

Meet "Las Marianas" - Puerto Rican Women Build New Organizations



This is an interview with "Las Marianas," women members of the Taller de Arte y Cultura in Adjuntas, taped on Aug. 24, 1986. We spoke to Tinti Deya-Massol, Evelyn Pérez, "Bechi" Torres, and Noemilda Vélez (photo l to r)

Free Puerto Rico!: You are an organization of women in the Taller de Arte y Cultura; can you tell us about your work and how you came together as a group?

B: We began by coming to the Taller de Arte y Cultura, and then we decided to form a group of women who were part of the Taller to struggle shoulder-to-shoulder with our men. One day we decided to call the group "Las Marianas" in honor of Mariana Bracetti. Who was she? She was the one who sewed the flag of the Grito de Lares. (The Grito de Lares, Sept. 23, 1868, was the attempted uprising to declare an independent Puerto Rico — ed.) As more women were joining the Taller, we wanted to make our group bigger and support each other in dealing with our overall problem, the 2020 Plan. To struggle against the 2020 Plan not over the heads of our men, but hand-in-hand with them against the problems of this society. One of the main problems is the plan for mining. We are totally opposed to mineral exploitation of Puerto Rico. And we are willing to do whatever is necessary alongside the men, to struggle to stop this Plan.

FPR!: Why did you build an organization for women? Through it you struggle against the 2020 Plan, but what do you project as your direction in organizing? Are there particular issues for women that you are addressing?

E: Well, the majority of us women have to work in order that our families have enough to eat. We decided that although we were all — men and women — meeting together as part of the Taller, if women met together, we could bring more women into the work. We set up a series of activities like sewing or embroidery, a whole lot of activities where we learned to do different things from each other.

Free Puerto Rico!

Newsletter of the New Movement in Solidarity with Puerto Rican Independence & Socialism
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Trial Begins Dec 8 for Jaime, Oscar, Kojo

The US government is taking every measure possible to stop the work of the Puerto Rican independence movement. Right now the government is pursuing a "continuing investigation" that has charged a leader of the National Committee to Free Puerto Rican POWs with conspiracy. The case, in which the government claims a conspiracy including Puerto Rican and New African prisoners and several North Americans, has been the excuse for violations of human rights through a very high level of surveillance and spying. The National Committee has learned that the Puerto Rican independence movement is the number one priority of the FBI.

On October 1, Puerto Rican POW Oscar López-Rivera, New African Political Prisoner Kojo (s/n Grailing Brown), and National Coordinator of the National Committee to Free Puerto Rican POWs, Jaime Delgado, were again brought

to a tiny maximum-security courtroom inside the Metropolitan Correctional Center in Chicago to begin proceedings on charges of conspiracy to effect the escape of Oscar and other prisoners from the Leavenworth Federal Penitentiary and conspiracy to purchase and transport weapons and explosives.

The government has tried to isolate and weaken the prisoners in this case: Oscar has been videotaped while being strip-searched, and Kojo and Oscar were each given only a third of the written materials they needed on the case, while the prison guards read the other third. The government has not even specified when it will hand over the thousands of pages of documents they claim as "proof" of the conspiracy. Federal Judge Hart expressed his "hope" that all materials would be made available to the defendants and that the MCC would provide adequate arrangements for the defendants to prepare themselves, but was unwilling to make a more specific

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First New Movement Work Brigade Goes to Puerto Rico

In August and September, some members of the New Movement got the opportunity to see first-hand how the US colony of Puerto Rico really works. We visited the island in two work brigades, to learn about current conditions and to make a video documenting the facts of the 2020 Plan. The August group participated as delegates to the Encuentro Caribeño, a conference in support of Human Rights and National Sovereignty in the Caribbean and Latin America, where we heard representatives of 27 countries. The conference highlighted the Puerto Rican POWs and Political Prisoners, climaxing in a huge demonstration through the streets of San Juan in support of the independence activists arrested on August 30, 1985. The second New Movement work group participated in the Grito de Lares celebration on September 23 and interviewed many activists. The visits made us see that Puerto Rico is truly a Latin American nation, and we North Americans have to act to end the colonial control of Puerto Rico by this country.

