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The Quality Of Leadership In Atlanta

REJECTING the easy and superficial course of outraged denunciation, Mayor Ivan Allen, Jr., of Atlanta is reacting sensibly and constructively to the recent racial disorders in his city.

While condemning Stokely Carmichael and his cohorts for their role in the rioting, the Mayor conceded that the substandard living conditions in the Negro area where the outbreak occurred would be a fertile field for agitation by anyone.

The city, he said, "must assume the responsibility of housing, education, and employment opportunities for many of these disadvantaged people, and in Atlanta we have accepted this as our responsibility." The Mayor also made it clear that he favors passage of the civil-rights bill now before Congress with an even stronger open-housing provision than it contains in its present form.

With this kind of leadership, Atlanta should continue to show the way to racial accommodation in the Deep South.

The rioting in Atlanta came after a policeman shot a Negro sought in a car-theft case. The policeman's judgment, in this instance, is open to question, but the use that Carmichael and his lieutenants made of the incident brings Carmichael's judgment into even more serious question. The evidence is strong that he provoked the violence, and to what purpose?

Mr. Carmichael, it is becoming increasingly clear, is a liability to the civil-rights movement. His purposes are undefined and his aggressions unfocused. His tiresome chant of "black power" is dangerously provocative and he has yet to define what it means in the context of his operations.

Dr. Martin Luther King, on the other hand, continues to speak in accents of reason. Commenting on the Atlanta outbreak, Dr. King said: "It is still my firm conviction that a riot is socially destructive and self-defeating . . . (but) . . . while condemning riots, it is just as important to condemn the conditions which bring riots into being."

This is virtually the same position that Mayor Allen takes, yet Mr. Carmichael implies that Mayor Allen is a racist. If he is, then so is Dr. King, and Stokely Carmichael is going to have a hard time selling that idea.