

Join us for these important upcoming events
in Vancouver, Canada

92ND PROTEST ACTION
FRIDAY JULY 5TH
U.S. CONSULATE 1075 WEST PENDER STREET
DOWNTOWN VANCOUVER B.C. CANADA
**FREE ALL THE
CUBAN 5
NOW!**

RENE GONZÁLEZ ✓
GERARDO HERNÁNDEZ
ANTONIO GUERRERO
FERNANDO GONZÁLEZ
RAMON LABAÑINO

Free the Cuban 5 Committee Vancouver
www.freethe5vancouver.ca

**CELEBRATE THE
MOVEMENT
AND THE GAINS OF THE CUBAN REVOLUTION**
JULY 26TH
**FILM
SPEAKERS**
FRIDAY JULY 26TH
JOE'S CAFE 7PM
1155 COMMERCIAL DR. @ WILLIAM ST.

2013 DOWNTOWN B.C. CANADA

VANCOUVER COMMUNITIES IN SOLIDARITY WITH CUBA - VCSC
www.vancubasolidarity.com



The Newsletter of
Vancouver Communities in Solidarity with Cuba - VCSC
WWW.VANCUBASOLIDARITY.COM

Spring 2013

2nd edition

In this Issue:

Cuban Elections	...3
Raul Castro takes over presidency of the the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States	...4
Volunteering in Cuba	...6
Our Winter Events	...8
Cuban New Year's Eve Party	...9
Upcoming Events	...11



Fidel Castro's Reflection: **We Have Lost Our Best Friend**

The best friend the Cuban people have had throughout their history died on the afternoon of March 5. A call via satellite communicated the bitter news. The significance of the phrase used was unmistakable.

Although we were aware of the critical state of his health, the news hit us hard. I recalled the times he joked with me, saying that when both of us had concluded our revolutionary task, he would invite me to walk by the Arauca River in Venezuelan territory, which made him remember the rest that he never had.

The honor befell us to have shared with the Bolivarian leader the same ideas of social justice and support for the exploited. The poor are the poor in any part of the world.

"Let Venezuela give me a way of serving her: she has in me a son," proclaimed National Hero José Martí, the leader of our independence, a traveler who, without cleansing himself of the dust of the journey, asked for the location of the statue of Bolívar.

Martí knew the beast because he lived in its entrails. Is it possible to ignore the pro-

Continued on 2

Continued from cover

found words he voiced in an inconclusive letter to his friend Manuel Mercado the day before he died in battle? "I am in daily danger of giving my life for my country and duty - for I understand that duty and have the intention of carrying it out - the duty of preventing the United States from extending through the Antilles as Cuba gains its independence, and from falling, with that additional strength, upon our lands of America. All that I have done thus far, and will do, is for this purpose. I have had to work silently and somewhat indirectly because, there are certain things which, in order to attain them, have to remain concealed."

At that time, 66 years had passed since the Liberator Simón Bolívar wrote, "the United States would seem to be destined by fate to plague the Americas with miseries in the name of freedom."

On January 23, 1959, 22 days after the revolutionary triumph in Cuba, I visited Venezuela to thank its people and the government which assumed power after the Pérez Jiménez dictatorship, for the dispatch of 150 rifles at the end of 1958. I said at that time:

"...Venezuela is the homeland of the Liberator, where the idea of the union of the peoples of America was conceived. Therefore, Venezuela must be the country to lead the union of the peoples of America; as Cubans, we support our brothers and sisters in Venezuela.

"I have spoken of these ideas not because I am moved by any kind of personal ambition, or even the ambition of glory, because, at the end of the day, ambitions of

glory remain a vanity, and as Martí said, "All the glory of the world fits into a kernel of corn."

"And so, upon coming here to talk in this way to the people of Venezuela, I do so thinking honorably and deeply, that if we want to save America, if we want to save the freedom of each one of our societies that, at the end of the day, are part of one great society, which is the society of Latin America; if it is that we want to save the revolution of Cuba, the revolution of Venezuela and the revolution of all the countries on our continent, we have to come closer to each other and we have to solidly support each other, because alone and divided, we will fail."