We focused our work on the 2020 Plan, which is already putting into place the infrastructure for a new stage of exploitation. The New Movement traveled to many "development sites" with Alexis Massol of the Taller de Arte y Cultura of Adjuntas. The Taller has been at the forefront of the national struggle against the 2020 Plan. While the New Movement was in Puerto Rico, the Taller scored an important victory in their campaign to stop the strip-mining of the mountainous region where Adjuntas is located: the colonial government announced it would not permit mining, and said it would buy back the land from US mining companies to put it to agricultural and recreational use. Although this decision is a direct response to the massive organizing done by the Taller, Massol and others pointed out that the

struggle will not end until the entire 2020 Plan is defeated by a free Puerto Rico.

We were able to meet with many groups which form the Taller, including students who work in the high schools to resist US military recruitment and to show positive alternatives for Puerto Rican youth, and Las Marianas, a group which incorporates women into the struggle through cultural projects and education. The women of Las Marianas and other women we interviewed pointed to the continuing fight against forced sterilization and to the importance of women in the struggle to liberate the island.

We could see that Puerto Rico already bears the scars of the implementation of the 2020 Plan. Near Adjuntas, we saw a super highway which is being built to handle heavy mining equipment. We saw the US Army Corps of Engineers building a dam at Maraguez above the city of Ponce. The construction has already displaced 2500 families, in order to generate electricity to supply

the industrial "parks" being built around Ponce. Alexis Massol showed the New Movement several zones which have been developed for industrial, mining and military use: land "frozen" in the mining areas, barred for any use because of mining plans; a water treatment plant that admits it is already unable to process the toxic chemicals that it was created to handle; new DuPont plants to make the same type of chemical herbicides that caused the Bhopal disaster. Women from Mayaguez told us they are being poisoned by toxic gas leaks in the pharmaceutical and cloth factories there. We talked to local fishermen and community residents who are organizing to fight the installation of Voice of America transmitters in Cabo Rojo. In organizing to protect their health and environment, local people have become aware of the military role the US has planned for this region of Puerto Rico. We saw this in many local struggles: Puerto Ricans are uniting local issues into a larger

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September 23, Lares — Hundreds assembled from all over the island to commemorate the 118th anniversary of the first declaration of an independent Puerto Rico.

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understanding of the nature of colonialism on their island. When we visited the squatter community of El Tuque, outside Ponce, we met people who have had to seize land because of the lack of housing. They are now struggling for water, electricity and roads, and the colonial government is scheming to win their support by offering such services bit by bit. But in Villa Sin Miedo, in the northeastern corner of the island, 350 combative and united families are showing that they can develop their community by themselves. They survived the assault by TAC squads and National Guard that threw them off their land in 1981, and are constructing a new Town Without Fear.

We saw what many Puerto Ricans think is a model of US plans for the island — the small island of Vieques, where two-thirds of the land has been taken for a US Navy base. We met with local anti-Navy activists, including Carlos Zenon of the Vieques Fishermen's Association. He told us the US Navy is now practicing in the waters of Vieques in small PT-type boats, and he suggested these would be used in aggression against Nicaragua. The people of Vieques continue to resist the Navy's plans, and they refuse to relinquish their island despite Navy efforts to displace them.



August 30— Demonstration in San Juan, Puerto Rico, in support of the 16 Puerto Rican independence activists arrested 1 year ago.

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order. He did order the trial to begin on December 8. Although Jaime Delgado is out on bond, it is difficult for the three defendants to prepare themselves for this case under the unprecedented restrictions the MCC claims as "security measures." This include videotaping of any persons who wish to witness the proceedings, as well as metal detector searches conducted twice on each person. Legal counselors have reason to believe that even their conversations with the defendants have been subject to electronic surveillance, a violation of what is considered "privileged communication."

