THE END OF THE LONG BABY-BOOMER GENERATION? IF SO, WHAT NEXT?

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Abstract

This paper argues that the post-war baby boomers led a long generation in which successive cohorts achieved, and came to expect, continuous improvement in living standards. The paper then notes that some members of current cohorts of young highly educated Europeans, mainly from middle class families, fear that they will be unable to live as well as their parents. It is argued that this situation arose initially within the working classes, and is now spreading upwards. The paper suggests that this new trend is unlikely to be reversed on account of: i. economic growth rates slowing since the three decades that immediately followed the Second World War; ii. costs of imported commodities will most likely continue to rise; iii. new cohorts of workers will have to bear some of the costs of supporting swollen cohorts of retired citizens, tackling pollution, and alleviating climate change; iv. The costs of raising children are likely to continue to rise, and new cohorts of workers will most likely need to make some private provisions for their health care and retirement incomes if they are to live like their parents; v. there are now excessive numbers of higher education graduates in all world regions relative to the number of graduate jobs; and vi. the changing class demography in West Europe and North America. The paper concludes by considering possible outcomes which include intensified inter- and intra-generational conflict.

Keywords: baby boomers, birth cohorts, generations, €1000 generation, standards of living, students, youth cultures.
Introduction

The baby boomers were the first in a series of birth cohorts who lived better than their predecessors in terms of levels of income and consumption. The baby boomers led the march into the consumer age. The following passages argue that this era began to end, initially within the working classes, during the closing decades of the 20th century. Today, throughout the West, it is argued that critical masses of middle class youth are experiencing this new youth condition. The outcomes remain unclear, but will necessarily involve transformational change in politics (old education, training and labour market policies designed to assist young people have manifestly ceased to work), and also in the character of adulthood.

Cohorts and generations

The following passages use ‘generation’ in a neo-Mannheimian sense; ‘neo’ for insisting that not all birth cohorts become new generations, and that new generations are not necessarily and explicitly political. Karl Mannheim (1952) wrote about the new political generations that were formed, mainly in continental Europe, after the First World War. Cohorts who grew into political awareness during and following this war rejected their countries’ established political leaders, policies and parties, and flocked into the then ascendant communist and fascist movements. In the event, this political generation proved short-lived. Recruitment into these movements fizzled to a trickle in most of the countries following the Second World War.

Evidence subsequently assembled has shown that Mannheim was correct in treating youth as the life stage when enduring political orientations are formed. Throughout the remainder of their lives, people are most likely to be able to recall political events and actors from the years when they first became politically aware (for evidence, see Schuman and Corning,
Thereafter, people hold fairly settled worldviews: they know which and whose sides they are on, and can respond to subsequent events accordingly.

The following passages do not depart from so much as build upon Mannheim in insisting that generations can be identified by their economic and socio-cultural as well as their political orientations and practices, and in clearly distinguishing new generations from new cohorts. Modern industrial and post-industrial societies change continuously. Thus every birth cohort experiences a rather different childhood and youth compared with its predecessor. This does not make every cohort a new generation. The terms cohort and generation are often used interchangeably, but since we have two words it can be helpful to draw a distinction. This is between, on the one hand, changes that are evolutionary, incremental or developmental, then, on the other hand, those that are transformative. The former extend and build upon earlier trends; the latter are a rupture. When changes are developmental or evolutionary, young people’s life stage problems will be basically similar to, and can be addressed in basically the same ways that worked for their elders. Governments need simply to update and refresh their youth policies. Transformative changes, in contrast, require wholly new thinking by the vanguard members of new generations themselves, and also by governments. Wholly new minds, and maybe new political movements and parties, may be required.

**The baby boomer generation**

Following World War II another new generation was formed in Western Europe and North America (‘the West’ as these lands were henceforth known). Ronald Inglehart described the baby boomers as a post-scarcity generation (Inglehart, 1977). They have been the vanguard cohort in a long generation, encompassing all cohorts in Western countries up to the present. Unlike predecessors, these cohorts have not felt threatened by subsistence poverty. In the
immediate post-war decades the threat of unemployment disappeared in most regions of Western countries. The baby boomers and their successors have not grown up being prepared for war. According to Inglehart, these conditions have encouraged the spread of post-materialist, self-expression values, a commitment to peace between nations, and greater equality between men and women, rulers and governed, parents and children, and between different ethnic groups and nationalities. Inglehart’s research has expanded into the series of World Values Surveys (Inglehart, 1997). These have distinguished traditional, modern, and post-modern (post-scarcity) values, and up to now the latter have been the end of the sequence. Following the baby boomer cohort, new generations have been announced regularly – generations x, y and z, Thatcher’s children in the UK, the internet generation, and so on. These have really been just cohorts. They have been distinguished by their youthful experiences, tastes and practices, but none have re-invented adulthood.

