

Exiled Prio Says Rebels His Backers

By **BOB HARDIN**

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Ex-Cuban President Carlos Prio said here today that the University of Havana students who unsuccessfully tried to seize or kill dictator Fulgencio Batista are his followers.

"I am ready to return to Cuba and fight whenever my people call," Prio said from his home-in-exile at a Miami Beach hotel.

However, he denied having prior knowledge of the attack in which 15 rebels and five Batista guards were killed yesterday.

Ready 'On Notice'

Prio said he has no definite plans to return — but added, "I am ready in a minute's notice."

Student leader Jose Antonio Echeverria, one of the rebels killed, is a good friend of Prio's, he said.

"I have known him about four years," said Prio. "I saw him frequently in Miami last summer. He was 23 — a student of engineering and from a good family."

Prio said Antonio was a "fighter."

Will Occur Again

"This is a chapter which will occur again," he said. "Always it is the young people who resist first. I did that 25 years ago, against the dictator, Machado."

Prio said he had been unable to contact Havana by telephone, and had heard nothing but news reports.

He said he was anxious to learn the names of the others killed in the gun battle at Batista's palace.

Prio was contacted after Miami News sources in Havana sent word that the students were believed to have been his followers, rather than those of rebel leader Fidel Castro.

The sources said the students

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Rebels Are Pals Of Prio

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were too lightly armed to be part of the main rebel force.

Prio has frequently been accused of plotting against Batista since the present president took over in a coup d'etat in 1952.

The handsome, graying Prio fought a U.S. court battle to stay here after he said he was abruptly forced onto a plane from Havana to Miami by Batista.

He has repeatedly denied charges of arms shipments or troop recruiting in this country, made against him by the Batista group.

Even in exile, Prio is generally conceded to be Batista's strongest political foe.