

UNEXPLODING POPULATION: LOCAL SCENE

The official tabulation of the 1970 census figures for Columbus and Muscogee County apparently was emotionally upsetting and caused embarrassment to local officialdom and news editorialists. Instead of a county population "well over 200,000," the census reported officially only 164,235. In 1960, Columbus city population was 116,799, and in spite of recently annexing a large area of county real estate in order to add an estimated 52,000 new residents, the new 1970 census figures gave us a total of only 152,110. If the quoted figures are reasonably correct, it would appear that the city itself had a net loss of about 16,000 persons in the past ten years. A telling blow to the pride of Chamber of Commerce enthusiasts.

It has always been somewhat ridiculous to us that politicians, hungry businessmen and Chamber of Commerce boosters insist that growth at any cost is a desirable goal. For irrational reasons, a rapid spurt in a city's size and population is generally regarded as a sign of progressiveness, a delusion neither shared nor sought by major cities in the more sophisticated Old World. It is a particularly inconsistent attitude now with fashionable alarmists crying about the dangers of population exploding and pollution increasing. It makes no difference that examples of urban sprawl and metropolitan overcrowding abound in all states to the discomfort of all; that the attendant problems of education, municipal services, transportation, taxation, crime, slums and welfare rolls become dreadful burdens that no large metropolitan areas can avoid bigger. Therefore better seems to be the motto.

Instead of being chagrined or red faced about the census population totals, perhaps Columbus should be congratulated on its good fortune. Long-time residents who remember population figures of 25,000 and 45,000 from census counts within their lifetimes will confirm that Columbus has grown. The steady tortoise pace, however unexciting, is preferable to the blind and headlong speed of the irresponsible hare. There is plenty of room for progress and improvement here but quality not quantity, should be the goal of civic boosters. And as for those impatient and short-sighted citizens who long for the prestige of bigness, two hours a day at rush times along the Atlanta freeways should more than satisfy their craving for Incidental Information.