That is what I said on that day and today, 54 years later, I endorse it!

I must only include on that list the other nations of the world which, for more than half a century, have been victims of exploitation and

plunder. That was the struggle of Hugo Chávez.

Not even he himself suspected how great he was.

¡Until victory forever (Hasta la victoria siempre), unforgettable friend!

Fidel Castro Ruz

March 11, 2013

12:35am



See Cuba for Yourself and Challenge the US Blockade



Join Pastors for Peace on the 24th Friendshipment Caravan to Cuba

The 24th Friendshipment Caravan will be welcomed in Santiago de Cuba. Work side by side with our Cuban friends to help rebuild parts of the city devastated by Hurricane Sandy! Attend one of our solidarity events during Caravan Week July 8-15 in a city near you and then travel with the caravan to Cuba from July 16-30!

Cuba is well known for its rich culture and focus on human development – all which comes from investment in human beings. While in Cuba you will meet the young scientists, doctors, teachers, social workers, artists, musicians and community activists who are increasingly at the forefront of developing their own society, and participating in internationalist missions to assist the peoples of other countries.

Take part in an exciting educational and cultural program in Cuba; join us on a voyage of friendship and discovery!

APPLY NOW!

Join the caravan as a caravanista – contact us for an application form. Email cucaravan@igc.org

Visit our website! www.ifconews.org



Vancouver, BC Events!

Saturday July 13 - 7pm

**PASTORS FOR PEACE SEND OFF!
PICNIC & CULTURAL EVENT**

**TROUT LAKE PARK
(NEAR BEACH & CONCESSION)**



Vancouver Communities in Solidarity with Cuba - VCSC

**PASTORS FOR PEACE BORDER CROSSING
PICNIC & RALLY AT PEACE ARCH PARK**

Sunday July 14 - 1pm

Canada/U.S. Border - White Rock/Blaine
*For Carpooling Call 778-882-5223

**WWW.BCANG.NET
www.vancubasolidarity.com**

Volunteer Work Brigade to Cuba. Using slides from last year’s voyage, he showed people how this amazing 3 week trip is a life changing experience of adventure, volunteering, politics, and fun! Everyone received a Brigade informational brochure, and there was a lot of interest in the room to join in.

By the time Vancouver hip-hop artist Joose Justis hit the stage every chair in the hall was full, and more people kept arriving as his high energy set unfolded. This continued as Joose handed the mic to Pablo and Angelo, who got the growing crowd moving with their unique fusion of Latin and rock rhythms.

DJ 100Fuegos had no trouble filling the dance floor as chairs were cleared and feet began to move together with the beats and harmonies. The atmosphere resembled a Cuban block party – people from seven to seventy and everywhere in between danced, laughed, and talked together. They also ate together as the kitchen was busy the entire evening serving special Venezuelan dishes from Magda’s Restaurant.

New Year of More Struggle

As the New Year approached the crowd came close for the countdown... “3, 2,1...Happy New Year! Viva la Revolucion!” Old and new friends hugged as they were showered in balloons from the ceiling and the screen at the front of the room showed historical footage of the triumph of the Cuban Revolution and its continuing gains.

The dancing continued much longer, and was capped by an exciting raffle with many happy winners. Even

as the late hour became late, nobody seemed to be in a hurry to get home as many lingered to check out the information tables, sign petitions, or simply to talk about the excitement of a new year and new possibilities.

2013 will be another year in the fight for the better world we all know is possible, and Cuba will once again be leading the way forward. Don’t miss your chance to participate in many more events organized by Vancouver Communities in Solidarity with Cuba (VCSC) on our way to celebrating the 55th anniversary of the Cuban Revolution!

VIVA CUBA!
VIVA FIDEL!
VIVA RAUL!
VIVA LA REVOLUCION CUBANA!
A BETTER WORLD IS POSSIBLE!

DONATIONS TO CUBA FOR HURRICANE RELIEF ARE STILL BEING ACCEPTED!

