

**B**BRITISH university teachers this month got their pay award from the government at the hands of arbitrators, called off their campaign of non-cooperation in the marking of examinations and so ended the short lived drama of academic militancy. The arbitration tribunal, whose findings are likely to be accepted by the government, gave lecturers a starting salary of £2,778, senior lecturers £5,838 and professors an average of £8,884. These figures will attract a separate cost of living element that could average 20%. The award represents the 'catching up' exercise that has been at the centre of the dispute between government and university academic staff for the past year.

But the euphoria over a settlement that, with the second element yet to be negotiated, could give university teachers a salary increase of nearly 50% by comparison with October 1974, should not be allowed to conceal irreversible changes in the relationship of academics and government. Not only have academics woken from their political slumber and taken direct action against their employers, but for the first time they have identified their employers clearly as the government. The paraphernalia of the 'buffer mechanism' of the University Grants Committee and university authorities has become a sideshow.

The history of the claim that led to the first strike ever attempted by academics goes back to early 1974. The Association of University Teachers believed that the settlement into which it was somehow cajoled during that year put it firmly behind all other comparable groups as from October 1973. The government rejected this argument and made it clear that it would negotiate a settlement for the year 1974-75 that would run from October 1975 and no sooner. Anything else, the Department of Education and Science has consistently argued, would be in breach of the social contract.

This picture of leads and lags in salary negotiations, coupled with apparently growing differentials between university people and fellow professionals in the Civil Service and in the rest of the higher education sector was darkened in the past 18 months by general reductions of government spending on the universities. There have been no absolute cutbacks, but a feeling of gloom and immobility grew, convincing many academics that the universities were a target for educational iconoclasts within the Cabinet.

During the summer of 1974, the Association of University Teachers (AUT), which now represents about

25,000 academics, settled a salary scale to begin in October. The revision of that scale, which gave a junior lecturer a starting salary of £2,118, a senior lecturer £4,707 and an 'average' professor £7,125 has just been completed. The scale for October 1974 emerged at the end of two sets of negotiations and after the deliberations of two separate committees. University teachers negotiate first with the university authorities and then, together with them, with the Department of Education and Science.

The first agreement in 1974 was made under the old Conservative

## University teachers show their teeth

from David Walker

government's incomes policy, given a few extra months of life by its Labour successor. At the end of statutory controls in July the agreement was changed by a few per cent. By November 1974 the AUT had begun further negotiations with the university authorities on a claim for an 18% increase in the October scales. At Christmas the claim passed to the government.

That AUT claim held up the Civil Service as the main reference group for academics but the publication on Christmas Eve of a report by a committee under Lord Houghton on the salaries of school and further education teachers immediately set up polytechnic lecturers as rivals and envied competitors in the salary race. The report of the Houghton Committee will probably come to be seen as one of the most divisive education documents ever published. In recent weeks university teachers have evinced suspicion of the quality of work done in polytechnics, and near hatred of a government that could apparently favour degree level work in such institutions at the universities' expense.

The campaign by university teachers on what was now seen as deep anomalies in their pay gathered steam in the early months of 1975. In February the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals expressed "very great concern" about recruitment and standards because of salary differentials. Allowing for adjustment between scales, a polytechnic lecturer of comparable age could be earning—in May—£1,000 more than a university man. There was a difference of £296 between the salary of a senior lecturer in a university and of his polytechnic equivalent.

Meanwhile the Labour government produced its own version of the cuts in public expenditure made by Mr

Anthony Barber during the last days of the Conservative government in 1973. Many academics came to the conclusion that while cuts were being made all round with the universities suffering as a consequence the polytechnics were being buoyed up by grants for accommodation for students, and not least by the Houghton settlement.

Against this background Professor William Wallace of the New University of Ulster, President of the AUT, called the polytechnics "overvalued" and threats began to be made concerning operation of the Council for National Academic Awards, staffed in the main by university academics, which validates the degree work of polytechnics and other further education colleges.

The campaign came to a head on May 6 when the AUT called a national "day of action" during which well attended meetings were held in most universities to protest about "discrimination" by the government. At the end of May the academics took their irritation to a council meeting of the AUT addressed by Lord Crowther-Hunt, the minister responsible for Higher Education.

By that time heated negotiations between the teachers and the government had ended only in agreement to go to arbitration. To keep up the pressure the AUT decided to recommend members to withhold examination results, a measure which would take full effect only later, in July.

The arbitrators have been generous. Lecturers will get a maximum of £6,050 and the minimum for professors goes up to £7,501. To which, of course, has to be added the cost of living element. This award is marginally above what the Department of Education offered the university teachers in May. Their claim for a separate element to take care of what they called "falling behind" during 1973-74 has now effectively been relinquished.

But what remains are deep feelings of resentment among many academics about what has been called the injustice of government policy. During the months of agitated negotiations, however, government policy has changed: Lord Crowther-Hunt has recently given a series of speeches which shows that the universities have lost most of their "special" attributes in the eyes not just of the Labour government but of any government that has to trim public expenditure on education. Just as university teachers plan strikes in the same way as manual workers, so universities are now irrefutably part of a system of higher education within which polytechnics and further education might be favoured.