

Huber Matos and the Maoist Dilemma

By Irwin Silber

The news that Huber Matos is now organizing a detachment of Cuban exiles to join the contras fighting to overthrow the Nicaraguan government should surprise no one on the left. Hopefully, however, it will further aggravate the ideological dilemma of Maoism and serve as a timely reminder that the left can play games with anti-Sovietism only at the risk of blatant collaboration with imperialism.

A leading political figure in the early days of the struggle to overthrow Batista, Matos was one of the first to panic and go over to the side of counter-revolution when Fidel Castro propelled Cuba forward on its anti-imperialist course. When the new Cuban government threw Matos in jail, he immediately became one of those "true revolutionaries" so much admired and promoted by the bourgeoisie in their propaganda assaults against revolutionary power. For 20 years, the imperialists shed numerous crocodile tears over Matos, depicting him as the "real spirit" of the Cuban revolution—as though anything remotely resembling real revolution could possibly win the support of Cuba's oppressors.

Matos was let out of prison in 1980 at the time of the "Mariel exodus" when Cuba decided to permit those unable to integrate into the revolution to pursue their illusions in the U.S. Naturally Matos and the other fleeing Cubans were given a hero's welcome by imperialism's ideologues while—not so incidentally—this new "refugee" community was carefully combed by the CIA as a prime fueling station for counter-revolutionary schemes throughout the hemisphere.

MAOISTS ENTHUSIASTIC

But along with the imperialists, some on the U.S. left also rolled out the red carpet for Matos and his soul-mates. U.S. Maoists were equally enthusiastic in hailing these pathetic remnants of Cuba's past as modern-day resistance heroes and "freedom fighters."

Most Maoist groups in the U.S. (and elsewhere) have since mercifully departed the political scene, unable to sustain the crushing contradiction between their avowed "revolutionary" principles and the blatantly class-collaborationist logic and policies of their ideological mentors in Beijing. But one Maoist group which still exists and postures itself as a supporter of popular liberation struggles—the League

of Revolutionary Struggle (LRS)—was one of the loudest voices commending the fleeing Cubans and singing the praises of Huber Matos.

"Today's Cuban refugees are not fleeing socialism," wrote LRS leader William Gallegos in the organization's newspaper, *Unity* (July 4, 1980). "They are fleeing a nation completely controlled by the imperialist USSR. They should not be condemned by revolutionary and progressive peoples, but welcomed and supported in their efforts to escape Soviet domination."

Articles of this kind—including interviews with refugees whose counter-revolutionary "horror stories" were given full play by the LRS—became standard fare in the pages of *Unity* throughout 1980. One of the most remarkable was a lengthy letter from "A Cuban Reader" concerning Matos. Prominently featured and published without comment, this undoubtedly pre-arranged "letter" declared:

"The release of Matos has been a tremendous victory for those Cubans that aspire to see their homeland free of imperialist interference. . . . While in jail, Matos remained firm in his revolutionary and patriotic ideals. In a letter smuggled out of his prison in 1973, he wrote: 'I would not give one drop of my blood or sweat to revive the . . . corrupt republic which was born in 1902, a deformed creature of North American intervention on the ashes of the ideals and sacrifices of true Cubans.' Matos' dignified stand and his desire to continue battling for the true and genuine independence of Cuba is an inspiration to all Cuban freedom fighters."

ON TO NICARAGUA

Almost five years later, Matos has become "an inspiration" not only to Cuban "freedom fighters" but to their Nicaraguan counterparts. Now secretary-general of the Miami-based Cuban Independence and Democratic Movement, Matos recently offered the readers of the *Wall Street Journal* (Dec. 21, 1984) an example of his "dignified stand" toward the "true and genuine independence" of Nicaragua.

"The Nicaraguan freedom fighters," he wrote of the contras whom he had just visited on a "solidarity" mission, "are absolutely convinced that if the communist regime that rules Nicaragua is not eradicated, it will be extended throughout Central America until it goes as far as the border of the U.S., an opinion I share completely. . . . A consolidated commu-

nist regime in Nicaragua would destabilize all the countries of the region, even if the Nicaraguan air force does not obtain one single Soviet-made MIG fighter jet."