>> To donate to the Canadian Network on Cuba’s “Sandy Relief Fund” make a cheque out to “Vancouver Communities in Solidarity with Cuba” and write “CNC Sandy Relief Fund” on your cheque’s memo line. Your donation is tax deductible. We will forward the donation and your information to the Mackenzie-Papineau Memorial Fund to receive tax receipts. Please also include your name, address, and phone numbers so we can forward your tax return to you. Call 778-882-5223 for more information!



THE 612 candidates for deputies to the National Assembly of People’s Power and the 1,269 candidates for delegates to the 15 Provincial Assemblies of People’s Power, were elected on February 3, according to information given by Alina Balseiro Gutiérrez, president of the National Electoral Commission (CEN), in a press conference.

Once again, Cubans exercised their universal, free and democratic right to elect their representatives, she affirmed.

Gutiérrez announced the preliminary figures, given that some votes still are to be validated over the next few days, stating that 7,877,906 people voted, 89.68% of those eligible.

Of the votes cast, 7,418,522 were valid, (94.17%); 364,576 were blank (4.63%) and 94,808 (1.20%) were spoiled.

With reference to the elected deputies, she noted that their average age is 48; 48.86% are female and 46.4% are members of Municipal Assemblies of People’s Power.

Regarding the provincial delegates, their average age is 45; 50.5% are female and 46.4% are municipal delegates.

Balseiro highlighted that election day activities went according to plan: the 29,957 polling stations opened at 7:00am; those staffing the tables ensured transparency in the voting; electoral authorities undertook their responsibility ethically in accordance with the law; the communications and information functioned as intended; and the rest of the arrangements went ahead as expected.

Finally, on behalf of the CEN, she thanked all those who voted for their participation, electoral authorities and commissions for their dedication, and the support staff, state bodies and other mass organizations for their contributions. “In summary, we wish to express our appreciation to all our people for the success of this process.

The CEN president was accompanied by vice president Rubén Pérez Rodríguez; Tomás Amarán Díaz, secretary; and members Julio Torres García, Raúl Van Troi Navarro and Heriberto Rosabal Espinosa.

612 DEPUTIES TO CUBA’S NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF PEOPLE’S POWER AND 1,269 DELEGATES OF CUBA’S PROVINCIAL ASSEMBLIES OF PEOPLE’S POWER ELECTED!

UNIVERSAL FREE DEMOCRATIC SUFFRAGE WITH 7,877,906 ELECTORS VOTING OR 89.68% OF ELIGIBLE VOTERS.

OF VOTES CAST: 94.17% WERE VALID 4.63% WERE RETURNED BLANK 1.2 % WERE SPOILED

By: Susana Lee

Reprinted from: Granma International - www.granma.cu



Cuban President Raul Castro takes over presidency of The Community of Latin American States (CELAC) from Chilean President Sebastian Pinera

Cuban Diplomacy Bypasses U.S. via CELAC

Raul Castro takes over presidency of the the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States

the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) this year.

CELAC is a diverse, plural and politically and ideologically tolerant bloc that gathers all the countries

of Latin America and the Caribbean. Thus the challenge put to member countries even before CELAC's founding meeting is to tread carefully and find a path of agreement and consensus, with the overall aim of moving forward towards regional integration and growth, striving, in particular, to achieve a socially-just economic development.

"We undertake to work for peace, justice and development for Latin America and the Caribbean, and for cooperation, understanding and solidarity among all Latin American and Caribbean peoples," Castro said on Monday, upon taking office as CELAC president, but acknowledged that regional unity must be built on the recognition of the region's diversity.

The 33-country bloc closed its first formal summit on Monday in the Chilean capital of Santiago, and has scheduled its second summit for a year from now, in Cuba.

The Cuban government has been a strong supporter of the regional integration body since the idea for its creation first came up four years ago, at the Latin American and Caribbean Summit on Integration and Development held in Brazil.

That 2008 summit, the first regional meeting of its kind to be organised without engaging the United States and Canada, was followed two years later in 2010 by a similar gathering, this time in Mexico, where participant countries agreed to create CELAC. The bloc was finally founded the following year at a third meeting in Caracas.

Cuba made its preference for a U.S.-free integration known in June 2009 when the United States voted against the Caribbean island's request to be reinstated as a member of the Organisation of American States, from which it was suspended by consensus in 1962 after embracing Marxism-Leninism.

