

Residents up in arms over Eskom's planned tariff hikes

BY **CEBOGANG SEALE**

A few days after Cosatu led a protest against rising food prices, Joburg residents again took to the streets, this time in protest against Eskom's proposed 53% tariff hike.

Young and old, the protesters – mostly women, some with babies on their backs – trudged through the CBD as they embarked on their five-stop demonstration, which included the offices of Joburg City Power, Eskom, and the city council offices in Braamfontein. They handed in memorandums with a list of grievances and demands.

Hoisting banners and clad in red T-shirts, some reading "Eskom's nuclear plans, apartheid hangover", "Why must Soweto pay for Sandton and Houghton?" and "Mbeki, Alec Erwin have failed, what will (Jacob) Zuma do?", the demonstration – led by the Anti-Privatisation Forum (APF) and Earthlife Africa – demanded that Eskom rescind its planned tariff hikes.

This, they said, would negatively impact on their living standards, which were already burdened with spiralling food, fuel and travelling costs.

"Despite the government and Eskom's repeated boasts about electrification, 30% of South Africans are still with-



FURIOUS: Joburg residents march from Beyers Naude Square to Eskom's offices yesterday.

PICTURE: DUMISANI SIBEKO

out electricity," they said.

"Of the 70% who have electricity, many prepaid meter users disconnect themselves because of lack of funds. The free basic allocation of 50kWh a month per household is widely regarded to be inadequate," they said in the memorandum.

APF organiser Silumko Radebe blamed the current situation on the government's continued restructuring and privatisation of Eskom.

"The current crisis is borne of these efforts to create a

power market where scarcity of energy resources ensures a 'competitive environment' and profitability for the generators

Call for state to increase free basic allocation

and distributors of electricity."

He added that the current situation, where many poor people were increasingly being forced to resort to alternative

energy sources, such as paraffin and coal, exposed them to risks of injuries and death.

The protesters demanded that the government increase its free basic allocation for poor people from 50 to 100kWh per household a month, and abolish pre-paid meters.

They also called for the scrapping of subsidised electricity for foreign corporations and for costs to be defrayed through the non-payment of bonuses to Eskom management.