

300 social workers protest

More than 300 social workers employed in voluntary agencies staged a protest yesterday against what they described as the Social Welfare Department's "cheating" on the promotional prospects of their colleagues.

The social workers said they had hired a legal adviser and if necessary they would sue the department for breach of employment contract.

The protestors, all members of the Social Workers' General Union, gathered outside the department's head office at World Trade Centre at 10 am.

They were protesting against a recently announced direct-transfer reshuffle scheme to convert welfare assistant grade staff into welfare workers.

The 800-member union fears the move will change the nature of duties of social workers by bringing in non-social work, and therefore hamper their prospects.

The protestors also urged the department to make public an interim report recently compiled by a planning committee in order to provide detailed information to the workers involved.

The union charged that it is unfair for the department to force social workers to accept the new arrangement without providing them with full details on their promotional prospects.

It urged the department to clarify all ambiguous points and to promise their present prospects will not be jeopardised by the move.

After gathering at the World Trade Centre office, the group presented a letter to the Director of Social Welfare, Mr S.E. Alleyne, through a representative.

In the letter, they requested Mr Alleyne to open direct negotiations with them next week.

Social workers participating in the rally yesterday said they believed the department introduced the new arrangement to lure workers from voluntary agencies.

They said they also believed the move is an economic bid by the Government to save any back-payments to social workers who have been pressing for equal wages with counterparts employed directly by the Government.