The Castro administration also stepped up its active involvement in forums that represent the countries of the region, including Caribbean island nations.

"Strengthening, expanding and

Vancouver Celebrates 54 years of the Cuban Revolution at annual VCSC New Year's Eve Celebration!

There's a special feeling in knowing that when the clock strikes 12 and you are celebrating with 250 others in Vancouver, Canada, you are also celebrating with over 11 million Cubans, and millions more around the world. Celebrating not only a new year, but the anniversary of the Cuban Revolution. The Revolution which brought to an abrupt end centuries of imperialist domination and gave space and substance to the power and potential of the Cuban people. The Revolution which lit a star of hope in the sky for the rest of the world to follow and which continues to burn brightly, especially in the evening on December 31st.

Donation to Hurricane Sandy Relief

Vancouver Communities in Solidarity with Cuba (VCSC) once again organized its annual New Year's Celebration of the Cuban Revolution, this year marking the Revolution's 54th Anniversary. The event also had another important objective: giving back to Cuba which has given so much to the world. All money raised was donated to Cuba for Hurricane Sandy Relief. The amount totaled \$3000, which will help rebuild housing and infrastructure on the Eastern part of the island as part of the Canadian Network on Cuba's

"Sandy Relief Fund".

The Evening of Revolutionary Politics, Dance and Fun

The evening opened with MC and VCSC Coordinator Tamara Hansen summarizing the events which led up to the hasty departure of US-backed dictator Fulgencio Batista and his associates on January 1st, 1959. They had realized their defeat by the revolutionary Rebel Army led by Fidel Castro was imminent, and this became the first New Year's Eve where the masses of Cuban people were able to celebrate the triumph of Cuba's Socialist Revolution.

Co-MC and VCSC Executive Committee member Colleen Glynn also gave a report on the huge damage Cuba suffered this year when Hurricane Sandy tore through the Eastern part of the island. Videos were shown both of damage, but also of Cuban President Raul Castro who arrived in the hurricane damaged area to personally coordinate reconstruction efforts.

The evening also reflected on the struggle to free the Cuban 5 Heroes imprisoned in the United States. This was the 15th consecutive year



they have spent their New Year separated from their families for defending their country from U.S. backed terrorists. However, this was also the 15th consecutive year where the Cuban Five have once again demonstrated their unwavering spirit and commitment to defending the Cuban Revolution and to social justice.

Javier Domokos Ruiz, Consul General of Cuba in Toronto, gave special greetings via telephone, reaffirming Cuba's commitment to defend and extend the gains of the Cuban Socialist Revolution. Gisela Lara, First Consul of the Venezuelan Consulate in Vancouver, also gave warm greetings to the event. She emphasized both the long friendship between the Cuban and Venezuelan Revolutions, but also the Venezuelan people's continued support of President Hugo Chavez and their Revolution.

Che Guevara Volunteer Work Brigade to Cuba

VCSC Executive Committee member Thomas Davies invited everyone to join this year's annual Che Guevara

Short reports from our other recent events!
December 2012-February 2013

December 31, 2012

VCSC Celebrates New Year's Eve with a party... See page 9 for full report!

February 15, 2013

This Cuban Film and Cultural Night titled, "I HEART CUBA!" featured the 1960s Cuban film, "Portrait of Teresa". This film tells the story of a Cuban woman, Teresa, who is trying to balance her commitment to social projects and the Cuban revolution and the pressure of her husband to stay home and take care of domestic responsibilities. This event also featured Cuba music and a presentation about the 2013 Ernesto Che guevara Volunteer Work brigade to Cuba.



January 25, 2013

Acclaimed author Shirley Langer came to Vancouver to present her new book, "Anita's Revolution", the event was attended by over 60 people who came to hear Shirley present her book and talk about her own life experiences living in Cuba during the 1960's which inspired the book's creation.



