

Our legacy: more take than give

By TOM McCLINTOCK

A new decade is now just five months away, and this particular one brings with it the bizarre prospect of the first generation after Haight-Ashbury, Woodstock, and Chicago. The Haydens and Fondas who led the great counterculture movement of the '60s are now themselves part of the new establishment, and their sons and daughters will soon become the "in" generation.

Which makes the prospect of a new generation gap utterly intriguing, because the generation of the 1980s and '90s has every right to be one of the most serious, purposeful, and angry countercultures in history. Few generations have been so exploited, so cheated, and so poorly provided for than those who will come of age in the next two decades.

One grievance, for instance, ought to be taxation without representation — the parasitic predilection of the New Establishment for forcing its youth to pay for its own profligacy — a practice euphemistically called the "public debt."

Past generations have resorted to borrowing against the future only when in imminent national peril or for investments to be shared with their progeny. But the New Establishment has used the debt as a convenient tax on future generations for services that it, alone, receives. In its basest terms, it is a scheme to make today's toddlers pay for services they will not receive, for benefits they will not enjoy, and for decisions upon which they have not been consulted. It is the theft of youth's future earnings to pay for the avarice of the New Establishment.

This exploitative relationship has reached astronomical proportions during these final

years of the 1970s. From 1950 to 1960, the public debt increased about 28 percent, from \$240 billion to \$308 billion. During the next 10 years, it accelerated to 57 percent increase. In the first six years of the 1970s, though, it shot up a staggering 71 percent, and should finish the decade with an additional increase during these last four years alone of well over 30 percent, weighing in over a trillion dollars.

The toddlers of today, the youth of the 1980s, and the adults of the 1990s will have to pay not only their own bills, but also those incurred to satisfy the current generation's greed. The new youth are a generation unconsulted, uninformed, and unrepresented in these decisions which will so profoundly affect their daily economic lives.

Social Security is another injustice in what ought to become the new counterculture.

The generation of the 1930s established Social Security as an equitable system of retirement benefits, but the Old and New Establishments turned their lusty eyes upon it as another cornucopia of riches for lavishing benefits upon themselves. A concerted effort began to shift the burdens of welfare, disability benefits, and child support off the shoulders of the present generation, and onto the shoulders of their children by raiding this retirement system.

And once again, it is the young who must pay for this abundant generosity, without enjoying the largess. From 1939 to 1959, the maximum annual payments of a worker climbed from \$30 to only \$100. But during the next 20 years, that maximum payment jumped 14-fold to \$1,400. Ten years hence, it is legally mandated to leap another 250 percent. But alas, even with this enormous increase, the system is expected to be bankrupt by 1984

without yet higher taxes.

And today's youth must pay those benefits to the New Establishment, knowing that in all likelihood, future generations will not be able to return the favor.

Finally, there is the no-growth, small-is-beautiful movement characterized by Jerry Brown. Of all the reasons for a new generation gap, perhaps this is the most compelling.

The New Establishment is the first generation since the fall of Rome that has ever consumed so much of past gifts and future earnings without making provisions for the next generation.

The environmental movement fills every growing town, and meets every promising new energy project, every new proposal for housing and industry, with the shrill and reactionary demand to stop the world. With an age fast approaching where the alternatives are severe shortages of housing, jobs, and energy, the New Establishment rails and raves and rages against more housing, healthier business, and every economically feasible form of energy.

Meanwhile, today's infants and teen-agers are growing into tomorrow's adults, searching for the homes, energy, and jobs that the New Establishment has enjoyed courtesy of its predecessors, but which it has decreed will not be shared by its descendants.

The generation gap of the 1980s, if it comes, will be a gap between the profligate and the victims of that profligacy, between the inheritors of plenty and the inheritors of want. The children of the flower children will need to bear not only the challenges and responsibilities traditionally borne by a generation, but also those defaulted by the present one.