

A change of heart

THE Housing Authority's plan to cool its move to evict all married children from their parents homes in housing estates should make a large number of estate residents happy.

Under a policy formulated by the Authority in 1971, married children of estate residents are not allowed to live with their parents. But this policy remained ineffective for the last four years because of the shortage of manpower to enforce it.

However, the Authority recently began to notify a number of estate residents that they would evict their married children so as to keep the estates less crowded. A survey by the Taiwohau estate residents' union conducted among a section of the residents in that estate showed that more than 100 married couple were asked to move out. This indicates the thousands of young couples in all other estates who are likely to face the need to find new shelters.

That overcrowding in housing estates is a serious issue is undeniable. Indeed it poses the potential danger of causing other more serious social problems.

In the light of all these the Authority's move to keep the estate population under check might appear well meaning. But in effect it is tantamount to failing to see beyond one's own nose. The irony is that while the Housing Authority's policy to keep married children out of their parents' estate homes may help to tackle one set of dangers, the thousands of young couple who suddenly become homeless could, as we pointed out recently, cause other grave social problems.

It is, therefore, a welcome relief that the Housing Authority has responded meaningfully towards the criticism estate residents and others have raised against its eviction programme.

But while we welcome this change of mind in the Housing Authority, the housing policy calls for a closer examination.

To begin with all that the Authority's management committee has agreed to at present is that only one married child of each estate house owner be allowed to add his or her spouse to the family unit. But the future of others remain uncertain. It is too much to expect that other children of marriageable age to remain single until such time they can rent an apartment from private landlords, even if such an expectation may be linked to family planning programme.

Ironically enough, while the Housing Authority seems to be reluctant to make an overall review of its policy almost 4,000 flats are kept vacant in housing estates and number of flats are occupied by people whose income is far above the ceiling set to qualify for estate accommodation. A thorough examination is needed in both these sectors.

Indeed a certain number of flats must be kept vacant to meet any sudden demand arising from disasters, dangerous buildings and to accommodate compassionate cases recommended by Social Welfare authorities. However, 4,000 flats seem to be too large a number for such eventualities.

What is even more difficult to comprehend is the passive attitude being adopted to what can be termed as the rich housing estate dwellers. It may be argued that it is difficult to keep a check on the changing income level of residents. But their visible affluence itself must be an adequate eye-opener for starting inquiries.