January 22-31, 2013
We are all Chávez!
International Week of Actions
in Solidarity with Venezuela



>> "We Are All Chavez!" Solidarity & Live Music in the Streets

A day of street campaigning and event in solidarity with the Bolivarian Revolution of Venezuela and President Hugo Chávez

>> Public Forum: "Revolution and Counter Revolution in Venezuela: Victorious Re-election of President Hugo Chávez and the Response of Right-Wing Opposition!"

Featured Speaker: MERLI VANEGAS

Venezuelan Consul General in Vancouver Merli Vanegas is a Bolivarian and socialist lawyer. She initially worked for the Bolivarian Government in the National Assembly, and has served as a Legal Advisor in different governmental institutions. She then joined the Foreign Ministry, where she began as Government Representative to the International Labour Organization. Before coming to Vancouver she was a diplomat in the Embassy of Venezuela in Libya.

On January 10th, hundreds of thousands of people took to the streets throughout Venezuela to show their support for legally elected President Hugo Chavez as well as for the Bolivarian Revolution. Between January 22nd and January 31st, people around the world did the same and organized diverse events as part of an International Week of Action in Solidarity with Venezuela.

After another decisive win by Hugo Chavez in the recent Venezuelan Presidential Elections, the U.S. backed right-wing opposition in Venezuela is trying to use his health situation to attack the Bolivarian Revolution and set back the huge gains made by poor and working people since Chavez was first elected in 1998.

Many people joined the Vancouver actions to demonstrate the huge love and solidarity people around the world have for President Chavez, and also to help educate people about the realities of the huge gains of the Bolivarian Revolution in Venezuela!

harmonising these bodies and groups is the path chosen by Cuba; (no longer holding on to) the impossible illusion of returning to an organisation that refuses to reform and has been condemned by history," Castro said.

Cuba is a founding member of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA), of which Antigua and Barbuda, Bolivia, Dominica, Ecuador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and Venezuela are also members. It also has close and active political and cooperation ties with CARICOM.

Cooperation with countries of the South is one of the strengths of Cuba's foreign policy, a strategy which opens up significant opportunities for Latin America and the Caribbean to implement major projects despite limited resources.

"We all have advantages and experiences that we can contribute," Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodríguez said shortly before the Santiago summit.

As an example of this, Rodríguez mentioned the assistance provided by his country to Haiti, which focuses particularly on health aid.

Solidarity is, in fact, the principle chosen by Cuba to guide cooperation among the countries of the region, moving away from conditions imposed from outside that have no place in a "new Latin America", Deputy Foreign Minister Abelardo Moreno added.

While Cuba strengthens its regional environment, expectations that its relations with the United States will improve with the second ad-

ministration of Democrat Barack Obama are low. Several commentators in the interactive Café 108 feature of the IPS Cuba website agreed that there is little chance that the U.S. will reconsider its relations with Cuba.

In the opinion of political scien-



Cuban President, Raul Castro, speaks at the CELAC Summit in Chile, January 2013.

tist Esteban Morales, the United States is facing a difficult time, both on the domestic and on the international front, and in that context a change in attitude towards its socialist neighbour is highly unlikely. Morales, however, does not rule out the possibility of an indirect route, opened up as a result of the "changes (in U.S. relations) with Latin America and the Caribbean".

"The last two years (of the Obama administration) may hold the greatest possibilities in this sense, depending on how well Obama does now," Morales added.

Journalist Roberto Molina, for his

part, does not expect to see any change "in the suspended state of relations between the two neighbouring nations, which have been enemies since the early 1960s."

"Obama has too many pending issues to address – immigration, fiscal reform, a war and other

potential conflicts, and a shaky economy – to be thinking of Cuba as a foreign policy priority," Boris Caro, a Cuban journalist living in Canada, said.

In his last speech of 2012, Castro announced that he will put all his efforts and energy into his role as CELAC president, but he did not forget to remind "the U.S. government once again that Cuba is willing to sit down (with the U.S.) and find a solution to all their bilateral problems in a dialogue based on mutual respect and sovereign equality."

How I Spent My Vacation with the Che Guevara Volunteer Work Brigade to Cuba

Volunteering, Solidarity, Education and Fun!

