

Hungary bus workers protest at decrease in rouble trade

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Susan Viets in Budapest

WORKERS from the Ikarus bus manufacturing company demonstrated outside parliament yesterday, claiming to be the first victims of Hungary's impending trade war with the Soviet Union.

They filled the parking area outside parliament with more than 100 buses due to be sent to Comecon countries, but trapped in Hungary since the government suspended all export licences to rouble trading countries last month. More than 1,500 angry workers demanded that licences be re-issued immediately.

Last year, Ikarus sent 10,000 of the 13,000 buses it produced to the Soviet Union. This year,

Soviet demand has halved, but the government will not even issue licences to meet this demand. Ikarus has been reduced to minimum capacity operation and its workers face an uncertain future.

"What can I do?" asked one middle-aged technician. "I earn 10,000 forints (£100) a month and have two children. All the workers in the factory are very angry and very frightened that the jobs will disappear."

Official sources say that Ikarus is one of the companies which will suffer from the government's determination to reduce Hungary's surplus in non-convertible trade by 1.5 billion roubles. Officials say that rouble trade licences will be examined case by case and that some will be re-issued.

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