Despite these efforts by the US, the prisoners and Jaime have remained strong. POW Oscar López-Rivera reaffirmed his right to POW status under international law, and Kojo also rejected US jurisdiction over New Africans. Oscar wrote about his reactions to abuses at the arraignment, Sept. 5: *"despite the disagreeable experience that I endured — insults and abuse at the hands of my jailers, even being videotaped while strip-searched — seeing the faces of so many loved ones dispelled the bad times I suffered. There was no justice in their alleged court, but among a handful of human beings, there was much sensitivity, respect and love."*

The National Committee to Free Puerto Rican POWs has published an analysis of this important case in their journal, *Libertad*. The following is an excerpt from their explanation:

"While the ongoing attack clearly follows the FBI's decision to make the Puerto Rican independence movement its number one priority, several things have become increasingly apparent. Chief among these is the prosecution's motive behind the decision to drop all charges against compañeras Viola Salgado and Dora García-López, originally arrested with Jaime Delgado on July 3, 1986 in an exaggerated show of force.

The government has either been forced by the weakness of its case to drop the charges or — in a deadly game of cat and mouse — is biding its time while increasing surveillance in hopes of bring charges against other compañeros (including Viola and Dora) with a superseding indictment at a later date. Given the nature of the prosecution's arguments, we can only assume the worst."

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**WELCOME HOME, FELIX ROSA!**

Puerto Rican political prisoner, Felix Rosa, also the brother of POW Luis Rosa, was released on Friday, October 17, from the Illinois State Correctional Center at Lincoln, IL. He was met by a delegation of his family and community that included MLN Grand Jury resister Julio Rosado and members of the National Committee to Free Puerto Rican POWs.

Felix had served six years in Illinois prison. He, of all the Puerto Ricans jailed for independence activities in the US, has served the longest sentence. His steadfastness in the face of continual harrassment inside the prison system has been a model for his community. We join in welcoming him back to his community, who provided him with a rousing welcome with music and greetings from many other prisoners, on the night of his release.

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Marianas from p. 1

We also learned about the 2020 Plan and integrated ourselves and other women into the Taller.

B: For example, we'd get together and share our handicraft skills, but then for new women, we'd also always have an informal talk about the 2020 Plan — how it would affect us. That's how we did it. We're like the ants: put one in the line and the others follow. So we grew pretty big.

FPR!: We would like to ask about some examples of how being part of this struggle has affected and changed you.

N: Puerto Rico, because of its historical and social situation and its Spanish heritage, has a particular vision of women. It is different from women in other continents. They tell us women from the very beginning that the woman is for the home, to cook, to sew, to knit. The man is the one on the street. The man can participate in any kind of activity, but not the woman. So we had the problem of how to bring other women of our community to be active and enter the Taller. How could we develop our own ways and methods to raise the consciousness of women of what we were facing as a society. So we'd have a sewing workshop here at Casa Pueblo and women could say, "See, they're having a sewing circle. Let's go." If we had said "We're giving a speech about mineral exploitation," women would have said "No, that's for the men." Even though the situation for women is changing slowly, this vision of men and women is the strongest in the interior of Puerto Rico — especially this mountainous region where we are. This is where the idea of different functions for man and women is most rooted.

Another way we've tried to struggle is by looking at women who have been very important in our history. We started with Puerto Rican history, with Mariana Bracetti, Julia de Burgos, so that we'd all realize that Puerto Rico hasn't had just great men, but it



Women's Clinic (in English) in the central mountain zone of Puerto Rico — a population control outpost and not a service for women to preserve their health.

has also had great women. Because those same social and economic conditions make people think the only distinguished Puerto Ricans are men. Even schools help create this image. They never tell us anything about women. Here at Casa Pueblo, we've brought historians and done research to give women this information.

B: The woman tends to get hidden. How can we say the men are all-important when in this century — when we are living — the women are making great strides and carrying out an important role? Now a man works 8 hours and then leaves his work, but women don't leave their work ever. If they are supposed to make a home, then they never are off the job.

N: When the Taller began, the only women were Tinti and I. Both Bechi and Evelyn here are examples of women who have had to overcome obstacles to be part of Las Marianas and the Taller.

