

Life goes on as village ignores ultimatum

THE INDEPENDENT 8/7/91

AT NOON yesterday, as an ultimatum demanding that Slovenia give up control of its border posts to the federal authorities in Belgrade came and went, the only sign of activity at the Gornja Radgona frontier post was a red and white lorry which drove round and round, washing down the road. The Slovenes ignored the federal ultimatum entirely and so, for the moment at least, did the army, which has caused such bloody havoc here in the last 10 days.

In sleepy Radgona, on the border between Slovenia and Austria, a war

has been and gone. Nobody is sure whether it will come again one day. A few hundred yards from the border post, a house in which several families lived is now a burnt-out shell, after attacks on the village by the Yugoslav air force and tanks.

Many of the buildings are spattered by machine-gun and cannon fire, though the Slovenes, ever-efficient, have already replaced most of the shattered panes. The steeple of the church, shot at by one of six tanks which moved into the village, has a gaping hole.

No one at the border post was confident that the army leadership in Belgrade has given up the use of violence to exert its will against Slovenia. One man said: "It's not over yet." The Slovenes declared they were prepared to fight again if need be. But one border guard said: "I don't want to shoot at anybody. I don't want anybody to die. I'm thinking how to solve the Slovene problem without making Europe fear the consequences."

The border crossing at Sentilj, just west of Radgona, saw 20 million people

**From Steve Crawshaw
in Gornja Radgona, Slovenia**

pass through it last year. Yesterday, it was almost deserted, though there was a determination to continue as if everything was normal. Most Slovene border guards are doing the same job as before: the only difference is that they no longer offer allegiance to the Serbian and federal capital, Belgrade. Three captured army trucks were lined up in front of the customs post, newly

painted over with the Slovene colours; red, white and blue. Martin Jancar, a border guard at Sentilj, pointed out that things are simpler in Slovenia than they will ever be in Croatia — parts of which are already on the edge of civil war, with daily gun battles between Serbs and Croats. "Slovenia is ethnically simple. We don't have many minorities. We have no territorial disputes. But in Croatia, they do. The Serbs are paranoid. They're pumped with propaganda all the time. That's a problem for the Croats."

Many road-blocks in Slovenia are still in place, in case the army moves against the republic again because of last month's declaration of independence. But many road-blocks have been partially removed. Tank-traps on main roads have been moved to allow a single file of traffic through, and sometimes — another Slovene touch — mobile traffic lights have been installed to make the traffic flow orderly. At a road-block near Sentilj, several burnt-out lorries lie on their side where they were pushed off the road by the tanks. One

lorry's cargo, shot up 10 days ago, was still smouldering yesterday.

In the middle of a wheat field outside Radgona, an undamaged army helicopter stands where its pilot abandoned it last week. "Independent Slovenia" is now painted across it. A steady trickle of Slovene visitors comes to gaze at the curious sight, while two young guards rest in the shade of a tree. Might the helicopter become part of a new Slovene air force? The guards didn't think so. "We hope that it will go into a museum."