

1997 body 'will snub democrats'

Preparatory committee seats will probably go to eager mainlanders

Staff reporter

Keen competition among mainland Chinese officials is likely to dash hopes that pro-democracy figures can be appointed to the high-powered preparatory committee to engineer Hong Kong's transition.

A Chinese source said members from the Association for Democracy and People's Livelihood (ADPL), who maintain a cordial relationship with Beijing, might be shut out because of insufficient seats, as mainland officials scramble to join the committee.

Three ADPL members, Law Cheung-kuok, Cheung Kar-min and Frederick Fung, the ADPL chairman, have been short-listed for the powerful body. But the source said Fung and Law might be displaced as many Chinese officials from the municipal authorities in the southeast coastal area were keen to sit on the committee.

Ip Kwok-wah - the owner of the former *Contemporary Monthly*, a local China-Hong Kong political magazine wound up earlier because of financial difficulties - was also understood to be on the list.

A maverick pro-China figure, Dorothy Liu, was not

short-listed, according to the source. Liu's name has not been included because Beijing has been angered by her critical views recently against the abolition of the Bill of Rights and the establishment of a shadow government.

Although a veteran local member of the National People's Congress, Liu has been regarded as a black sheep by Beijing for her longstanding hostility towards the director of the Hong Kong branch of the New China News Agency (Xinhua), Zhou Nan.

She has called on Beijing to drop the idea of forming an interim legislature, and to aim for a "transitional legislature" instead, which should include only incumbent and former legislators.

The preparatory committee is expected to be set up early next year to handle crucial issues related to the handover.

The source said the list had been finalised, but was subject to approval by Chinese President Jiang Zemin and the National People's Congress next month.

The 150-strong body, to be drawn up by mainland officials and Hong Kong people, was originally fixed at a ratio of six local to four mainland.

But the source said the final number of Hong Kong representatives might eventually be fewer than 90 as municipal officials

were eager to sit on the panel.

"They [Chinese municipal officials] think they ought to have a say over the territory after the 1997 handover because Hong Kong has such close economic links with southern China, so they insist on sitting on the committee," the source said.

Cheung is a non-active ADPL member, whose loyalty and pro-democracy stance has been called into question.

The source revealed that mainland representatives were mainly officials from various Chinese authorities, including the Ministry of Railways.

Officials from several provinces and cities in China, including Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin, Fujian and Guangdong, were also short-listed to the panel, according to the source.

Fung yesterday said he had received no word from the Chinese authorities about the appointments.

He said no ADPL members had told him that they had been appointed by the Chinese side.

He stressed that all ADPL members would have to get the party's approval before accepting any appointment.

But he said he would welcome any chance for party members to be involved in the preparatory committee.

A Preliminary Working Committee member, Lau Siu-kai, said he was not surprised that ADPL members had been short-listed.

"The move demonstrates China's readiness to extend its strategic line of the so-called 'united front' to the pro-democracy camp. The inclusion of ADPL members would strengthen the committee's credibility," Lau said.