

tions, feminist organizations put forward an intersectional analysis of the dictatorship as bringing together interlocking systems of racism, patriarchy, imperialism, and homophobia.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, a core of committed activists sustained efforts to take down the regime from abroad. Journalists exposed the CIA's role in Operation Condor, which was responsible for disappearances, political assassinations, and terror throughout South America. Another sustained hub of solidarity activism was the North American Congress on Latin America (NACLA), a media outlet formed by several North Americans who had been in Chile during the coup and who remained committed to providing analysis of Chile and the culpability of the US state. By the 1980s, however, many activists from the Chilean solidarity movement were shifting their focus to Central America, especially the Sandinista struggle in Nicaragua.

After a long and bitter battle, Pinochet was ousted from power in March 1990 through an electoral referendum energized by massive protest. To critics' chagrin, the transition left intact an enduring system of neoliberalism—or what some referred to as “el Pinochetismo sin Pinochet” (“Pinochetism without Pinochet”). Nonetheless, the practical and symbolic importance of the regime's end cannot be understated, particularly among survivors of the dictatorship. Pinochet's defeat sent a clear message that the international community would not tolerate authoritarian regimes. Further, it set the stage for democratization across the region. The solidarity movement was instrumental in bringing this victory; as scholars and activists have argued, it forged a new vocabulary of human rights and, in particular, offered a model for solidarity movements on an international scale.

### **3.A.9.**

#### Lesbians and Gays Against Intervention

#### **“Principles of Unity” (1983)**

LGBTQ people have been active leaders of antiwar, anti-imperialist, and other radical organizing for decades. However, queer activists have sometimes faced hostility from other leftists, especially those asserting that sexual and gender diversity are inherently bourgeois, Western, white, or capitalist. In the 1980s, the Central American solidarity movement became an important place to reject those notions. Lesbians and Gays Against Intervention (LAGAI) was a key organization of LGBTQ radicalism in this era. The group remains active today as LAGAI-Queer Insurrection and through its offshoot Queers Undermining Israeli Terrorism, or QUIT.

Lesbians and Gays Against Intervention was formed in December 1983 by the membership of the Lesbian/Gay Taskforce of the El Salvador Initiative Campaign in San Francisco, California, USA. The initiative called for an end to all military aid to El Salvador. After the victory of the initiative and our effective work as a taskforce, we saw the necessity of continuing our work. We wanted to remain an autonomous gay group in opposition to the role of the US government and corporations in Central America and the Caribbean. US corporations profit handsomely from the control they exercise over the economies in this region. The US government acts hand in hand with these aims as the military/political force which keeps this system of economic slavery institutionalized. This results in the dissolution of local autonomy and a blatant disregard for human rights. As residents and citizens of the US, we elect to support and join in the struggle for freedom and self-determination in Latin America.

### Points of Focus

1. *Stopping US intervention in Central America and the Caribbean:* LAGAI's main purpose and major focus is combatting the US government's aggressive role in the internal affairs of Latin America. As residents of the US, we think we have an important role to play in halting the expansion of imperialism. It is imperative that we actively support the popular peoples' struggles in Central America and the Caribbean for self-determination.
2. *Creating gay visibility in the solidarity movement:* The effectiveness of the US solidarity movement will be measured by its ability to mobilize the many sectors of the US population. "Mass" organizations have generally failed to activate a representative percentage of ethnic, racial, and sexual minorities into anti-intervention work. We support the formation of groups whose aim is to organize these various sectors. In light of this, we think the lesbians' and gay men's communities can be more effectively mobilized by a gay group at this time. Many gay people are involved at all levels of solidarity work, but our contributions can be downplayed because of homophobia and our own internalized oppression. LAGAI will fight homophobia in the solidarity movement by creating a visible presence of progressive lesbians and gay men, working in coalition with other solidarity groups.
3. *Working with progressive Caribbean and Central American groups:* LAGAI will contact the various Central American and Caribbean organizations in the San Francisco Bay Area which are working against US intervention. We will work toward building mutually supportive relationships. We support their just struggles for self-determination and human rights. We aim to raise consciousness about the lesbians' and gay men's communities in order to further a better understanding of gay liberation in the US and Latin America.
4. *Solidarity with Latin American lesbians and gay men:* Gay people in Latin America suffer the overall economic and national oppression inflicted by