The baby boomers themselves have rightly been described as a lucky and privileged cohort (see Willetts, 2010). They grew up in strong welfare states, entered labour markets amid full employment, at a time when middle class jobs were increasing rapidly. Those who established themselves in professional and management careers have been most likely to see these careers survive subsequent recessions (Buchholz et al, 2009). Their living standards have improved throughout their adult lives. They have been part of the spread of home and car ownership, television (now colour and multi-channel), foreign travel, and computer and internet technologies. Their living standards have been boosted by supplies of relatively cheap (by present-day standards) imports or locally sourced oil and gas, and in recent decades by imports of relatively cheap manufactured products from the new industrialising countries. They are now retiring with more wealth than any previous cohorts, and with more generous
pensions than previous and, most likely, any foreseeable future cohorts (see Higgs et al., 2009).

Some subsequent cohorts have faced higher risks of unemployment on completing education, which may have scarred some careers for life, but these have been mere blips on a landscape of continuous improvement. Most, though not all (see below), members of all post-war cohorts have lived better lives than their predecessors in terms of levels of consumption and the acquisition of possessions. Indeed, continuous improvement has become built-into the expectations of all cohorts in the long baby boomer generation. The lengthening of youth transitions which has enabled, indeed required, young people to construct so-called ‘choice biographies’ has not diverted successive cohorts from the upward path. Members of the baby boomer cohort became their countries’ political leaders during the closing decades of the 20th century. They have not been challenged by new movements, with new leaders and ideologies, supported mainly by younger cohorts.

The inter-war generation was relatively short-lived. The baby boomer, post-scarcity generation has now lasted for 60 years, but the signs are that its era is now ending, slowly, because up to now there has been no third world war, nor a deep and sustained global recession, nor an ecological calamity to accelerate change and mark the transition to a new phase in history.

The €1000 generation

This is the title of an Italian book that Anatonio Incorvaia and Alessandro Rimassa published on the internet in 2005. Subsequently the book inspired an Italian film, then thousands of internet blogs and interactive sites, In 2010 a Google search recorded over 19 million hits.
The title of the book and film, and the topic, have clearly struck widespread chords throughout the relevant generation in many European countries.

The book and the film were about the lives of 20- and 30-somethings in Italy who were continuing to live as students, renting cheap rooms or sharing flats, or more likely still living with their parents, still partly dependent on ‘the bank of mum and dad’, shopping at cheap food and clothes stores, and using low cost airlines to take holidays once in a (long) while. The book and film presented the €1000 generation as happy-go-lucky crowd, but the internet sites suggest otherwise. Many members of this generation fear that they will never be able to live like their parents (see Chiotaki-Poulou and Sakalariou, 2010). A common refrain is that their elders lived well, partly at the new generation’s expense.

The €1000 generation see no escape from temporary, low paid jobs. They have plenty of work experience but their starter jobs have not been stepping stones onto middle class career ladders. Thirty-somethings discover that they are still eligible for special measures originally designed for school and college-leavers (Cuzzocrea and Tavani, 2010). The vocal members of the €1000 generation are not poorly-qualified early school-leavers. They are well-qualified university graduates, mostly from middle class families, who have found that the once reliable routes into middle class careers have not worked for them. Politicians, it appears, have nothing to offer except more of the same.

€1000 refers to the typical monthly salary that the generation was being offered in 2005, and the sum was unchanged in 2010. The recession that began in 2008 had by then spread the experience among larger numbers of Europe’s young graduates, and €1000 had become an attractive starting salary throughout much of Europe. In Greece and Portugal €1000 had
always been a top-end starting salary, and in the new market economies of East-Central and South-East Europe even €700 was a good offer. A point to note is that the book was published in 2005. The predicament of the €1000 generation cannot be dismissed as a temporary recession induced phenomenon. The generation appears to have developed a characteristic consciousness only during the 21st century, but there had been earlier signs of its gestation. Charvel (2006) has shown that in France since the 1980s 30 year olds in employment have been earning less than their parents earned at age 30. The GLOBALIFE project (see Buchholz et al, 2009) has shown that, throughout OECD countries, young people have been among the losers during recent economic restructuring in terms of their chances of being in employment and levels of pay relative to other age groups.

