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S CMP

# 5,000 attend bus fare protest rally

Only about 5,000 people turned up yesterday at a rally in Victoria Park to protest at proposed bus fare increases.

The organising body — the Coalition Against Bus Fares Increases — had hoped for an attendance of 10,000 and leaders expressed disappointment at the poor turnout.

A spokesman blamed the weather for keeping people away.

Members of the coalition, which claims to have the support of more than 1.4 million people in its campaign against the increases, thought the Kowloon Motor Bus and China Motor Bus Companies now stand a better chance of getting what they want because of the poor showing.

But they insisted that the rally turnout did reflect actual public discontent with the rises.

Another reason suggested for the low attendance was that the organisers "miscalculated the situation."

They believed that with a hot topic like bus fare increases, they could easily attract a large gathering at a rally, especially if representatives of all the coalition's 280 member organisations attended.

In the event representatives of only 50 member organisations were present.

The rally, however, was the largest ever as far as protests against public transport charges is concerned.

During the two-hour meeting, about 700 passers-by stopped to see what was going on, but declined invita-

tions to take part.

Those taking part were mostly high spirited young people who applauded every speaker.

Discipline was strict with about 500 monitors ensuring that the rally was peaceful.

Police kept a very low profile with very few uniformed officers around.

A total of 16 speakers, including a blind and a physically disabled person, addressed the crowd who were later asked to vote on three resolutions:

- To freeze the fare increase applications for six months until August in order that both bus companies can improve services while the Government works to ease road congestion.

- To allow public participation in the shaping of policies to regulate the public utilities.

- To step up protest actions if the Government ignores public opinion and approves the fares increases asked by the two bus companies.

One speaker, Father Chan Tat-ming of the Mother of God Church, said the people had the right to veto any bus fare increase.

He told the crowd the Government had an obligation to provide a form of cheap transport for the public.

Worker representatives said bus fare increases would trigger-off another round of inflation.

They said they are already finding it difficult to make ends meet and any increase in charges for basic necessities

will aggravate their hardship and may force "some of them to test the law."

Some speakers urged the Government to take over the management of bus companies.

Meanwhile, the Transport Advisory Committee will meet later today to discuss the controversial issue.

The chairman of the TAC, Mr T. S. Lo, has stressed that public opinion will have significant bearing in the committee's consideration of the fare applications by KMB and CMB.