- imperialism. They must also face the daily realities of homophobia in a patriarchal culture. Lesbians also confront sexism in their lives. Gays in some countries throughout the region have organized in various gay and feminist groups. We will contact the existing groups and outspoken individuals to aid the formation of an inter-American progressive lesbian/gay movement/network. There is very little information available in North America about the lives of Latin American gays. Throughout our outreach and through contacts with the media, we will disseminate information that we receive from gays in the region. We will work in various creative ways to support the struggles of our southern sisters and brothers.
5. *Outreach to Third World gay individuals and groups*: Most lesbian and gay male groups are mostly white and fail to address the issues and needs of people of color. LAGAI will be most effective in its work by being a multi-racial, multinational organization. Our literature will be printed in both Spanish and English.
  6. *Supporting antiracist work in the lesbian/gay men's communities*: Racism must be fought in order to address existing inequalities, prejudices and stereotypes. This struggle is of major importance. In order to create a representative movement, people of color must be empowered. National chauvinism is also a detriment to progress and is rampant in the US. Peoples of other lands are scapegoated for the failure of the US system to meet the needs of its citizens. For instance, undocumented workers are blamed for the job shortage. In reality, the overbloated defense budget robs resources from human services. These cutbacks hit minorities the hardest. Racism and national chauvinism create the smokescreen on which the myth of US superiority is projected. Fighting racism and national chauvinism will enrich the humanity of all people. International solidarity demands an end to these forms of bigotry. It is important that we, as a progressive force in the lesbians' and gay men's communities, be outspoken in support of the struggles of people of color and members of national minorities.

### Points of Clarification

1. LAGAI is an *anti-imperialist* group and we fight US expansionism at its source.
2. LAGAI is a *gay liberation* group. We actively fight homophobia. We support our sisters and brothers worldwide, especially those most disenfranchised.
3. LAGAI is a *feminist* group. We support women's struggles and realize the centrality of feminist issues in the general fight against oppression.
4. LAGAI is *internationalist*. Our freedom as lesbians and gay men in the US is integrally linked to the worldwide fight against all forms of oppression.
5. LAGAI is a *left* group. We will fight all forms of red baiting as detriments to the realization of freedom and independence. We are an autonomous

group and are not tied to any existing party or mass organization. We welcome gay people of various progressive politics to join us as individuals.

*US out of Latin America and the Caribbean now!*

### **3.A.10.**

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Marisa Pruitt

#### **“Victoria Mercado Brigade” (1985)**

Solidarity brigades served as an important tactic in the Central American solidarity movement. Activists, especially those from the global North and from across Latin America, traveled to Nicaragua under the invitation of the Sandinista government, and to El Salvador and Guatemala in solidarity with leftist and Indigenous groups. The Victoria Mercado Brigade, which traveled to Nicaragua in 1985, was the first such project to be specifically and openly lesbian and gay. This article was published in *Voices*, the newsletter of the Redwood Records Cultural and Educational Fund.

The Victoria Mercado Brigade is a group of lesbians and gay men doing solidarity work against US intervention in Central America and support of people around the world struggling for self-determination.

We see our responsibility as political people to mobilize and educate our communities on the issues of nonintervention and on the importance of the links between our struggle for self-determination and the self-determination of all people. We went to Nicaragua Libre as an open lesbian and gay brigade to make our continuing solidarity with the Sandinista revolution and the people of Nicaragua visible through our concrete work, helping to rebuild the new Nicaragua and to make our work inside the solidarity movement as proud lesbians and gays struggling for a better world visible also.

For years we have worked in organizations in the US solidarity movement. Some of us, foreigners like me, have worked in liberation organizations in our own countries, hiding our lesbian and gay identities. Homophobia in our political groups kept us silent. Often we were made to feel that our issues and concerns, our “lifestyles,” were inconsequential private matters. Yet, at the same time, lesbians and gay men were raising issues of sexism, interpersonal power relations, the politics of sexuality, and a critique of the nuclear family and patriarchal culture, all within the context of revolutionary change.

In the seventies and eighties we began to come out of the closet in our work. In response to the assassination of President Salvador Allende in Chile and the murder of hundreds of gays and thousands of civilians in Chile, gay solidarity with the Chilean Revolution [Gays in Solidarity with the Chilean Resistance] was formed in 1973 in San Francisco. BAGL (Bay Area Gay Liberation) was also