

TIMES, THURSDAY, JUNE 4, 1970

In The Nation: The Fence Is Down

By TOM WICKER

ATLANTA, June 2—Gov. Lester G. Maddox, having spied the international Communist conspiracy at work on The Atlanta Journal and Constitution, has prohibited sales of the newspapers in the state capital and announced he will picket their offices on Forsyth Street. So across the way in the upstairs quarters of the American Civil Liberties Union's Southern staff, director Charles Morgan is preparing a huge banner with which to greet the Governor: "Welcome to First Amendment Country."

This may not be precisely descriptive of the South or of Georgia, where a voter registration worker can still find himself told to get lost by a deputy sheriff or a rural policeman. But it does suggest the kind of political and social ferment at work in the South, and how the extremes of a sad, second-rate demagogue like Lester Maddox can enhance rather than inhibit the process.

Coming a Long Way

Here in Georgia, for instance, one J. B. Stoner has just announced his candidacy for Governor on a platform remarkable for brevity and candor: "I am a racist." But former Gov. Carl Sanders, who is the favorite, is considered a racial moder-

ate. And one of the major candidates is a bearded, professorial black lawyer, C. B. King of Albany.

Mr. King and Georgia thus have come a long way since the days when, as he puts it, he had his "head split" by a sheriff while acting as general counsel for Martin Luther King's "Albany Movement." His campaign for Governor is important, even though he is not given a chance to win by the political buffs who gather in Mr. Morgan's office at the bullbat hour. Nor is the campaign doing as well as his black sponsors had hoped.

Originally, their notion was to put Mr. King—a revered figure in the heavily black area in the southwestern part of this big, varied state—at the head of a lengthy black ticket which would feature numerous black candidates for local and county offices. But after Mr. King was nominated at a convention of the Georgia Black Coalition at Macon last November, things didn't work out that way. Some say Mr. King has not been aggressive and effective enough to lead other black candidates into the field; others agree with him that Southern blacks are still too numb and fearful from decades of effective repression to leap into overt political action.

Mr. King recalls that, as a child, he heard the animal trainer, Clyde Beatty, speak at a school in Albany that featured on its grounds two alligators in a pond surrounded by chain-link fence. Mr. Beatty told the children that after about 25 years of such "conditioning," if the chain-link were to be replaced by tissue paper, the two 'gators would not even try to break through it. "That's exactly what's happened to black people in Southern politics," Mr. King said this week. "They can't quite believe the fence is down."

Spurring Black Political Action

At any rate, the sweeping black ticket envisioned by such black leaders as Julian Bond and Hosea Williams has not been put together. Nevertheless, the King campaign is an important development in the South; since nearly 400,000 of Georgia's 1.6 million registered voters are black, he seems almost certain to make a respectable showing in a field of five candidates, and could force a run-off in which he could swing some political weight between Mr. Sanders and Jimmie Carter, another moderate candidate. It is just such performances that are most needed to stimulate black political action.

Since 1960, for instance, black voter registration in the old Confederacy has more than doubled—1.4 to 3.2 million, with the biggest gains coming since passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Still, this is only about 65 per cent of the voting-age black population in the same states, and white registration is going up by far larger numerical totals. An effective showing by Mr. King is bound to stimulate black voter registration and future black candidacies, just as registration increases and the election of black officeholders—for instance, fourteen state legislators in Georgia and six aldermen in Atlanta—paved the way for the King campaign.

Two black candidates for the Atlanta seat in Congress—Andrew Young and Lonnie King—endanger each other's chances, but Mr. Young still is given a reasonable chance to win it in a constituency 40 per cent black. And down in the Second Congressional District, around Albany, C. B. King would run a lot better today than he did in 1964, when he came in third in a five-man race. If the redistricting that must follow the 1970 census is done honestly, this area could elect Georgia's first black Congressman since Reconstruction.