

\$30,000 rise approved for councillors



■ Martin Lee: increase too low



■ Peter Wong: increase too high

By Bill Ko

LEGISLATIVE Councillors yesterday endorsed an increase of \$30,000 to their monthly allowance despite objections from two members.

Elected members Martin Lee and Peter Wong abstained when the Finance Committee was asked to approve a proposal raising the monthly allowance of councillors to \$66,000.

However there were contrasting reasons for the abstentions.

Mr Wong, a representative of the accountancy profession in Legco, said the increase was too much in view of Hongkong's high inflation rate.

"I think councillors should show a lead in combating inflation," he said.

Mr Lee, chairman of the United Democrats of Hongkong which has fielded 14 candidates in next month's direct elections, said the increase was not enough.

"The \$30,000 general expenses allowance is too low for directly elected members who may want to have several offices," he said.

Another elected member Poon Chi-fai urged the Government to review the councillors' allowance as soon as the

new legislature is formed following the election.

At yesterday's committee meeting, members were also asked to give the Secretary for the Treasury authority to approve any capital works expenses not exceeding \$10 million.

Under the present system, any capital expenditure, new or supplementary, needs the Finance Committee's approval if it exceeds \$5 million.

Mr Lee, who voted against the motion, said there was no pressing need for such a change as the new legislature would be formed in two months' time.

"When we agree to delegate power in that way, the Finance Committee will have less control over the Government budget," he said.

Secretary for the Treasury Yeung Kai-yin said the proposal's main objective was to save time for the Finance Committee.

In a circular to members, the Government said the Public Works Sub-committee of the Finance Committee had too much of a workload because of the low limit of the capital expenses.