

Kiev rallies

12 OCT 1990

to cause of striking students

ALARM bells are ringing in Kiev, the capital of the Ukraine, the Soviet Union's second-largest republic. Late on Wednesday night 10,000 people embarked on a spontaneous march to the television station to demand live air time for opposition deputies.

They had come from a student hunger strike in October Revolution Square. There, huddled inside tents, more than half the 200 students from across the Ukraine are refusing food until the Communist Prime Minister, Vitaly Masol, resigns and new elections are called. Yesterday was their 11th day; one student is in a coma and several have been hospitalised.

When parliament held a special session on Wednesday the spectators in the packed gallery thought they were about to witness a vote of no confidence and Mr Masol's resignation, after the presentation of his government's economic report. Opposition MPs have criticised the report for failing to enshrine the principles of market economics and for stipulating that 39 per cent of the republic's hard currency earnings should go to Moscow. Instead, the 239 hardline Communists won the vote.

At the student camp, banners displayed the number 239 in black on a white background, crossed out by a huge red X. Sympathetic Kievites gathered around the cordoned-off strikers, discussed politics and donated money and warm clothes. When news arrived that Mr Masol was still in, the crowd drifted across Khreshchatyk Bou-

From Susan Viets
in Kiev

levard, the main street, blocking traffic. "We'll stay here until they meet the students' demands," shouted an elderly man.

Later 15 MPs from the opposition party, Narodna Rada, which holds one-quarter of the seats, stood at the head of the crowd on the steps of the television station, where they demanded 10 minutes of live air time.

"The Communist Party is the most dangerous force now in the country," said one MP, Olexander Yemets. Accusing Mr Masol of "sabotage", he called for a campaign of civil disobedience and the creation of strike committees.

The Ukraine's radical declaration of sovereignty in July is tangled in conflicting legislation. Narodna Rada's attempts to amend the constitution in keeping with the declaration have been blocked by the hardliners. When the party moved to legislate on the declaration's proviso that Ukrainian soldiers should serve only in the Ukraine, a counter-clause was adopted, reserving a quota of troops for service outside the republic.

Describing the parliament, elected six months ago, as incapable of reform, Mr Yemets said: "We must push for dissolution of parliament, and new elections on a multi-party basis by winter, early spring." At least seven MPs have joined the hunger strike.

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