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Angry students tear up letter

Angry student leaders tore up a petition to the Governor outside Government House yesterday to express their "contempt of British justice" after they failed to deliver a letter of protest against corruption in the police force.

The act highlighted a rally organised by 13 student and youth bodies to denounce corruption and to call for the extradition of Peter Godber, a former police chief superintendent who escaped to England while under investigation.

After a march from Victoria Park, where a two-hour rally was held, the demonstrators were abruptly stopped by six policewomen in Upper Albert Road — a few yards from the main gate of Government House.

A smiling woman sergeant told them that they could not present their petition at the main gate because that would "disrupt the flow of traffic."

The officer asked the demonstrators to turn back to the east gate, in Lower Albert Road, where the Governor's aide-de-camp would receive their petition.

The sudden encounter caught the demonstrators by surprise, and leaders immediately retreated to hold

an on-the-spot conference to decide what to do.

They came up with a quick decision. They ordered the procession — numbering about 140 people — to turn back to a road junction, swiftly led them across the road to avoid the policewomen's blockage, and converged on the main gate after a short dash from the opposite side of the road.

Their action sent the policewomen running back to the main gate, which was hurriedly closed by policemen posted at Government House.

There, the demonstrators, brandishing protest posters and chanting anti-corruption slogans, demanded that their petition be received.

But the authorities were firm in their stand. The petition must be presented at the east gate.

Through a loud-hailer, the President of the Hongkong Federation of Students, Mr Wong Shing-wah, declared that the police action was aimed at "obstructing our rightful protest."

After a stalemate lasting 20 minutes, Mr Wong said that he would tear up the petition as a symbol.

He told the demonstrators that the petition contained four

motions which were passed at the rally held in Victoria Park:

- The police should immediately withdraw their summonses against 33 people for taking part in anti-corruption demonstrations,

- the police should stop their suppression of anti-corruption demonstrations,

- the police should state clearly their attitude towards corruption, and take action to eliminate it, and

- the police should extradite Godber immediately.

Amid chants of "anti-corruption" and "catch Godber," Mr Wong tore up the petition before the gate. Later

he picked up the litter.

Only a handful of police —

including detectives — were present throughout the petition drama. However, three lorries of police "Blue Berets" were waiting in the Government Offices car park on stand-by.

Earlier in the morning, more than 300 people took part in a rally held at Victoria Park.

Various allegations of police corruption were made by the student organisers and the public who were invited to speak.

The rally was well-controlled. The organisers had dozens of people placed to control the crowd.

About half the crowd joined in the procession to Statue Square along Waterfront Road, under the watchful eyes of two traffic policemen on motorcycles.

After regrouping beside the Supreme Court building, they set off on their march up Garden Road, chanting slogans and wielding placards.