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# Labor leader Kirkland: Elections will be toughest unions have faced

By Jonathan Taylor

AFL-CIO President Lane Kirkland said Monday in Omaha that he believes the 1984 presidential election is probably one of the most important elections the unions have faced in his lifetime.

Speaking at a press conference, Kirkland said the election is significant because of the "grievous nature of the problems that the country faces, the unfinished work that needs to be done and the degree of stress that so many of our (union) brothers and sisters are suffering." He said that with the highest level of unemployment since the great depression hundreds of thousands of families have suffered hardship and damage that cannot be rectified.

Kirkland was in Omaha on Labor Day to participate in the city's annual salute to labor, Septemberfest.

Kirkland said fair play is also at stake in the 1984 election. He said the National Trade Relations Board, supposedly impartial, has been taken over by "hostile forces" who want to deprive the "working people of their right to be represented by an effective union." He said the board has been loaded with "bitter diehard, lifelong enemies of collective bargaining and trade unionism."

"We've never attempted to load that board with ardent advocates of trade unionism," he said. "All we want are fair people (on the board)."

Commenting on the Korean airliner that was shot down by a Russian warplane, Kirkland said the United States must answer the Soviet action with an effective response.

He said an appropriate response would be to terminate or collect on loans made to the Soviet Union by the United States.

"If our industrialists are to sell our enemies the rope with which they intend to hang us, we at least should make them pay cash for it," he said. "We should not give it to them on easy street."

Kirkland said he is afraid the Reagan administration is not prepared to take retaliatory measures because it has shown in the days following the incident, a "business as usual" attitude.

Earlier in the day, Kirkland told more than 200 people in a speech in Solidarity Park that some people may consider the labor movement as just another "special interest group." But he said the

special interest of the labor movement included jobs for all Americans, quality education, equal pay for equal work, and "a fair deal for the family farmer who is a working man just like us."

Kirkland said the labor movement stands for "jobs and justice not for a few, not for the privileged, but for all."

He said that 81 years ago, Samuel Gompers, the only other national labor leader to visit Omaha, spoke of a pendulum of power that swings to and from the unions' direction. Today, Kirkland said, the pendulum is sweeping back to the labor movement.

Kirkland participated in Labor Day weekend parades in New York and Chicago before arriving at Septemberfest.



Staff photo by Dave Bentz  
AFL-CIO President Lane Kirkland

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