

PREP

Producers of Film on Radicals Vow to Fight U.S. Interference

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By JON NORDHEIMER JUN 7 1975

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LOS ANGELES, June 6—Three film makers working on a documentary film about the Weather Underground, a political terrorist group, said today that they would seek a court injunction to keep the Federal Government from interfering with their work.

Subpoenas ordering the three to appear before a Federal grand jury in Los Angeles with film, recordings and other materials associated with the production were withdrawn without comment last night by the authorities.

The film makers—Haskell Wexler, Emile de Antonio and Mary Lampson—said in a news conference that the Government's move to bring them before a grand jury was an attempt to suppress the film, in addition to being what they called a "fishing expedition" to learn the whereabouts of fugitive members of the group.

"The Government is humiliated that it hasn't been able to find them [the fugitives]," said Mr. de Antonio, whose previous works include "Point Of Order," a documentary about the late Senator Joseph R. McCarthy, and "Milhou: A White Comedy," a retrospective on the political career of former President Richard M. Nixon.

"But I found them, and I'm proud of that," said Mr. de Antonio, who added that he had met with unspecified members of the Weather Underground in "safe houses" at undisclosed locations in recent months.

He said that these members had agreed to meet with him after spurning an offer of "thousands and thousands of dollars" from a television network that sought an interview. "I didn't pay anyone a penny," Mr. de Antonio said.

Declarations of Support

Prominent members of the film community have rallied to support the right of the production company to continue its work unimpeded by the Government. A declaration expressing that position has been endorsed by six directors—Robert Wise, Peter Bogdanovich, Mel Brooks, William Friedkin, Arthur Penn and Elia Kazan—and by several actors, including Warren Beatty, Jack Nicholson, Jon Voight and Harry Belafonte.

"This flagrant violation of

the First Amendment rights of freedom of speech and freedom of the press ranks with the witch hunts against Hollywood in the nineteen-fifties," remarked Ramona Ripston, executive director of the Southern California branch of the American Civil Liberties Union.

The United States Attorney's office here had not comment on why the subpoenas had been withdrawn. A fourth subpoena for Mr. Wexler's son, Jeff, who was not present at today's conference, was also dropped.

No 'Innocent Gesture'

"It's perfectly obvious that the withdrawal of the subpoenas was not an innocent gesture by the United States Government," said Mr. de Antonio, who added that he had been harassed by Government agents throughout most of his career.

"Nor was there an interest in finding justice for anybody," he continued. "It was a ploy, a trick, a gimmick, and I fully expect that we will have another subpoena before very long. We obviously can't continue work on the film until we get injunctive relief from the courts."

As to any indictment of the film makers, Mr. de Antonio said that his attorney was advised by a Government lawyer that none was contemplated. He added, however, that a Justice Department source held out that possibility.

The three film makers said they were determined to complete the film, which has been shot on a \$10,000 budget put up by Mr. de Antonio and Mr. Wexler. If the Government persists in bringing them before a grand jury to answer questions about their professional contacts with the Weather Underground, all agreed that they would go to jail before providing information beyond their own names.

Mr. Wexler, who had won an Academy Award in 1967 for his work in "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?" and was the director of the film "Medium Cool," said the Government was interested in suppressing the film because it "will expose aspects of a secret government, a repressive complex which existed before Watergate and continues after."