B: In my case, it was that I got interested. This was before we had this house, and there were two offices. I had gotten to know Tinti before that, but I never came to activities, because they always tried to make people afraid of the Taller by saying they were bad — you know, like communists. But then one night one of the women told me about a night where there was going to be a poetry reading. I'm a person who would go to any cultural activity, because I like those things. So I saw they were offering cultural activities for our

community and they weren't bad as others said they were. I went and I liked this movement, because it has been a movement that has liberated me from many things. There are many things that are like phantoms or fantasies; little by little you start seeing reality. We're not just confined to four walls, but we have to see the reality all around us. That's why we're trying to draw more women into our work.

"I went and I liked this movement, because it has ... liberated me from many things."

N: You've asked me questions that I've never had a chance to think about before. There is one thing I'd like to add, about our work in Las Marianas and the Taller. So many people ask us why we call ourselves an institute for art and culture when we are struggling against mining. And gradually I've come to think that one of our most important responsibilities is the struggle to preserve our culture and our language, just so that we can continue to live as a nation. We have to have a territory in common, we have to defend our territory and not allow the mining, because that would destroy our territory. If it is destroyed, where would we base our culture. So then we wouldn't have any culture either — therefore no nation.

B: Why did I join Las Marianas? Well, in grade school — I went to school originally in the US — they always had us pledge allegiance and sing the national anthem. Here in Puerto Rico they don't do this. Even the so-called Puerto Rican anthem isn't the right one. The right one was written by Lola Rodríguez de Tió and is very revolutionary. Here, during the governorship of Luis Ferré, about twenty-five years into the Commonwealth, he rewrote the words to what we have now.

FPR!: We have seen in the 2020 Plan that there is a very high rate of sterilization of women. Do you encounter this as a problem among women here?

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T: Yes, we do. Right now we are not working around this issue, since we are at a stage of building our work. But we are sponsoring a program next month where a woman psychologist working on this issue is going to speak. We always speak about sterilization as genocide against our people when ever we talk about the 2020 Plan.

B: The fact is that the center of the island is where sterilization is the highest. Since there is so little work here, many women say, "I shouldn't have children." The government presents sterilization as an economic alternative. But in reality, when the government has to evict people to start the mining, they'd rather have fewer people to evict.

"an important point to tell our north american sisters is that the woman is very important all around the world."

E: Also, Puerto Rico is number one in the rate of Caesarean deliveries. During the caesarean, it is much easier and more practical to sterilize the women. They almost did the same thing to me, for example. They gave me 3 C-sections and sterilized me. They made me think that I shouldn't have more. Now they do C-sections for anything. You go in for an X-ray or an exam and they want to get out the knife. Some women they tell that their baby is too big for regular birth, or that the umbilical cord is in the way, or whatever, as they told my sister-in-law. Others, of course, are necessary sometimes. Right now there is tremendous criticism about caesareans.

B: In fact, they gave me a caesarean also. Now they tell me 8 or 9 years later that I can't risk another caesarean and the doctor offers to sterilize me.

E: Sometimes I feel terrible because someone says to me, "You don't even know what it's like to have a child, since they just put you out and cut out the baby." I

feel terrible, because I wanted to have children — to experience the birth of my three. But they gave me no alternative but these caesareans. It's like they say I'm not as much of a woman because they delivered the babies by caesarean.

"One of our most important responsibilities is the struggle to preserve our culture and our language, just so that we can continue to live as a nation."

T: What Evelyn is telling you about is exactly what happens to women who are sterilized. A study has just been made here in Puerto Rico. One of the consequences of sterilization is a big drop in the feeling of self-worth among the women. A very negative repercussion on the family, and it comes directly from this system they have imposed on us.

E: An important point to tell our north american sisters is that the woman is very important all around the world. It's very important for the women to struggle along with the men. Not for women's liberation that means conquering the men, but for the liberation of the women to work together in the struggle with the men, a struggle we must join. That's where Las Marianas come from.

B: See, here in Puerto Rico and other Latin American countries, the man's machismo is what makes him think he's superior and the strong one. But if we're all struggling together, and if the woman is working outside the home, then if the man comes home first, he can cook and do what's needed. If I help you, you help me — we are trying to develop a circle where love and solidarity are the basis of the system. We're equal and just as capable in culture, in work, in everything. But the struggle is not to just get on top.

