

ARTICLE APPEARED
 ON PAGE 3-A

WASHINGTON TIMES
 21 April 1987

Kirkland cautions unions about pro-Sandinista rally

J By Rita McWilliams
 THE WASHINGTON TIMES

P AFL-CIO President Lane Kirkland is warning his 13 million labor union members not to support Saturday's anti-Reagan administration rally, contending that its sponsors ignore the Sandinista's repression of labor unions in Nicaragua.

"It is possible to criticize the Reagan administration's policies toward Nicaragua without embracing the Sandinista regime; it is possible to criticize the administration's policies toward El Salvador without supporting the guerrilla movement," Mr. Kirkland wrote in letters sent last month to union affiliates around the country, warning them that rally sponsors support both the Sandinistas and the Salvadoran guerrillas.

But rally organizers said they still expect union members to constitute the bulk of the 100,000 participants they hope will attend Saturday's rally on the Ellipse.

Amy Carter, actor Ed Asner and the Rev. Jesse Jackson are scheduled to speak during the weekend-long events sponsored by a consortium of groups that oppose administration policies in Central America and South Africa. The event will end Monday with a civil disobedience protest at the CIA.

Organizers of the rally — called the Mobilization for Justice and Peace in Central America and Southern Africa — include the Communist Party, the Christic Institute, Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador [CISPES] — which supports the Marxist guerrillas there — and the U.S. Peace Council, which is considered a communist-front organization.

In letters sent March 23 to local union leaders around the country, Mr. Kirkland wrote that positions backed by the organizers of the rally are contrary to AFL-CIO policy. Specifically, he cited organizers' support of the Sandinista's repression of the trade union movement in Nicaragua and ending aid to the emerging democracies in El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala.

Mr. Kirkland was a member of the Kissinger Commission, which President Reagan appointed in his first term to develop a long-range plan to promote democracy in Central America.

"The Sandinistas have repressed independent trade unionism since the very beginning of their rule, using intimidation, harassment and

violence to force workers to join government-created unions," Mr. Kirkland wrote. "And in El Salvador the guerrillas attempt to control and use trade unions to serve their purposes, much in the style of company unions."

He said those who oppose Reagan administration policy in Central America need not embrace either the Marxist Sandinista government or the Marxist guerrillas in El Salvador.

"That is the AFL-CIO's position; it is not the position of a number of the organizations that constitute the steering committee for the April 25th rallies, some of which openly support the Marxist-Leninist guerrillas in El Salvador and support the Sandinista government of Nicaragua," he wrote.

Administration officials, searching for new ways to win support in Congress for continued aid to the Nicaraguan resistance, welcomed the letters.

"What's been happening is traditional solidarity politics," said one State Department official. "They send communist labor union representatives up here from Central America to talk with labor groups, and they are just introduced as labor union leaders."

"It's an attempt to misrepresent

the labor situation to attract support," the official said. The letters "call a lie to all this, saying elements of the labor union movement are being used, which, of course, they are."

Will Marshall, policy director for the moderate Democratic Leadership Council, said Mr. Kirkland's position taken in the letters "perform a real service in pointing out that opposition to the Contra policy shouldn't be confused for support of the Sandinista regime."

"Those who are opposed to Contra aid still bear the burden of taking an honest look at Sandinista repression and the democratic rights of working people," Mr. Marshall said.

Letters similar to the ones written by Mr. Kirkland were mailed by John Joyce, president of the International Union of Bricklayers & Allied Craftsmen, to the local chapters which represent 135,000 members nationwide.

Despite the warnings by the two union leaders, a number of other labor groups around the country continue to support the planned rally. Among these are the Newspaper Guild, the Machinists Union and the American Federation of Government Employees.

The 750,000-member American Federation of State, County and Municipal Workers also will continue to endorse the event.