Casa Pueblo

Published by Lever Press

Casa Pueblo: A Puerto Rican Model of Self-Governance.  


For additional information about this book
https://muse.jhu.edu/book/101014

For content related to this chapter
https://muse.jhu.edu/related_content?type=book&id=3242911
The second anti-mining campaign drew large crowds thanks to *The Motherland Concert*, a major cultural event featuring talent from Adjuntas. September 17–21, 1984.
WHAT IS TO BE DONE, AND HOW?

We dedicated most of 1983 to conducting an in-depth analysis of what to do next and how to do it. Tinti, Noemilda, Brunilda García, Ileana Carrión, and I worked on this with fierce passion. The results of our labor came to define the trajectory of our organization, then known as the Taller de Arte y Cultura de Adjuntas, the Adjuntas Arts and Culture Workshop. Our analysis showed that the government and the mining companies had become more uncompromising than ever in their commitment to exploit our copper, gold, and silver deposits. Although most of the town opposed the mining projects, the local people demonstrated a certain level of apathy and unwillingness to get involved in the conflict. Fear, the product of a history of oppression and intimidation, weighed on Adjuntas as much as it did on the rest of Puerto Rico. The Adjuntas Arts and Culture Workshop was generally viewed sympathetically as a pro-independence revolutionary group ready to do what needed to be done. Nevertheless, it was clear that the Workshop had not generated the wide base of community support that the circumstances required. Our analysis revealed that there was a disconnect between everyday people, the Workshop, and the struggle. How to shorten the distance between ordinary citizens and the Workshop had proved to be a challenge. Clearly, we needed a new strategy, and we had our breakthrough when we discovered that Puerto Rican culture could be employed as a tool of resistance.

We decided our next step would be to stage a large cultural event with resources and talent from Adjuntas, and we called it The Motherland Within. To bring the idea to life, we organized ourselves according to our skills and areas of interest and we started various working groups, or commissions. These included commissions for artisans, for traditional dance among the young people, for folk singers and musicians, for agriculture, and for a study of mining. We also organized an artist group of women called Las Marianas, composed of wives, mothers, and allies of our struggle. We grew in number and in the diversity of our political views, opinions, and
ideas about life. We established a new, rich, and complex organizing body with the immediate objective of stopping the mines. On October 4, 1983, the Artists’ Commission met. Folk singers, musicians, and artists of all kinds agreed to participate in the defense of our shared territory. On November 12, a much larger meeting took place with members from all the commissions and all the collaborators in the growing Adjuntas Arts and Culture Workshop. The dialogue about what to do and how prepared us to start 1984 with plenty of enthusiasm. The Motherland Within would serve as both cultural expression and artistic ammunition. Whether this combination of knowledge, culture, and community would be effective had yet to be proven.

THE MOTHERLAND WITHIN

The Motherland Within Concert (Concierto Patria Adentro) became a cultural production that brought together all the commissions and working groups. Brunilda García and Ramón Calderín worked as the designers, consultants, and collaborators that brought the show to life. With no previous experience in theater, we wrote the script together. The production included two narrators, three folk singers, five musicians, and six members of the youth folk-dance group. The light technician, the stagehand, the stage manager, and the sound engineer were integral members of the team. One person oversaw the projection of large images of our country’s wealth of natural beauty, culture and humanity; these slides were synced to the narration and lyrics of the songs. I prepared a short talk about Plan 2020 and the mining industry for the show’s intermission. Some volunteers prepared the dressing room, while others readied a lighting system using galvanized tubes, large cans with a hole cut out in them and multicolored lightbulbs. This was a completely new experience for us, a new form of learning, and a different way to fight. The artisans stepped into the limelight to
showcase their crafts and make themselves known to the community. Culture, along with learning, was the central focus.

We began rehearsals and meetings. Brunilda and the dancers held several workshops on physical expression and heel toe dance techniques. Rosa Meneses Albizu, the granddaughter of Puerto Rican independence movement hero don Pedro Albizu Campos and then a member of the National Ballet of Cuba, instructed the group, as did Tere Marichal. Sometimes we had to go back and make changes to the script to improve it or go out into the countryside and take more photos for the slideshow. It took a lot of effort to put on this production and to bring together more than thirty amateurs around one goal—not to mention organizing all the volunteers who built the stage, did the publicity, and coordinated the events. Puerto Rican culture was the artistic tool we had been missing to help us frame our struggle as one of national affirmation.

Mounting the production raised our self-esteem and clarified who we were and who we wanted to be. This was the key: we had to value ourselves first to be able to fight with a desire to win. Our slogan was: “Sí a la vida, no a las minas” (Yes to Life, No to Mining.) We learned that happiness is in the fight itself and that the best way to speak is with actions. Noemilda and Tinti; Sandra, Nomaris, and Yomaira; along with Alexito, Curi, Arturo and Ariel, all filled important roles working with our neighbors on Water Street (including María and Tita). Fonso Vélez Massol developed his photography skills; he was also the light technician and grew increasingly more involved. Salvador Acevedo and “el Corso” were the most active of the artisans. And occasionally, musicians and folk singers—Tony and Sixto Ostolaza, the Badea Brothers, el Indio, Casimiro Miró, Aniel Irizarry, and Tata Ramos—energized the group with their songs. It was not easy to find harmony among people with so many differing political voices without losing the specific character of each individual. Sometimes participants would move away from the group a bit, but they would typically
The concept of unity is often over-emphasized in social movements. We managed to find unity without speaking, and despite our differences, by working together to beat the mining industry without compromising our fundamental beliefs.

