

## **Union Leaders Denounce 2 Who Voted for Cafta**

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**By Nicholas Confessore**

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The roiling debate over the narrow vote in the House of Representatives to approve the Central American Free Trade Agreement rippled back to New York City yesterday, as a broad coalition of labor unions and allied groups assailed two congressmen, Gregory W. Meeks and Edolphus Towns, for supporting the bill.

"This vote that took place last week is not a yes vote for Cafta; it is a no vote for good-paying American jobs," said Brian M. McLaughlin, president of the New York City Central Labor Council and a state assemblyman, at a rally on the steps of City Hall.

"To say we're disappointed is an understatement," he added, as a member of the crowd shouted, "Make 'em pay, make 'em pay!"

Fifteen House Democrats voted for the legislation, earning the faintly disreputable-sounding sobriquet "the Cafta 15" among critics of the trade agreement.

But labor leaders said they felt particularly betrayed by Mr. Meeks, of Queens, and Mr. Towns, of Brooklyn, because both had generally liberal voting records, enjoyed strong union support and faced little risk of losing re-election next year.

"Unfortunately, for some reason, Towns and Meeks decided to associate themselves with a shrinking minority within the Democratic Party," said Dwight Loines, an official with the United Auto Workers and an executive committee member of the Working Families Party, which sponsored the rally.

Cafta would lower most barriers to trade and investment between the United States and six nations, including the Dominican Republic, Costa Rica and El Salvador.

Proponents say it will drive export growth in the United States and job growth in Central America.

In a statement distributed at yesterday's event by his staff, Representative Meeks struck a cordial tone, saying that he believed Cafta would bring more jobs to his district.

The trade agreement "is just one issue where my friends in organized labor and I disagree."

Several calls to Representative Towns's offices yesterday were not returned.

The criticisms yesterday were significant both for their intensity and their breadth. The more than a dozen unions represented include some of the largest and most influential in New York.

Representatives were present from several of the unions that recently seceded from the A.F.L.-C.I.O. over disagreements regarding strategy - illustrating, Mr. McLaughlin said, that those differences would not prevent the two sides from working together on important issues.

Mr. Loines said that he and other union leaders were preparing a campaign to tell about 75,000 union members in each congressman's district about the vote.

The labor groups have written to Representative Nancy Pelosi, the Democratic minority leader, asking her to remove the two men from two key House committees, he added.

Another union official, James Conigliaro of the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers, District 15, was particularly blunt.

"They're sellouts," said Mr. Conigliaro. "They want to run for re-election? I'm a Brooklyn guy, so I'll give you a Brooklyn saying: Fuggedaboutit!"