Matos, of course, is only playing out the logic of the same counter-revolutionary path he embarked on 25 years ago when he betrayed the Cuban revolution—demonstrating once again that anticommunism with its inevitable counterpart, service on behalf of imperialism, readily relocates itself across national borders as the locus of the class struggle shifts from one country to another.

AND LRS?

But what about the LRS? Was its enthusiasm for Huber Matos in 1980 merely a case of misplaced ardor for someone whose political trajectory has since gone unpredictably astray?

Despite Maoism's revolutionary pretensions, its history is shot through with class collaborationist betrayals.

Such an explanation would be hard to sustain. So far as Matos is concerned, his support for the contras is a logical extension of the struggle to combat the "Soviet-Cuban menace" in Latin America. "They [the contras], like us," he said recently, "are fighting against Castro and the Russians."

In fact, it would be most ungenerous of the LRS to now disown Matos since his operative political framework for Latin America—then and now—hardly differs from theirs. It is the LRS, after all—not Matos—which offers the left the following analysis of Latin America:

"Today the U.S. continues to dominate much of Latin America, but due to the decline of U.S. imperialism and the struggles of the Latin American people for democracy and independence, U.S. hegemony has been weakened. The growing independence of the Latin American countries however is being endangered by the expansionism of an aggressive and ascending new imperialist power, the Soviet Union. Soviet penetration into Latin America is quite widespread and takes place economically, militarily and politically. . . ."

"Cuba remains one of the chief vehicles for Soviet infiltration into the liberation movements. Utilizing the prestige of the

Cuban revolution, the Cubans offer 'internationalist' aid aimed at bringing Latin America into the Soviet orbit. Following the Cuba-backed 1979 coup in the Caribbean country of Grenada, Cuba immediately sent teachers, doctors and technicians, who were quickly followed by a Soviet trade delegation. Cuba is also trying to subvert the Nicaraguan revolution by providing 'aid.'" (*Unity*, March 14, 1980)

The only thing Huber Matos could rightfully be accused of is taking this analysis—which is identical to U.S. imperialism's rationale for aggression—to its logical political conclusion.

EXPLANATION DUE

But why dredge up all this "ancient history?"

Well, first of all, it is not so ancient. While the LRS is a bit more discreet in its attacks on the Cuban revolution these days, it has never given the slightest indication of an alteration or refinement—let alone a renunciation—of the framework it advanced five years ago. As an organization nominally committed to oppose U.S. intervention in Nicaragua—including intervention-by-proxy in the form of the Matos-backed "contras"—the LRS, at the very least, owes the Nicaragua solidarity movement some accounting of its views on both its broader Maoist perspective and its concrete political expressions today.

The political dilemma thus posed to the principal survivor of the Maoist debacle is not, however, confined to the LRS. Large sectors of our movement—while having rejected much (though hardly all) of Maoist politics in the concrete—have not yet settled accounts with the ideological underpinnings which lay at the root of those class collaborationist betrayals which have made a mockery of Maoism's revolutionary pretensions.

In particular, the anti-Sovietism which provided the Maoist enterprise with its principal nourishment continues to hold a grip on significant sections of the left. And the real world of politics makes it impossible to sustain an anti-Soviet world outlook without sooner or later vacillating in defense of the Cuban revolution, the Vietnamese revolution, indeed of any consistently anti-imperialist stand.

Huber Matos is, of course, a sorry figure. The legion of exiles he now proposes to enlist against the Sandinistas are of a piece with the dregs of every old society who have rallied behind counter-revolutionary undertakings. Whatever Matos may once have been, he is now nothing but the organizer of fascist mercenaries and the servant of U.S. imperialism.

The real question is how anyone on the left could ever have seen Matos and his unsavory crew as anything else. □

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