The debut performance of The Motherland Within took place on February 25, 1984, at the San Joaquín High School in Adjuntas in front of a full house. When it was over, no one wanted to leave, and instead stayed to shower the performers with hugs and praise. Artisans shared some of their works as gifts. A new chapter had begun. The distance between the people and those who were fighting for their interests started to shrink. Every member of the Workshop became a leader. From that day on we sang, taking our message to different places, affirming our identity, valuing what we had, and fighting to defend it. People began to request performances of The Motherland Within, and we obliged that same year with a presentation at the Fishermen’s festival in Vieques, held in opposition to the presence on the island of United States Marines. Truthfully, I don’t remember how we transported ourselves from Adjuntas to Fajardo and then on the ferry to Vieques and back with our contingent of dreamers. It seemed like magic or a miracle. Looking at the photos now, I see distinct moments of the trip filled with beautiful, smiling faces full of life. As we approached Vieques, we heard a powerful voice singing in the distance, “Barlovento, amarra el perro y suelta el viento...” (Windward side of the boat, tie up the dog and release the wind). It was Andrés “El Jíbaro” Jiménez, who later joined our team. In the following months we performed The Motherland Within throughout Puerto Rico: at an homage to the immortal bolero singer Davilita in an unforgettable display sponsored by the Bayamón Teachers’ Federation; at the University of Puerto Rico in Río Piedras; and for the Conference for the National Affirmation of the Social Sciences, in an event organized by Doctor Luis Nieves Falcón, who also later joined our group. Everywhere we went, the show was a success, the attendance was solid, and we met people who later became important collaborators with the
Workshop. All the events were free of charge, with artists contributing voluntarily to defend their country. Between concerts we continued to offer conferences on Plan 2020 and the Mining Industry. We presented at the University of Puerto Rico campuses in Humacao, Río Piedras, and Aguadilla. We also made presentations to the medical students at the Catholic University in Ponce, to the teachers in the Teachers’ Federation in Morovis, at the Santa Rita High School in Bayamón, at the University of Puerto Rico Law School, and to a religious group in Ceiba that included the celebrated patriot Doña Isabelita Rosado.

WORK CONTINUES AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

Throughout 1984, we continued to evolve productively at the local level thanks to a lot of dedication and collective effort. The presence of the Workshop grew as word spread and we began to accept invitations to perform at schools, hospitals, and at the Adjuntas Centro para Envejecientes (Center for the Aging), where the attendees declared themselves to be in opposition to mining. At the Rafael Aparicio Jiménez Middle School, we curated an exhibition of works by artist Miguel Ángel Guzmán, which dealt with the theme of mining and was titled Canto a la Naturaleza (A Hymn to Nature). At that same school, we organized a film festival and a talk about the mining industry given by Arturo Massol, one of our members, to his group of seventh grade students. Doors that were once closed now opened to us. For the first time, the Kite Festival that we had been putting on for years, drew in a large crowd. More than 300 people including more than fifty kite flyers came to the event. The most common kite themes were the Puerto Rican flag, provincial figures, and designs evoking the mining industry. Our kite was in support of Puerto Rican prisoners of war. During an earlier visit to Chicago, we had met Luz and Alicia Rodríguez, two jailed patriots. At the Kite Festival, the sisters’ faces seemed to fly free in the Adjuntas sky.
Little by little, we persuaded the town to our way of thinking and doing things. Together with religious groups, hospitals, and regular citizens, we began a campaign against the noise produced by cars with loudspeakers during electoral campaigns. This increased our range of action. The political parties were driving people crazy with constant noise day and night. “The truth doesn’t shout,” became our motto. We gathered petitions, hung banners, passed out bulletins, and introduced an ordinance which the Municipal Assembly passed in its entirety. The community saw that we succeeded in lessening the noise, proving our intention of working in their best interests. To round out the year and prepare for the next stage of resistance to the mining industry, the Workshop published my book Plan 2020 and Mining Industry Exploitation, and The Motherland Within was performed in the neighborhoods near the mining sites.

