



Serbian mothers arrive in Ljubljana to see their sons, who are serving in the federal army there. "You are a bunch of murderers," they were told Photograph: David Rose

## Soldiers' mothers trade nationalist insults

LJUBLJANA — A peace mission by mothers visiting their sons serving in the federal army in Slovenia ended in angry rows yesterday as Serbian, Croatian and Slovene parents traded nationalist insults in a Ljubljana car park. The Red Cross mission, which included 500 parents, mostly Serbs, arrived in Ljubljana after a gruelling trip across barricades, writes **Marcus Tanner**.

"I've been in this bus two-and-a-half days," moaned a blonde-haired woman, sobbing quietly in the bus. "Just let me see my son. I'm so frightened for him. He's been serving in a tank crew. I haven't heard from him for weeks. He's very young."

Many were already worn out after staging a two-night protest vigil outside the Serbian parliament in Belgrade, where they demanded the return of their sons from mili-

tary service in Slovenia. Some rushed the building during a debate on the crisis in Slovenia and fought with delegates.

While most of the parents wanted only to see their sons alive and well, and go home, the longed-for emotional reunion was not to be. A bureaucratic row between Serbian and Slovene Red Cross officials, over who should conduct the parents to the local military barracks, scuppered the trip in a tangle of red tape.

While parents sobbed and Red Cross officials argued the issue, the stranded busloads of parents were surrounded by a crowd of curious and none too friendly Slovenes. Heated rows sprang up between Croatian and Serbian mothers, over whether to get off the bus. The Croatian mothers happily accepted an offer of refreshment from

the improvised welcoming committee of mothers of Slovene soldiers. But the angry Serbs refused to get off the bus and set foot on Slovene soil.

"Go away and leave us alone," one Serbian mother shouted through the open window of the bus. "We came to see our sons and not to talk to you."

"Get out of the bus if you're not afraid," jeered a crowd of Slovenes outside. "Afraid? Who's afraid?" a Serb shouted back.

"You're a bunch of murderers," shouted a Serbian woman. "You killed our sons."

"Who is a murderer? You are the murderers," shouted back Magda Kerin, a Slovene. "You even bomb innocent people from your planes." Mrs Kerin said she lived in a Slovene village that was strafed by Yu-

goslav air force MiGs. "The Serbs murder people without any warning and then they have the cheek to accuse us of killing their sons."

As the police intervened to break up the crowd and stop the angry mothers from attacking each other, both sides continued to trade nationalist slogans. "I expected a bit of female solidarity," said one woman from Zagreb, Croatia. "There wasn't a bit."

A handful of mothers stuck to the original aim, to visit their sons serving in Slovenia without getting involved in nationalist disputes. "I just want to see my son. I haven't heard from him for over a month," said Bojana Huseinovic, from Nis, in southern Serbia. "Let the Slovenes secede. What's the problem? I just want my son to come home."