



Zrenjanin, Jugoremedija, 2004 **(2010 Notes about the cover painting)**

ARTIST: MILICA RUŽIČIĆ

BACKGROUND TEXT WRITTEN BY IVAN ZLATIĆ

Pharmaceutical Factory Jugoremedija from Zrenjanin in Serbia was privatized in 2001 in such a way that the workers and retired workers got 58% and the state 42% of the shares. In 2002 the state sold its portion of shares to Jovica Stefanović – Nini, a businessman from Niš, who was still on the interpol's wanted list at that time as Smiljko Kostić's close associate in cigarette smuggling. In 2003 at the Jugoremedija Assembly, the small shareholders refused Nini's proposal to become the majority owner through recapitalization so he forged the decision on recapitalization, registered in court as the owner of 62% of the shares and started persecuting the workers that were active in the Trade Union and Small Shareholders' Association.

Notices given to two workers' leaders were the motive for the first strike in Jugoremedija in December 2003. At the beginning of January the strike was ended successfully and alongside their activities in the factory, the Association submitted the request for annulling the recapitalization. Stefanović disbanded the factory security, formed his private army in Jugoremedija and increased the pressure upon the workers, which provoked another strike in March. The workers threw the private security out of the factory, and Stefanović's management left Jugoremedija. During the following summer they tried to get in by force several times, but with no success. However, on August 19th Nini's private army provoked the fight with workers-shareholders again, which the police used as the reason to enter the factory area. Although the Zrenjanin police established order, the Government sent a paramilitary

police unit from Belgrade, under the command of general-major Milivoje Mirkov, to Jugoremedija the same afternoon. In the evening Mirkov summoned four workers' leaders to the Zrenjanin police for negotiations. There he informed them they were arrested. They spent the following 10 days in isolation cells. Workers-shareholders, the majority owners of Jugoremedija, were thrown from the factory area on the 20th August. In spite of the public scandal caused by the brutality of paramilitary police forces, in spite of the Government Anti-Corruption Council's findings that the police should have maintained order in Jugoremedija, and not intervened in the property dispute that was being conducted in court, Stefanović continued with violence—he fired the workers that had been on strike. In the following year he bought Belgrade Serbolek, Menta from Padej... Wherever he came, he started plundering, selling goods to his companies at the reductions of over 30%. At the same time, 150 fired workers-shareholders of Jugoremedija were fighting persistently in public and in court for their right to live and work. In December 2006, the Supreme Court passed a judgment in their favor. Stefanović stayed in Jugoremedija for a whole three more months, trying to take raw materials and products from the warehouse in order to prevent small shareholders from restarting production after the takeover. The workers blocked the entrances and guarded the factory day and night until the 1st of March 2007, when at Jugoremedija Assembly more than 4000 small shareholders presented majority ownership and elected new management.

In the following three years, Jugoremedija workers-shareholders themselves, relying exclusively on their work and their own resources, invested over ten million Euros in bringing the production process into line with European standards. At the same time they supported the struggle of workers and small shareholders in several Zrenjanin companies that had similar problems in privatization, as well as numerous groups throughout Serbia, such as the workers in Zastava elektro, Trudbenik, Srbolek...

Stefanović continued with plundering and violence against workers and shareholders of the companies he was buying in privatisation processes. He was arrested on the 9th of November

2010 on charges of damaging the workers and shareholders of Srbolek of over five million Euros.

Milivoje Mirkov is retired now, and is a security commissioner of the Football Association of Serbia.

Created under the aegis of Servo Mihalj industrial complex in 1961, defended by workers' and share-holders' solidarity struggle, Jugoremedija has become the only company in Serbia where, through joint-stock company bodies, the spirit of genuine self-management has been created. Such probably did not exist at the time of official "self-management".