By Thomas Davies

Cuba is so full of life! The people, the politics, the arts, the culture, the nights, the mornings, the children, the elders, the streets, even the soil of their organic gardens... so full of life! Somehow it all mixes and moves together in ways which make you forget about sleep and language barriers as you dive into it all. How do I know? I've traveled on the Ernesto Che Guevara Volunteer Work Brigade and experienced it for myself. The Brigade is a unique 3 week journey that for the past 20 years has given people across Canada the opportunity to volunteer in Cuba and be exposed

to life on the island in ways unimaginable on any other trip.

Last year's 2012 Che Brigade was centered in the province of Holguin, with a major excursion to the city of Santiago de Cuba. Over 40 people from all ages and from across Canada participated as 'Brigadistas'.

On one of our first days we woke up in the early morning darkness of May 1st, and as the sun rose we saw hundreds of thousands of Cubans streaming in to celebrate International Workers Day with their annual march and rally. There was literally no end in sight to the people joining the rally from 3 directions, all carrying colourful signs and flags, and singing and chanting to celebrate their



Revolution.

We worked side by side with Cubans rebuilding houses destroyed by hurricanes – sharing work, water, and laughter with new friends. We also worked in one of Cuba's famous urban organic agriculture farms, cultivating rich soil with the knowledge that the produce provided not only for the farmers and their families, but was given to the daycare across the street and the hospital around the corner.

We walked through Holguin City during the world renowned 'Romerias de Mayo' Festival. For one week every storefront and every corner of every public square was taken up with countless artists presenting their crafts. The city itself became one giant living art exhibit created by the people and for the people, and which never stopped moving and never slept.

We entered high schools, hospitals, trade union centres, women's centres, universities, and

factories to tour them all directly and speak with the professionals (and professionals in training) making them all run. Nothing compares to the clean calmness of a Cuban hospital or the enthusiasm of an international student from Angola studying medicine for free in Cuba.

We also met economists, judges, parliament members, and historians whose knowledge and patience surpassed even the ea-



ger questions of more than 40 'Brigadistas'!

We ventured through the winding, neon sign filled streets of Santiago de Cuba, a historical epicenter of the Cuban Revolution. We imagined the young underground revolutionaries darting between the narrow buildings around us, and saw the bullet holes in the Moncada Army Garrison, a former site of violence and torture which has now been converted into a museum and elementary school.

Of course we did our best to keep up with the dance lessons provided at block parties filled with young and old Cubans who invited us into their houses to share smiles and stories. We also swam

where the two clear blues of the sky and the Caribbean Ocean met, and then walked from the most beautiful beach we have ever seen to an even more beautiful beach around the corner!

In the end we were left wondering how time can be so full and pass so fast. We also learned some of the answers to how a tiny

island which has been blockaded and attacked by the most aggressive and dominant country in the world for the past 50 years, can still be so full of life and an example for building the better world we all know is necessary.

You know what the best part is? You can join the Che Guevara Brigade this year and see it all for yourself! There is no age limit. Brigadistas from 7 to 77 have all enjoyed incredible and fulfilling experiences on the Brigade.

This year's Che Brigade takes place from April 23rd to May 15th, and will once again be led by National Coordinator Dave Thomas. We will be in Havana for the march of over a million people on May Day, and also making a very special trip to the historical Isle of Youth. All of the fundamental aspects of the Brigade will be included, such as the volunteer work with Cubans, the tours to places of interest, the presentations and question and answer sessions,

the art exhibits, the exploring, the swimming, the dancing, the friendships, and the learning.

If you have never visited Cuba before, this is the absolute best way to go as the Brigade cost covers your food, accommodation, transportation, and translation. All you need to do is focus on really experiencing everything around you!

If you have already been to Cuba, this your best opportunity to dig deeper into a fascinating society and also make an important contribution through your volunteer work.

So what are you waiting for? Join the Brigade! If you would like more information about the Che Guevara Volunteer Work Brigade to Cuba, you can visit the website at www.canadiannetworkoncuba.ca/brigade e-mail chevolbrigade@gmail.com, or in British Columbia, you can also contact B.C. Coordinators Tamara Hansen and Thomas Davies at 778-882-5223 or 778-889-7664.

vancubasolidarity@gmail.com

