

OLD WORLD

Hope at Last for Civil Servant Scientists

AT long last the Government has announced that it has referred to the Pay Board the question of what criteria and methods should be used for determining the pay of the science group within the Civil Service. The government's intention was first made public last April but it has taken six months for Whitehall actually to present the issue to the Pay Board.

Mr William McCall, General Secretary of the Institution of Professional Civil Servants said this week that the position of civil service scientists is now much worse than it was at the beginning of the present campaign to bring the salary of government scientists into line with the administration and technology grades. He also said that it is imperative to get acceptable recognition for government scientists and that it is essential to solve the long term problems of parity with other grades.

The problem "merits being designated a special case" under Phase Three of the government's pay plan, said Mr McCall, and it will be quite inequitable if the government does not accept that.

The Pay Board will not determine the pay scales of government scientists but what it will decide are the methods and criteria for determining pay. In the past, the pay of government scientists has been determined by a process known as Pay Research under which the salaries of government scientists are compared with the salaries of scientists working outside the service, for example in industry. Such a system, according to the IPCS, is unfair as there are so many scientists working in government (about 17,000) that it is inevitable that salaries outside the civil service are to some extent determined by the salaries paid by the government. Therefore the system breaks down. The institution would much prefer to see equity developed within the civil service and the pay of the scientists matched to the pay of the administration and the professional and technology grades. An Administrative Principal working outside London now commands a salary at the top of the scale of £4,708, and a Professional and Technology Principal's maximum is £4,760. The Principal Scientific Officer is very much at the bottom of the league table earning, at most, £4,387. What is distressing to the scientists and their union officials is that as recently as 1969 the maximum salaries of all three grades were comparable.

The issue first came to a head in the summer of 1971 when massive demonstrations in favour of an increased salary for government scientists occurred. Mr McCall at this time boldly stated that there would never be another pay exercise for scientists in government employ in Britain. The issue, at that time, resulted in an independent tribunal being set up which brought in a verdict which did not wholeheartedly favour the scientists' case. But it offered them more than the government was prepared to do following a pay research inquiry.

Since then the situation has developed into a stale mate. The IPCS pressed for an independent committee to determine the criteria by which the pay of government scientists should be determined. The government prevaricated until September 1972, when the first

phase of the current prices and income strategy was introduced, which effectively brought negotiations, for what they were, to a halt. Finally in April of this year the government agreed in principle to refer the matter to the then newly set up Pay Board.

A decision is expected from the board within two months. The procedure will be that the IPCS and the Civil Service department will both present their cases and both sides will be bound by the board's decision.

Mr McCall says that he is confident that the institution's case is so strong that there is no likelihood of the board recommending a return to pay research. But if the worst comes to the worst the institution will accept the Pay Board's decision, provided the official side does likewise.

Uranium Resources

URANIUM demand for nuclear power programmes, currently 19,000 tonnes of metal a year, will treble by 1980 and quintuple by 1985. By then 100,000 tons per annum will be needed, according to a report published by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. "It is therefore essential that urgent steps be taken to increase the rate of exploration for uranium so that an adequate reserve may be maintained".

The report also gives a fuller guide to Britain's uranium deposits than has been available to date. The Institute of Geological Sciences undertook a five-year survey for the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority in 1965 to try to find uranium in Britain. Although the fact that the search was successful has been announced, the quantities discovered have not been disclosed. The report states that widespread but low-grade enrichment was found in Caithness and Orkney in Devonian sediments, with local enrichments providing "a few thousand tons of U_3O_8 probably coming within the \$10-15 per pound price range". Investigations in the southwest of Britain have revealed concentrations associated with wrench faults in proximity to Hercynian granites. The report suggests that some structures "show evidence of continuity sufficient to indicate resources of the order of hundreds of tons of U_3O_8 ".

The report—a joint study undertaken

by the Nuclear Energy Agency and the International Atomic Energy Agency puts reasonably assured world resources of uranium that can be mined at \$10 per pound at 866,000 tonnes with a further 916,000 tonnes of estimated additional resources that can be mined at the same price. Once the price increases to up to \$15 per pound a further 680,000 tonnes of reasonably assured resources are thought to be available, along with 632,000 tonnes of estimated additional resources.

Although these figures are appreciably larger than those produced by the last OECD report on uranium (published in 1970) the agencies note that "current uranium prices are generally not quite adequate to permit the necessary exploration or to provide the increased expansion of production capability needed". The agencies also point out that in arriving at their estimate the possibility that many countries may accelerate their nuclear programmes because of an energy shortage "was not taken into account".

The agencies warn that some means must be found to ensure that the production levels required are achieved so as to avoid an unstable market in the 1980s.

No solutions are suggested, but a further warning is issued about the demand for uranium enrichment plant. Existing and planned capacity over the next decade is likely to be adequate until the early 1980s, but when additional capacity is needed it will be needed very quickly indeed, to meet a huge leap in demand.