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1,000 families boycott payment of higher rent

By OPHELIA SUEN

More than 20,000 families from 38 public housing estates yesterday paid new rents to the Housing Authority amid calls for a boycott of the higher fees.

This sharply outnumbered those who stuck to paying the old rents — about 1,000 households.

The rent rises, which became effective on Saturday, affect over 100,000 households.

The increases range between 25 and 48 per cent — \$50 to \$130.

Meanwhile, the chairman of the Hongkong People's Council on Public Housing Policies, Mr Chui Kim-ling, said he expected more people to join the fight against higher rents.

He believes many tenants have still to make up their minds about whether to withhold payment of the new fees.

"They have not paid the new rents to the Housing Authority yet," Mr Chui said.

He said mutual aid committees from Lok Fu and Shui Pin Wai, Taipo, had contacted the council yesterday.

Of those who paid the old rents, Mr Chui said they were

mainly from five estates — including Kwai Shing, Tai Hang Tung, Tai Yuen and Nam Shan.

The council has been one of the prime movers behind the campaign against higher rents and has hired a lawyer to assist residents in their fight.

The threat of a payment boycott brought a fresh appeal from a housing official yesterday.

The official, who refused to be named, urged tenants not to be "misled" into withholding payment.

He called on those who have not yet paid the new rents to do so as soon as possible.

Under Housing Department regulations, tenants have to settle their rental payments within the first 14 days of each month.

Anyone failing to do so may have his lease terminated, the official said.

About 100 residents from 31 estates met last night to review the progress of their

campaign.

A spokesman for the Joint Committee on Public Housing Estates Against Rent Increases, Mr Fung Kin-kee, said tenants are determined to continue their fight by paying the old fees.

In another development, the police yesterday refuted a charge that they had cancelled a licence for the group to stage a mass protest.

"The police did not at any time grant or subsequently cancel such a licence," said a police spokesman.

"The application, in fact, was rejected in the first instance."

Mr Fung had earlier claimed that the police had cancelled a licence to stage a march from Chater Garden to the Government Secretariat and Government House on Sunday.

Meanwhile, eight representatives from a group of public housing tenants yesterday met Umelco members to convey their views on proposed housing policies.

According to a spokesman for the Preparatory Committee on Presenting Public Housing Tenants' Views on Public Housing Allocation Policy, Mr Fung Kin-kee, it was hoped their views would be passed on to the Executive Council, which is expected to discuss the issue soon.

He said the Home-Ownership Scheme should be improved to encourage more public housing tenants to purchase their own flats.

Concern was also expressed on policies regarding squatters, single people, well-off tenants and married children.

The group also called on the Housing Authority to release more detailed information when announcing its policies so as to avoid "misunderstanding" among tenants.

They were assured by duty Umelco members, including Miss Maria Tam and Mrs Pauline Ng, that their views would be conveyed to the administration.