

7,000 rally round sacked dispensers

THE Joint Action Committee of Civil Service Unions yesterday claimed to have mustered massive support in its campaign against what it termed the abusive use of the Letters Patents by the Government in suspending dispensers who worked-to-rule without pay.

The committee said it had collected 7,000 signatures denouncing the Government's action. The protest letter bearing the signatures were handed yesterday afternoon to

Mr S.P. Corrick, an aide to the Governor.

The protesters said the number of signatures they gathered was the most ever received so far in campaigns of this sort.

Thirteen members of the Joint Action Committee representing 42 civil service unions forwarded the signatures together with a protesting letter.

The committee decided to bring the dispensers' case to the attention of the Governor after the Court of Appeal dismissed on Friday the petition of 26 dispensers who were suspended without pay for more than a month following a dispute with the Pharmaceutical Staff Union to which they belong.

At the same time, union leaders are considering further steps to resolve the

problem, including launching an appeal to the Privy Council and requesting international labour organisations to intercede in the dispensers' behalf. The leaders said, however, that they would discuss matters with the Pharmaceutical Staff Union before taking any action.

A statement issued yesterday by the Joint Action Committee said the use of the colonial Letters Patent to suspend civil servants who participate in industrial action was a "contravention of the fundamental rights of the civil servants and their unions."

The statement also pointed out the unions' right to engage in industrial action to safeguard the interests of their members was protected by the United Nations' Declaration of Human Rights. This

should not be suppressed by any government, the committee stressed.

"The frequent use of special powers to deal with unions will only aggravate the already fragile labour-management relationship," the statement observed.

The statement suggested instead that the Government adopt an attitude of mutual respect in solving labour disputes.

In issuing the judgment that provoked the protest Chief Justice Sir Denys Roberts said that suspension of a civil servant meant he had ceased to perform any of the functions of his office.

"Assuming that his suspension has been for proper cause, why should he be paid, when he has done no work?" he asked.