

(17.6)

230,000 join war on bus fare rises

Two unions, representing about 230,000 members, yesterday joined the battle against proposed fare increases by the two bus companies.

They were the powerful leftwing Hongkong Federation of Trade Unions, which has 65 affiliates, and the Tai Wor Hau Residents Union.

Their representatives met and wrote to Unofficials on the Transport Advisory Committee — Father Patrick McGovern, Mr Chan Kam-Chuen and Mr Francis Tien.

Letters will also be sent to the Transport Department and the Transport Advisory Committee in a day or two.

The chairman of the federation, Mr Poon Kong-wai, said the reasons for the fare rises were "unsound" and the rate was "shocking."

The Kowloon Motor Bus Co has proposed a 100 per cent rise for urban routes while the China Motor Bus Co wants an average increase of 30 per cent.

Mr Poon said the proposal should not be accepted because this is the second time in a year that the companies have asked for a rise.

Mr Poon also criticised the two companies for forcing the public to shoulder the burden of investments which should be borne by the companies' shareholders.

Dissatisfied with the services provided by the companies, Mr Poon said:

"Although the Secretary for the Environment (Mr Derek Jones) said the services have improved, the inadequate number of buses, plus the Government's road transport policy have greatly inconvenienced the public."

He urged the Government to set up a committee to probe and supervise the standard of service.

The Tai Wor Hau Residents Union demanded the Government:

- Arrange an open hearing to seek public opinion on the issue.

- Set up a committee, comprising representatives

from all sectors of the community, to probe the financial situation of the bus companies and freeze the increase proposal until the report has been completed.

- Set up a citizen's committee to scrutinise the standard of service.

The federation vice-chairman, Mr Anthony Tse, said a signature campaign has been launched.

During the nine-hour campaign 9,240 residents were against the increase while 13, mostly mini-bus drivers, favoured the rise.

They demanded an answer from the Unofficials within two weeks.

Meanwhile, the committee members of the Coalition Against Bus Fare Increase yesterday delivered an open letter containing 10 questions to Mr Derek Jones concerning the issue.

According to one member, Mr Lau Chin-shuk of the Christian Industrial Committee, the letter asked Mr Jones to answer the questions within a week.

The 216 organisations of the coalition, with more than a million members, will launch a signature campaign

Some of the 10 questions for Mr Jones are:

- Whether the data for the bus fare increase has been sent to the TAC and the Executive Council for discussion and approval, and on what grounds did he openly support the increase while a final decision has yet to be made?

- What is the correlation between traffic congestion and a large-scale bus fare increase?

- If the bus companies are in the red due to poor management, would it be legal for them to make up the deficit by increasing bus fares?

- The KMB had threatened that if the Government turns down its application for the fare increase, it will cancel routes which do not yield any profit. What is the Government's reaction to the threat?