

# 3,000 AMAHS TO GO ON STRIKE

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By

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## Union serves notice to Command Secretary across the table as talks in Singapore break down

**T**HREE thousand amahs working for Commonwealth Servicemen in the Federation will go on strike on Oct. 1, in protest against a move by the authorities to relegate responsibility of employment to individual soldiers.

The strike notice was served by union leaders across the table to the Command Secretary (Far East), Mr. W. T. Horsley, at 4.30 p.m. yesterday in Singapore, immediately after talks broke down.

Strike ballots returned to the War Department Civilian Staff Association, which represents the amahs, show that 2,836 voted in favour of strike action. One hundred and fifty-two voted against and 12 ballot papers were spoilt.

The amahs will walk out

of the 3,000 Service homes — the Army, Navy and Air Force, including the Royal Australian Air Force — in Penang, Butterworth, Malacca, Johore Bharu, Kluang, Sungel Patani, Tampin, Cameron Highlands, Taiping and Kuala Lumpur, after they finish work on the night of Sept. 30.

The next day they will form picket lines in these centres.

## **Donate**

The other 6,000 civilian employees in the War Department, who are members of the association, will not take part in the strike but have been asked to donate a day's wage for the "amahs' strike fund", which has been formed with a donation of \$511 by committee members.

The president of the W.D.C.S.A., Mr. S. J. H. Zaiul, who led the union delegation at the Singapore talks, told a Press conference here this afternoon that the authorities told them that they were going ahead with their plan to relegate responsibility of employment of amahs to individual Servicemen.

He said: "We were told that the contemplated change in the status of the amahs would apply to the whole of the Far East. They claimed that it was a new War Department policy.

"They would not give an undertaking that the present conditions of service for the amahs would be upheld."

Under the switch-over plan the amahs would continue to be employed and paid by the authorities until the family they are working with at present returns home.

When they start work with a new service family their status would be changed and they would be treated as employees of individual Servicemen and would be paid by the Servicemen.

# **Responsible**

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Mr. Zaidi said the authorities hoped to complete the "switch-over" in the status of the amahs within a year.

"They have fixed a one-year transitional period to achieve this," he added, "because most servicemen would have completed their tour of duty here by then."

Mr. Zaidi said the union was opposing the move because there would be a lot of abuse and ill-treatment of amahs if Servicemen were responsible for their employment.

He also thinks that the authorities are trying to do this as an "easy way out" of the union demands for better working conditions and also to weaken the union by forcing the amahs to fend for themselves.

Mr. Zaidi said: "All these years, the amahs have been treated like any other civilian employee in the War Department. I don't see why their status should be changed now."

"It is an obvious attempt by the authorities to weaken the union by the divide and rule policy which the white man has practised in the past."

them that they would not be paid if they went on strike and would "lose money."

Copies of the letter were distributed to reporters by Mr. Zaidi.

Brigadier Martin, who said that it was his business to see that all who worked in army households in Malaya were happy and contented, made the following points in his letter:

● He found it very hard to believe that there was anything seriously wrong with the working conditions of amahs and alleged that the union was only trying to make use of them to build up its membership.

● Amahs were free to join or stay out of unions and no one could force them. Any threats to force them to join the union should be reported to the authorities.

Brigadier Martin said he would personally ensure that amahs would get the same conditions of service whether they were a member of the union or not.

He added: "Now let me tell you about the changes. Up to now you have been paid by the unit office where you have to go to get your money. I am not changing this while you are in your present job.

## **Distorted**

"If you leave, however, you will be paid by the family you next work for. The family will give you the money and will have to tell me that they have done so. It will not affect your days-off."

Commenting on the letter, Mr. Zaidi said: "It is nothing but a string of inaccurate, distorted facts."

Mr. Zaidi and union officials reported the breakdown of talks to the Assistant Minister of Labour, Mr. V. Manickavasagam, at a 90-minute meeting at the Ministry of Labour this morning.

Mr. Zaidi said Mr. Manickavasagam had agreed to put forward certain proposals to the Service authorities to solve the problem when they come to Kuala Lumpur on Friday next week for more talks.