E: No, but the struggle isn't really just in the home. It's at the level of our whole country. If we don't struggle together, we can't ever defend our nation. So, on with the struggle!

Rights Conf. from p. 6

US aggression. The *abuela* from Argentina told us that nearly half a million people had disappeared during the 4 successive military dictatorships, and that the Argentine government still was not cooperating fully to prosecute the criminals or their masters. In Guatemala, the entire *Maya Quiché* population is being forced into "model villages" along the lines suggested by the US after its experience of Viet Nam. All the delegates united in condemning US intervention in Nicaragua and El Salvador. (Salvadoran delegates were not able to attend, because the US announced they would be sent back to the Duarte government of El Salvador — to face death or imprisonment.)

The Conference was a victory for the Puerto Rican independence movement as well; delegates from all the countries are taking the message home that Puerto Rico is a sister Latin American nation, and that 88 years of US colonialism have not taken away its desire to be free. Delegates called for freedom for Puerto Rico and for all the Puerto Ricans imprisoned for the struggle to win that freedom. In particular, the delegate from Mexico agreed to add the demand of all the delegates to the request that the Mexican government grant political asylum to Puerto Rican freedom fighter Guillermo Morales, and that he not be extradited to the US. The conference as a whole passed resolutions calling for an end to colonialism in the Americas by 1992, the 500th anniversary of the "discovery" of America. That day 500 years ago began the process of colonization, but it also began the birth process of all the Caribbean and Latin American nations. By 1992, we North Americans also agree, all those nations should be free of control by the US as well.



Latin American Human Rights Conference Held in Puerto Rico

Human-rights activists from 26 Latin American and Caribbean nations met in Puerto Rico at the end of August for the first Caribbean and Latin American Conference for Human Rights and National Sovereignty. The three-day conference, called by the Unitary Committee Against Repression (CUCRE), the Committee United for Ecumenical Action (CASEP), and noted Puerto Rican patriot Rafael Cancel Miranda, was dedicated to the 30 Puerto Rican POWs and political prisoners in US prisons and — in the case of Guillermo Morales — in Mexico. Puerto Rican clergy, labor, independence organizations sent 35 delegates, including the MLN and the National Committee to Free Puerto Rican POWs. Members of the New Movement were invited as solidarity delegates from the US.

One of the grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo in Argentina, a priest from Bolivia, a Colombian lawyer representing political prisoners were some of the South American delegates; a Honduran labor lawyer, a member of the National Assembly of Nicaragua, and a Panamanian human-rights worker were among the Central Americans. The Caribbeans in-



Delegate from Bolivia listens as Rosalinda Soto of CUCRE speaks to the Caribbean and Latin American Conference on Human Rights and National Sovereignty on August 29 in Puerto Rico

cluded Dominican labor lawyers, a Haitian human-rights lawyer and a Cuban church worker. Most were from non-governmental organizations. In the case of the representative from the Guatemala Human Rights Commission, she has to carry out her work in exile in Managua.

The delegates soon found many problems in common. Repeatedly delegates criticized the US and the International Monetary Fund for the most basic violations of their human rights — the right of a nation

to control its economic and political life. The Hondurans and the Puerto Ricans both called for an end to the US use of their countries as bases of aggression against their sister nations, and to US militarization of their societies. In almost every one of the countries of the Americas, there are numerous political prisoners or disappeared, usually those who struggle to maintain their indigenous or national culture against exploitation by international economic control and

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The New Movement in Solidarity with Puerto Rican Independence and Socialism is a national organization that works to develop understanding and support for the struggle of the Puerto Rican people — invaded and seized by the US military in 1898 — to liberate their nation and to establish an independent socialist society. As North Americans, we in the New Movement work under the leadership of the Movimiento de Liberacion Nacional Puertorriqueño, a US-based organization of Puerto Rican patriots. The New Movement chapters are involved in many activities against US colonialism and US military intervention. We have written material, slide and film programs on such topics as the 2020 Plan, the history of Puerto Rico and the independence movement. A new slide program entitled, "The Independence Movement through the Eyes of Puerto Rican Women" is now available. Please write or call the chapter nearest you to set up a program and discussion.

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