The threat of an inter-generational decline in living standards has been obscured by the lengthening of youth life stage transitions – prolonged education, and later entry to full-time, long-term employment. By 2008 29 had become the earliest age when the majority of a cohort throughout the EU27 was in stable (full-time, officially permanent) employment (Social Agenda, 2009). Typical ages of becoming a parent and marriage have also risen. In the UK the average age of women giving birth for the first time is now 29. The typical ages of UK couples marrying for the first time are now early-30s for women and mid-30s for men. In the new market economies young people facing protracted difficulties in finding acceptable employment have been able to take comfort from the belief that not only are they still in life stage transition, but that their countries also are still in transition to becoming properly functioning market economies (see Roberts, 2009).

The impact of the inter-generational decline in job prospects and living standards is also being cushioned by inter-generational transfers of wealth. In some countries (for example,
Ireland, the UK, Portugal, Spain, Italy and Greece) the younger generations will have to take-on and pay-off public sector debts (part of an alleged mess) that their elders have left. Overall, however, this will be outweighed by inter-generational transfers of privately held wealth. Levels of household debt have been rising in most OECD countries over the last 20 years, but privately held wealth has risen at least as steeply, and vastly exceeds household debts (see Table I). The wealth and debts tend to be held by the same households. The wealth is mainly in the form of dwellings and savings (mostly in pension funds). The savings may be exhausted by the older cohorts during their years of retirement. Some of the wealth tied-up in dwellings may be mortgaged to sustain the elders’ levels of consumption and, in some cases, to pay for their long-term residential care. Overall, however, younger generations are inheriting, and for many years will continue to inherit, private assets that will enable some to maintain their parents’ standards of living even if younger cohorts cannot obtain equally attractive well-paid jobs. This will not reverse, but will simply obscure and defer the inter-generational decline if upcoming generations are unable to earn as much and therefore to save and leave as much to their own descendants.

Table I
Household debt and wealth: percent of annual disposable income

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<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>135</td>
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<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>736</td>
<td>750</td>
<td>725</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>541</td>
<td>575</td>
<td>578</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>461</td>
<td>547</td>
<td>752</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>702</td>
<td>820</td>
<td>936</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>569</td>
<td>750</td>
<td>790</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>370</td>
<td>527</td>
<td>640</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>514</td>
<td>567</td>
<td>734</td>
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<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>188</td>
<td>236</td>
<td>260</td>
<td>357</td>
<td>524</td>
<td>562</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>302</td>
<td>319</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>141</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>618</td>
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<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>246</td>
<td>369</td>
<td>528</td>
<td>515</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>472</td>
<td>445</td>
<td>670</td>
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Another ‘cushion’ has been the increase in the number of dual earners households. University-educated women in particular have been pursuing full-time, scarcely interrupted employment careers in increasing numbers. If partnered, these women’s menfolk are usually equally well-educated, doing similar professional and management jobs. If they become mothers, these women are stay-at-home mums only for brief periods of maternity leave (see Kay, 1996, 1998). Two full salary earners, instead of just one or one-and-a-half, obscures any inter-cohort decline in occupational levels and salaries.