In September 1984 we held our biggest production to date, a weeklong festival of cultural events in support of our anti-mining struggle. On the first day, we celebrated the reopening of the Joaquín Parrilla Gallery at its new location. Dr. Ricardo Cordero from Adjuntas, who was Pedro Albizu Campos’ doctor, unveiled the new space. An exhibit of paintings by Rafael Rivera Rosa and a poetry recital by our own Brunilda García were the highlights of the night. Filled with such remarkable people, the small venue felt much bigger than it really was. On the second day, we held a symposium on the mining industry in the town plaza, featuring speakers Juan Antonio Corretjer, Dr. Luis Nieves Falcón, law student at the University of Puerto Rico José Amundaray, and me. This was followed by a recital of Afro-Puerto Rican poetry and a concert by Adjuntas troubadours. During the following days we held performances of The Motherland Within and a National Concert featuring several artists. We closed on the last day with singer Andrés “El Jíbaro” Jiménez and his band. The week had been a major success. There were lots of people in attendance, and there was a visible shift in in the size and composition of the audience. It was completely
different from our first major event in that same plaza, back in September 1981 with its attendance of one. We felt that our hard work was paying off. Little by little we were doing away with the separation between us and the people of Adjuntas. However, we were not about to rest on our laurels; we knew that we had to keep working if we wanted to win against the powerful mining industry. With that thought in our minds, we finished 1984, a year full of hope, hard work and accomplishments, with a Celebration of Fellowship at the covered basketball court of Adjuntas on the December 16, 1984.

PLAN 2020 AND MINING INDUSTRY EXPLOITATION

Community organizing sometimes led to pleasant surprises. My book *Plan 2020 and Mining Industry Exploitation* began to be used at the University of Puerto Rico in Río Piedras, and our talks on campus started to fill amphitheaters. In return, students and university professors visited us in Adjuntas in search of more information and to offer their support in solidarity with the movement. Students began to write their masters theses and doctoral dissertations in collaboration with us; the first of these was a student from the School of Social Work at the University of Puerto Rico in Río Piedras. This led to new collaborations, more support, and much learning. On May 9, 1985, Dr. Luis Nieves Falcón hosted the presentation of my book at the Aboy House in San Juan, and more people started to invite us to give our talk. We did, at the University of Puerto Rico in Ponce, in Ciales, to religious groups in Vieques, and at the Ponce Medical School where a student wrote a thesis on the implications of mining to public health. The findings of his thesis reaffirmed the urgency of our fight and lent further credibility to the plans we had made. Our presence was also felt at the national level. The Workshop helped with a report I presented at the First Meeting of Environmental Organizations in Ponce. We participated in two big marches: one in defense of El Yunque
National Forest, which was threatened by the planned felling of 6000 trees; and another against nuclear arms, on June 9 in Ceiba. We also were invited to speak on several radio programs in support the campaign, which was a good way to maintain contact with everybody living in and around Adjuntas.

GROWING FROM WITHIN

1985 saw many changes to the way the Workshop functioned and to overall levels of participation. It also saw the birth of a new project of great significance to Puerto Rico that I describe in the next chapter. For these reasons, we can describe 1985 as the year the organization grew from within. The rehearsals and meetings for The Motherland Within continued unabated. On March 23, we presented the program in Vegas Abajo, an anti-mining neighborhood. Some 200 people attended, a resounding success and a strengthening of our anti-mining campaign. We held the fifth Kite Festival on March 30 and dedicated it to the memory of our dear musician friend from Adjuntas, Chelo Román. On May 11, we celebrated Puerto Rican Mother’s Day in the covered basketball court. It turned out to be another encouraging success, featuring participants from every one of the commissions in our Workshop, as well as members of two newly founded groups, the anti-mining chapter of Vegas Abajo, and the Adjuntas Student Democratic Front. There was music, poetry, a raffle, presents, and flowers for all the women in attendance. Finally, we presented a commemorative plaque to the organizer of the Kite Festival, Alfonso Vélez, and a donation to a family who had lost their home on Water Street to fire.

AN INFRACTION OF THE LAW

One problem we cannot overlook is institutional oppression of the kind that is designed to intimidate, punish, or slow efforts that oppose the interests of the State and the entrenched economic
and political powers. We had by that time become a real threat to those interests. We were never blind to this fact and, in fact, we lived it in our own flesh. Since 1984, Secret Police had been assigned to constantly monitor us and the events we organized. They followed us to meetings we held in other towns and carried out the sad assignment of visiting the homes of our dance group members, folk singers, musicians, artists, and collaborators to intimidate them. We only found out about the harassment when nobody came to a meeting. Once we found out why no one had shown up, we had to start all over to convince them to return. It was a constant struggle to put on the performance of *Motherland Within* during this period. Elsewhere, teachers who were part of our organization were reassigned to lesser jobs in the school system with the aim of intimidating them, scaring other members, and discouraging the older students from joining our cause. They searched our houses and even slaughtered animals on our properties. Wherever we went, they went there, too. When returning from events outside of town, a car would follow us all the way back to Adjuntas, even to our homes. The partial release of secret files drawn up by the Police Intelligence Division provides evidence of the surveillance we were under. Several informants infiltrated the Workshop to do harm to our fight to save the water, the earth, the air, and our shared resources by preventing the exploitation of the mining deposits. For a few bucks, Rodríguez, Natal, Pietri, and someone called Antonmarchi (332-H-2), all sold their souls. Their collaboration with the government and mining interests put our lives in grave danger. We lived under constant threat.