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 sur- prise no one on the LRS. Hopefully, how- ever, it will further aggravate the ideologi- cal dilemma of Maoism and serve as a timely reminder that the left must 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 revolution. In the years since, the imperialists have 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 the CIA and the CIA alone.

Matos was let out of prison in 1980 at the time of the "Marxist 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 ideolo- gists who proclaimed their 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 failures as resistance heroes and "freedom fighters." Most Maoist groups in the U.S. (and elsewhere in Latin America) have been in agreement with the political scene, unable to sustain the crushing contradiction between their avowed Marxist-Leninist principles and the blatantly class-collaborationist logic and policies of their ideological mentors in Beijing. But one Maoist group which still exists and posture 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 see the annihilation of the Vietnamese-led imperialist USSR. They should not be condemned by revolutionary and pro- gressive peoples, but welcomed and supported in their efforts to escape Soviet domination."

Despite Maoism's revolutionary preten- sions, 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 exten- sion 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 making evident 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 at bringing Latin America under Soviet orbit. For- lowing the Cuba-backed 1979 coup in the Caribbean country of Grenada, Cuban Communist Party officials and technicians, who were quickly followed by a Soviet trade delegation. Cuba is also supporting the new imperialist revolu- tion by providing 'aid.' " (Unity, March 14, 1980)

The only thing Huber Matos could fight against was to kick out this analysis—which is identical to U.S. im- perialism's rationale for aggression—to its logical political conclusion.

EXPLANATION DUE

But let's bridge up all this "ancient history!"

Well, first of all, it is not so ancient. While the LRS is a bit more circumspect in its attacks on the Cuban revolution these days, it has never given the slightest indication of an alteration or refinement of a form...