The inter-generational decline in job quality and pay actually began in the working classes in countries whose economies de-industrialised in the 1970s, 80s and subsequently. This process destroyed swathes of ‘quality’ (skilled, long-lasting, higher paid) manual jobs (see Goos and Manning, 2003). Thus in the UK, for example, a working class job has become less likely to keep a household out of poverty (see Hills et al, 2002). Europe’s and North America’s working classes, especially working class youth, were the first to experience the spread of low-paid, precarious, often part-time employment. This class lacked sustained cultural and political voice. Those affected were told that they were at fault for their lack of sufficient education, up-to-date skills, and sometimes work motivation. The plight of the more vocal €1000 generation signals the predicament spreading into the middle classes. A sign of the times in the UK has been a government-appointed Panel on Fair Access to the Professions (2009) seeking to equalise opportunities among graduates to access *unpaid* internships.
The triggers that provoke a new consciousness among young people are likely to vary from country to country. Throughout much of Europe it has been low and non-incremental graduate salaries. Elsewhere, the UK being the prime example, the triggers may be the withdrawal of middle class welfare benefits (such as Child Benefit for higher earners), and the privatisation of the costs and the escalation of the risks of investing in higher education. These trends are likely to leave graduates confronting situations where the levels of debt that they need to service and repay, and the levels of taxation on their annual salaries of £20K-£30K (relatively generous by global standards), are incompatible with living as well as their parents. The manifestations may vary, but throughout the West there are long-term, underlying trends (see below) that are ending the baby-boomer experience and expectation of forever increasing prosperity.

The slow death of the baby boomer generation

The fear of the generation of €1000 that they will be unable to live as well as their parents is more than recession-fuelled media hype. The fear is linked to long-term underlying trends of which members of the €1000 generation themselves are unlikely to be fully aware.

i. Economic growth rates in the Western world have slowed since the ’30 glorious years’ that followed World War II. West European countries averaged annual growth rates of 4.06% between 1950 and 1973: during the next 23 years the growth rate dropped to an annual average of just 1.86%. In the USA the decline was from 2.45% to 1.91%. In a longer-term historical context, it is the ’30 glorious years’ that were exceptional (see Table II). Subsequently the growth rate has slipped back towards its long-term historical norm from which it is unlikely to leap barring another world war or major calamity from which the economies can then recover.
### Table II
Annual rates of growth in real GDP per person

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Western Europe</th>
<th>USA</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1820-1870</td>
<td>0.98%</td>
<td>1.34%</td>
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<tr>
<td>1870-1913</td>
<td>1.33%</td>
<td>1.82%</td>
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<tr>
<td>1913-1950</td>
<td>0.78%</td>
<td>1.61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950-1973</td>
<td>4.06%</td>
<td>2.45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1973-2005</td>
<td>1.86%</td>
<td>1.91%</td>
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Data from Crafts and Toniolo, 2008.

ii. Western consumers are likely to face progressively rising real prices for oil, gas and other imported commodities. In 1950 the USA produced 52% of the world’s oil: by 1997 it was just 10%. The global price of oil fluctuated around $2.50 per barrel in 1950. It had risen to around $3.50 by 1970, then to over $20 by 1980 and was over $90 in 2008. The 1950 price, adjusted for inflation to 2008 values, would have been $19.70. There has been a four-fold increase in real terms\(^1\). There are likely to be similar rises in the prices of other commodities where the earth’s supply is finite because demand is rising not only in the West, but most of all in the newer industrial economies of Asia (especially India and China) and Latin America.

iii. There will be additional demands on whatever growth in GDP Western countries are able to achieve. These include the support of growing numbers of elderly citizens. Future workers will have to cover at least part of the costs of their pensions and the medical care which will enable them to draw pensions for even longer. Birth rates declined after the original baby boomer cohorts were born. This means that there are currently declining numbers of workers to support each retired person, and this will be just one among several rising demands on Western countries’ ability to spend. The costs of education are likely to continue to rise. Then there are some of the costs of economic growth itself: handling the pollution (including nuclear waste) and minimising climate change. All this will mean that little of whatever
economic growth is achieved will be available to support the living standards of upcoming cohorts of workers.

iv. There will be additional demands on household incomes that are left after taxes. The costs of raising children are likely to continue to grow, especially the costs of those who progress through higher education. Recent graduates, earning €1000, will need and want to budget for this. They will also realise that they will need to budget to meet some of the costs of their own health care, and to save for their own retirement, if they are to enjoy the same standards as their parents.

v. There will be constant downward pressure on the salaries offered to members of the €1000 generation of graduates and their successors. This is on account of the steep recent increases in the supply of university graduates in all world regions. In 1950 worldwide there were just 13 million students enrolled in higher education. There were 82 million by 1995 and 132 million in 2004 (Morley, 2007). An outcome is that highly educated young people are now plentiful in all world regions, and cheap. Higher education pays handsomely only when the supply of graduates is exceeded by demand for their services. The ease with which ‘professional’ jobs can be outsourced, sent offshore to the other side of the world using present-day ICT, the willingness and ability of young people from poorer countries to migrate to richer lands (see Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2009), allied to the scope for digital Taylorism – breaking down hitherto professional skills into simple operations – makes a revival of graduate salaries unlikely (see Brown et al, 2010).

