

'3,400' protest at rent surge

By JULINA CHAN

Organisers claim about 3,400 housing estate residents attended the rent rally at Morse Park yesterday.

The rally was a protest against the "hefty" increases which came into effect on Saturday in 38 public housing estates.

Residents from 28 estates braved the weather to take part in the 1½ hour rally.

Rents have gone up by between \$50 to \$130 — an average of 25 to 48 per cent.

A position paper prepared by the Joint Committee on Public Housing Estates Against Rent Increases was read out at the rally.

The paper outlined five proposals which included the call to freeze this month's rent rise and that the increase should be no more than 20 per cent.

In the past two days, hundreds of affected households were reported to have submitted their rent — at the old rate — by cheque or money

Residents pack park

to the People's Council on Public Housing Policy, which was one of the rally organisers.

The joint committee on Thursday decided to go ahead with a "rent freeze."

All the cheques and money orders collected will be passed over to a lawyer who has been hired to assist the residents in their fight.

The rally began shortly after 3 pm with estate representatives voicing dissatisfaction at the rises.

Amid clenched fists and angry cries for a united front to fight against unreasonable rent increases, one guest speaker, Mr Pao Ping-wing, who is an Urban Councillor, called on protesters to calm down.

Mr Pao suggested a "three-month rent freeze" during which the Housing Department should review the entire decision.

"It will be very unwise for the Housing Authority to go ahead with its decision and turn a deaf ear to residents' claims," said Mr Pao.

Another 10 floor speakers from different estates spoke at the rally.

A member of the Housing Authority, Mr Lee Chik-yuet, who was a guest speaker, promised to relay the residents' message to the authority.

Mr Lee also said he would make a three-point proposal to the authority's management committee at their next meeting.

The proposals are:

- The Housing Authority and the Housing Department should meet affected residents to listen to their opinions.

- The Housing Department should publicise in detail the reasons and figures for the current rent increase.

- A document on "Public Housing Estate Rent Policy" should be published laying down the criteria for setting rents.

Mr Fung Kin-kee, who is spokesman for the people's council, presented two letters to Mr Lee requesting him to reflect directly the residents' dissatisfaction to the Housing Authority as soon as possible.

After the rally about 29 representatives led by the chairman of the people's council, Mr Chui Kim-ling, and Mr Fung, handed in a petition at Government House over a police ban for a march.

An appeal letter was addressed to the Governor, Sir Edward Youde, demanding that the residents' problems and difficulties should be listened to.

According to organisers, the police had granted them a licence which was later cancelled when they requested the number of marchers be boosted from 1,500 to 5,000 in the proposed march from Chater Gardens in Central to the Government Secretariat and Government House.

Mr Chui said they would continue to fight for permission to stage the march.

The organiser revealed that the mutual aid committees of the supporting estates would report every three days on the number of households paying old rents to the people's council.

Among the protesters were many elderly people, as well as children accompanied by parents.