusade was somehow confused by the fact that it was conducted on the side of another satrap but nevertheless the main thrust was an anti-Hitler crusade. On the other hand, it has been suggested [12] that xenophobia prevented some of the refugees from Hitler's regime to take up suitable tasks in the United States in the '30s. Thirty years later, it was young voices who were raising objections to the special arrangements made by the universities for Czech refugees from the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968 though they were more united in the support of Chilean refugees in 1973. Still, by and large, it can be said that youth was confronted with real problems, even if they did not always respond to them equally idealistically.

<sup>21</sup>Acceptance by the "sane" outside world may not be a convincing standard to many who consider the world society wasteful, narrow minded, and lacking foresight most of the time. However, it is difficult to suggest an acceptable standard with a sufficient degree of objectivity and efficiency. The philosophical and moral justification for "think tanks" and the actual experience with them in autocratic regimes is not encouraging.



ment, but receiving consumption, could be another explanation of the aimless unrest of the victims of this process.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>This text depends heavily on other people's writings, more heavily than the frequent acknowledgements in the text; particularly so on Feuer [11] and Goodman [13]. The writer is also indebted to extensive comments received on an earlier draft from James Hackler, Professor of Sociology at the University of Alberta. It was not possible to give full references even when paraphrasing verged on plagiarism. The use made is entirely this writer's fault.

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