vi. Perhaps most basically of all, the new class demography in Western countries works against a prolongation of the era of continuous improvement. Until the 1950s most Western
countries had working class majorities in their workforces. These working classes have now shrunk and become minorities. Managers and professionals now amount to around 40% of all employees in these societies, and as in the UK (see Roberts, 2010), they now produce the majority of university students and graduates. The majority of graduates and new entrants to management and professional jobs are no longer upwardly mobile. They are having to race harder than in the past just to maintain their positions in the class structure. This is not due to a decline in social mobility. Children from working class homes have better than ever prospects of social ascent (see Roberts, 2001). The new situation is that the majority of the young people who succeed in education today have started life in positions from which ascent is difficult to achieve. For them, any mobility is most likely to be downwards. This is their fear, and in terms of the quality of their occupations and living standards it is likely to be the fate of many.

Discussion: conflict of the generations and other possible outcomes

The birth of any new generation is likely to be accompanied by inter-generational conflict, but the character of this conflict will always depend on the character of the old and new generations. After World War I there were fierce conflicts in politics and on the streets of Europe between upstarts and upholders of the old orders, and also between different (communist and fascist) factions of the new generation. Following World War II it was the new youth cultures, followed by the student movements of the 1960s, that alarmed and perplexed elders, and led to talk of inter-generational conflict replacing class struggle (see Feuer, 1969). Elders wondered whatever cosseted youth could be complaining about. There was more hostility towards, and more incomprehension of the young by the old, than vice-versa (Eppel and Eppel, 1966). It has been different during the birth of the latest, post-baby boomer generation. Elders feel that the youth life stage was easier to transit when they were
young. They worry about their children’s unwillingness or inability to embark on long-term occupational careers, to establish themselves on home ownership ladders, and to settle in stable heterosexual partnerships (see Halsey and Young, 1997). Alarm and anger may initially be expressed by the parents and grandparents of today’s young people. They may be angered about the low salaries that their well-qualified children are being offered, the shortage of long-term career jobs, the withdrawal of Child Benefit and the debts that the young are incurring, and frustrated that they, the elders, lack the resources to remedy or compensate for young people’s difficulties. One can join a new generation at any chronological age, but it is always the young whose lives depend on answering the new problems and implementing an agenda.

Up to now most young people appear to have been more relaxed than their elders about the formers’ situations. In this respect they are portrayed accurately in the Italian book and film about the €1000 generation. Students may shrug off worries about the debts they are accumulating through knowing that so many of their peers are in the same situation. Arnett (2005), an American sociologist, claims to have identified a new ‘emerging adulthood’ life stage during which individuals voluntarily postpone their social development in order to enjoy a prolonged youth. Cote (2000), a Canadian sociologist, claims that maturation into full adulthood is being set permanently at risk during the extended period in their lives when young people are not required to exercise full adult responsibilities. Devadason (2007) shows that many of the 20-somethings who hop from job to job, apparently making no career progress, are at ease with their precarious labour market situations, and are able to build and maintain coherent views of their biographies by progressively adding to their skills and experience, and recording these on lengthening CVs. Young people have not been psychologically devastated by their inability (for the present) to embark on the kinds of
occupational careers and family lives that their parents led. In this respect they have been different from older workers whose careers have been prematurely terminated during waves of economic restructuring and who, according to Sennett (1998), have been likely to experience a ‘corrosion of character’.

