cut back in staff was evidence of ICL's determination to live within its resources.

International Business Machines Limited has been maintaining a dignified silence about the events of the past few days, but the Honeywell company has spoken out against the government's action. Mr Donald Brosnan, chairman and managing director of Honeywell, said this week that "the policy works against the British computer industry as a whole and in particular against the development of computing in the public sector. Not only does it stifle competition but it also limits access to international technology".

The question that remains unanswered is whether the confidence placed in ICL is well founded. Are the performance and cost of ICL computers comparable to or better than their competitors? Such a comparison is not possible without a detailed analysis of the needs of a particular user; in particular it depends on the scientific/commercial balance that the computer user needs to achieve.

The computer companies stress that they will only quote performance figures for a particular job assignment. Despite this, however, it is apparent that the Honeywell 6000 series, the IBM 370 series and the ICL 1900 series are comparable and competitive.

With ICL receiving such support from the government and also in view of the pressure that is being exerted on industry and public sector bodies in Britain to buy ICL computers, it is not difficult to understand why the other companies are annoyed. Mr Brosnan expressed the feelings of these companies when he stated that Mr Corfield's statement "ignores the interest of foreign owned companies which manufacture and employ significant numbers of people in the United Kingdom (Honeywell employs 8,000). In so doing it conflicts with other stated government policies of attracting overseas investment to the nation's development areas".

EARTHQUAKE RESEARCH

What Future for Tokyo?

from a Correspondent

THERE is great anxiety among seismologists about the future of the International Institute of Seismology and Earthquake Engineering, set up in Tokyo in 1962 and supported jointly by the Japanese Government and the United Nations Development Programme. The immediate problem is to know how the institute can continue after August 1972, when the present agreement runs out. At what seems to have been a sombre meeting of the senior consultants of the institute

in Tokyo in March this year, it was accepted that continuing support for the institute would have to come from the government of Japan and from UNESCO.

The institute has a permanent staff of about twenty provided by the government of Japan. UNESCO also provides two or three "experts" each year, usually seismologists and earthquake engineers from outside Japan. The institute conducts regular lecture and laboratory courses, as do the visiting lecturers.

An average of some twenty students a year have been trained at the institute. Over the years, they have come from more than forty countries, including developing countries in Asia, Africa, South America and the Pacific region. Stipends have been provided by the government of Japan and through the UNDP Special Fund.

During 1963-68, the institute concentrated on routine training. The programme has now been extended to include an advanced course in which the emphasis is on research training. The students, some five a year, have

previously been PhD graduates or hold equivalent qualifications. The advanced students assist in the lecturing programme.

The institute has a special role in fostering seismology and earthquake engineering in developing countries, where there is an urgent need both to mitigate the effects of earthquake disasters and to fill conspicuous gaps in the global recording of earthquakes.

ASTRONOMY

South African Debate

EMOTIONS are still running high at the closing of the only strictly South African observatory, the Republic Observatory at Johannesburg. There have been bitter exchanges in the correspondence columns of *Monthly Notes of the Astronomical Society of South Africa*. The British Science Research Council is involved to the extent that the rationalization of South African astronomy was stimulated by the review of astronomy in the southern hemisphere completed late in 1968 by

Freshwater Biology

THIS is a fluvarium which was opened on July 23, together with other extensions, at the site of the River Laboratory of the Freshwater Biological Association in East Stoke, Dorset. The fluvarium, which was opened by Mr Peter Walker, Secretary of State for the Environment, has been so called because it is an aquarium in which the tanks contain flowing water. Built where once a corn mill stood, the building is a water-tight concrete box, 30 feet by 12 feet, sunk 9 feet into the ground. The roof is made of glass, and the flow of water through the fluvarium is maintained by gravity, without recourse to pumps.