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28 arrested in gambling raid on Reform Club

By S Y Wai

A BRANCH of Hongkong's oldest political group, the Reform Club, was raided in an anti-illegal gambling operation early yesterday.

The raid on the Yau Ma Tei branch netted 28 people, aged between 20 and 55, suspected to have been gambling on the premises. The arrested allegedly included a member and an employee of the 39-year-old organisation.

The office is in a flat on the fifth floor of a building in Portland Street.

The operation arose from a prolonged investigation into allegations concerning the club's Yau Ma Tei liaison office which the police believe has been used for gambling repeatedly.

The *Standard* disclosed in July that the Yau Ma Tei Police District sent an official letter of complaint to the club's founder, former Urban Councillor Mr Brook Bernacchi.

It was reported then that the letter involved two alleged incidents of illegal gambling in June.

In the first incident on June 1, uniformed officers were sent there following a bogus 999 call. They found 45 people, mostly hawkers, who denied gambling.

The second raid came on June 24 when the district's special duties squad found 17 people, again workers and \$47,000 cash.

Some admitted playing mah-jong. Others were found to have previous convictions for gambling and other offences.

The letter was to inform Mr Bernacchi of police suspicions

but neither the club nor Mr Bernacchi has responded.

In yesterday's raid, the district's special duties squad officers raided the flat about 1 am.

In view of the possible implications as the premises allegedly belong to the club, the district's acting-commander, Chief Superintendent Ian Seabourne, and operations officer, Chief Inspector W L Ma, took charge of the raid.

The police said the officers had encountered obstructions and had to make a forced entry.

Twenty-five men and two women suspected to be gambling in the flat were arrested and more than \$160,000 in cash was seized.

Another man returning to the flat was also taken to the police station. The arrested were released on bail.

Police also seized a quantity of gambling equipment.

The 40,000-strong Reform Club was formed in 1949. Since its formation it has taken part in all Urban Council elections and more recently in district board polls.

But new political groups such as Meeting Point, the Hongkong Affairs Society and the Association for Democracy and People's Livelihood, have recently stolen the limelight from the club.

Club chairman Mr Bernacchi lost his Urbco seat to Mrs Chow Cheung Wai-ping by a narrow 24 votes in the 1986 elections.

Mr Bernacchi was not available for comment last night.