However, as documented earlier, some members of the €1000 generation fear that they will never be able to embark on the kinds of occupational careers and achieve the standards of living of their parents, and some do blame their elders for acting irresponsibly and selfishly, protecting their positions at the expense of the young. They have the support of David Willetts (2010), a UK politician and government minister since 2010, but writing before then, who has argued that elders should yield and return decent futures to the young. This could mean reallocating jobs, repealing age discrimination laws that allow seniors to stay in their jobs beyond what has hitherto been normal retirement age so as to allow younger people to advance. Rather than enhancing retirement pensions and extending free travel and other perks for seniors, governments could offer more support to students and young people seeking independent housing. Wealth and high earnings could be subjected to higher taxes thereby enabling lower-paid young people to benefit from lower taxes and higher minimum pay. In practice, none of this agenda is likely to be implemented given the weight of the ‘grey vote’ in the relevant countries. In any case, not all seniors are well-off, and young people en masse are unlikely to turn against elders who house them, act as ‘the bank of mum and dad’, and whose dwellings and other assets they will eventually inherit. Also, the young’s gains from immediate transfers of income and employment opportunities would turn against the same cohorts when, later on, their own earning careers were curtailed and they faced retirement on inadequate pensions. Fighting an inter-generational war offers no long term solutions to the new situations and problems of the post-baby boomer generation.
Even if the baby boomer generation has already ended in the sense that rising living standards from cohort to cohort in all socio-demographic groups can no longer be taken for granted, the cultural and political character of the new generation remains undecided. Inter-generational conflict is a possibility even if it offers no long-term solutions to anyone. The conviction that the old mantras – expand GDP and become better educated, trained and qualified – will no longer work, will need to sink deeper and more widespread roots prior to seismic cultural and political transformations, but these are most likely to happen eventually if the era of progressive improvement really is over.

The new generation, whatever its character, is unlikely to be a truly global generation as some commentators have predicted (for example Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2009; Edmunds and Turner, 2005). Some of the necessary conditions exist – higher than formerly inter-country rates of mobility of persons and information, and the formation of transnational virtual communities – but while necessary these are not sufficient conditions. The change of circumstance described above applies only in the West. Most young people in former communist countries believe that they will live better lives than their parents (see Roberts, 2009). In the third world continuous improvement has never become a common experience or assumption. In Western countries the change of era is being experienced differently by middle class, university-educated youth than was the case among the working classes for whom the changes began several decades ago in many of the countries. €1000 causes alarm only when it is offered as a non-incremental middle class salary in the affluent West.

We must bear in mind that some well-educated young people in Western countries are continuing to progress into well-paid, long-term career jobs soon after completing university.
Graduates are not all part of the €1000 career group in any country. Some are still stepping straight out of universities into high-rising long-term careers. The rest are bound to ask, ‘Why not all of us?’ A faction may settle for living like students as a long-term, eco-friendly adult lifestyle, compatible with zero-growth. Others are likely to continue to seek to emulate the successful. Up to now there has been no decline in the number of young people seeking to enter higher education. There will be several reasons: the erosion in the number and quality of jobs open to earlier education-leavers, the status and other attractions of the student lifestyle, and the need to graduate in order to compete for middle class, career jobs (see Brown and Hesketh, 2004). Middle class young people are not quitting the ‘rat race’. Some who are being denied the futures to which they feel entitled may pioneer a respectable racism, demanding that good jobs be reserved for the titular national group. If they wish to live like their parents, they will need to will the means. They may demand foreign policies that enable their countries to control the earth’s natural resources, and make these resources available for first world citizens at low cost. Some may demand that good jobs be reserved for the best-educated, that is, strengthened credentialism, and that access to the relevant education should be restricted to the academically most able. Any of these outcomes will mean that the change of era sharpens intra-generational conflicts between countries in different world regions, and between nationalities and ethnic groups, and socio-occupational and educational classes within countries.

Conclusions

Every birth cohort throughout the industrial and post-industrial ages has experienced a youth life stage with new features. Since 1945 these new features have been due to some combination of changes in family patterns and practices, the expansion of educational opportunities and changes in the labour market, always in the context of economic growth
that has created enlarged consumption opportunities. Until the late-20\textsuperscript{th} century the new youths did not become new generations. As adults they lived like their elders, maybe a little differently, and in most cases rather better in material terms. Governments’ core youth policies were consistent over time: to provide more education and training so that more young people could benefit from economic growth, particularly groups who were formerly disadvantaged be these groups the working class, females or ethnic minorities.

The latest new youth condition will necessarily be transformative. We can be sure of this even though we cannot forecast exactly what the outcomes will be. The latest new youth condition is one in which most members of most socio-demographic groups are finding it difficult to live as well, let alone better than, their elders, in which the proportion of jobs that are higher-grade and higher-paid must, at best, stagnate, and in which governments together with young people and their families feel less confident about and, in any case, less able to invest in, to afford, the amounts of education that earlier cohorts received.
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