

HOUSING

Cheyenne tenants pay rent into trust

With continued sewage contamination, the threat of welfare reductions and a threatened utility shutoff, the downward spiral for tenants at two rundown apartments in east London just gets worse. But the tenants are starting a legal counterattack.

By Hank Daniszewski
The London Free Press

The tenants of two Cheyenne Avenue apartment buildings are working on a plan to keep their lights on by bypassing the landlord they blame for miserable living conditions.

In meetings this week, the tenants of 95 and 105 Cheyenne Ave. decided to voluntarily start paying their rents into a trust fund which will be used to pay a huge, overdue utility bill.

The London Public Utilities Commission warned power and water to the buildings would be shut off Dec. 14 because landlord Elijah Elieff had run up a bill of about \$13,000. The estimate was pushed up from \$8,000 after a recent reading by the utility.

Reverend Susan Eagle, a United Church community worker, said the tenants will be going to court in the near future to ask that the rent money in the trust fund be used directly to pay the PUC bill.

"This is a significant step for the tenants. This is something they have never done before. They have had enough," said Eagle.

PREVENT SHUTOFF: Ted Power, PUC customer services manager, said the establishment of the trust fund will prevent a utility shutoff because it gives the PUC some assurance the account will be paid, even if the money is tied up in the courts for some time.

He said the electricity bills are high because the gas furnace in 105 Cheyenne is apparently not working and most tenants have been forced to use space heaters.

Eagle said four tenants have already paid into the trust fund



George Blumson/The London Free Press

Chantha Sang holds up a bank book to show Susan Eagle, a United Church community worker. Sang is one of the tenants at 95 and 105 Cheyenne who will be putting their rent into a trust fund to pay bills not paid by their landlord.

but many have already paid the December rent and will have to wait until January.

The situation is further complicated by the fact that some tenants are now paying little or no rent because of a rent rebate awarded early this year.

In October, the ministry of housing ordered Elieff to pay back \$31,000 in excessive rents either through direct cash rebates or rent reductions.

Elieff declined comment on Friday.

WELFARE REDUCTIONS: The \$31,000 rent refund awarded to the Cheyenne tenants after months of appeals to the ministry of housing could turn out to be a curse.

Some of the tenants were supposed to get an immediate cash rebate but Elieff has not paid. Others were supposed to get rent reductions but welfare officials are threatening to cut back on their social assistance and shelter allowance because of the reduced rent and their rebates.

Eagle said she is trying to ne-

gotiate a solution with provincial welfare officials.

"It's turned out to be one colossal headache," said Eagle.

SEWAGE CONTAMINATION: The six units on the bottom floor of 105 Cheyenne were vacated this week by order of the London-Middlesex health unit because Elieff has not cleaned up properly after a sewage backup last month.

Only two of the units were actually occupied at the time of the health unit's order and those tenants have moved to other vacant apartments. Health unit spokesperson Peter Parkhouse said the backup problem has been solved but Elieff has not disposed of carpets and woodwork contaminated by the sewage.

Parkhouse said he is concerned the condition of the buildings will get worse if Elieff is not receiving any rent.

"As bad as he is, every landlord needs some money coming in to keep the building up and he's getting little or nothing."