

'Now Is The Time'

Atlanta Keeps the Faith Of Martin Luther King

By Jacqueline Trescott

ATLANTA—In his lifetime, this was a city that wanted to shut out Martin Luther King and his movement for social justice. But now the marquee on Atlanta's Best Western hotel welcomes the estimated 30,000 visitors to a six-day celebration of King's 50th birthday, and on Saturday the post offices were packed when a 15-cent King commemorative stamp was issued.

The city of Atlanta celebrates Jan. 15, King's birthday, as an official holiday. But the state of Georgia does not, although it honors Robert E. Lee and Jefferson Davis. Nonetheless, over the last four days convened for the occasion—TONS OF THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE INCLUDING President Jimmy Carter, the prime minister of Sweden, the foreign minister of Norway, U.N. Secretary General Kurt Waldheim, Sen. Edward Kennedy, a dozen congressmen and administration appointees, scores of faces from the civil rights movement of the 1960s and the human rights movement of the 1970s.

President Carter, who as governor did not support a proposed state holiday for King's birthday, yesterday afternoon received the Martin Luther King Jr. Nonviolent Peace Prize—and said that he now endorses the idea of a national holiday.

Today the city will flash back to the '60s as crowds march downtown to the state capital. But even before the



Rev. Martin Luther King Sr.; President Carter and Coretta King; photo by Steve Helber for The Washington Post

lines of marchers—which will include Stevie Wonder and mayors Maynard Jackson of Atlanta, Richard Hatcher of Gary, Ind., and Coleman Young of Detroit—and before the picket signs appear, Atlanta will have felt the full impact of this birthday celebration.

The participants filled six major Atlanta hotels—the people festive with the reunion spirit, buttonholding, are another for serious conversation. And outside Ebenezer Baptist church yesterday, two groups demonstrated

against President Carter: one a group of Iranian students; the other, workers from the Southern Christian Leadership Conference protesting unemployment rates.

The recurrent question of both hotel personnel and taxi drivers was, "Are you here for the King celebration? This is just what the city needs!"

Despite all the turmoil, the King Birthday commemoration, now in its 11th year, differs from the other large

black gatherings in its spiritual emphasis. The constant reminder of spiritual goals, tempers, outbursts and angry viewpoints.

Most of the meetings, including the presentation to President Carter, were held in Ebenezer Baptist Church, home church of the King family.

"The spiritual source of the church is never far from these peoples' minds," said Barbara Williams, staff

See CELEBRATION, B2, Col. 4