UNDERGROUND

Sound Track from the film by
Emile de Antonio, Mary Lampson and Haskell Wexler

WITH THE WEATHER UNDERGROUND
Billy Ayers, Kathy Boudin, Bernardine Dohrn, Jeff Jones and Cathy Wilkerson

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UNDERGROUND
The complete sound track of the film by Emile de Antonio, Mary Lampson and Haskell Wexler with The Weather Underground Organization.

HOW IT BEGAN by Emile de Antonio
I have been making political films since 1961 when Dan Talbot and I planned Point of Order. My active political life had begun long before—in the late 30's when I was a student at Harvard. The bang that ended World War II sliced my marxism right down the middle. Praxis fell away. Without a party, without a machine for action, I hungly and self-indulgently savored the contradictions of cold war capitalism, its piety and hypocrisy, the opulent click of the putter in the White House. I was out to lunch. My hedonism and egotism weren't aberrational. A Marxist in the USA during the 50's was like a martian: no base, no solid space. Real change and revolution seemed a light year and a day away. Meanwhile, on with the party.

In 1960, my politics, revived and twice-born, coalesced with my work in film. A series of films, analytical and critical, were the result: Point of Order, 1963, on the Army-McCarthy Hearings; Rush to Judgment, 1967, an attack on the Warren Commission: In the Year of the Pig, 1969, the Indo-China wars; America Is Hard to See, 1970, the failure of liberal politics in the 1968 campaign; in 1971, Millhouse: A White Comedy, a political biography which got me on the 'enemies list'; and in 1972, Painters Painting, US painting from 1945 to 1970, real questions of politics. And then Watergate. Watergate was a crime in which the thief was paid to slang away; business; a national affair of the US ruling class. The more things seemed to change, the less they did. Watergate proved the system worked, proved that it worked imperialism, racism, sexism, oppression anywhere. I felt tired.

Until 1974 when I read Prairie Fire: Political Statement of the Weather Underground The Weather Underground? Our perception of them was formed by the media. McCluhan got it wrong: the message really is: whoever owns the media owns the message. So what we saw in the Times and CBS were trendy Wonder Bread reality sandwiches. Artificial coloring added. One-sided, sensationalist, all about 'crazed terrorists' and bombers. But the people who wrote and distributed Prairie Fire weren't crazed terrorists. Their voices were strong, analytical, rational. I wanted to make a film with them, collectively. And to find people who would be interested in making a new kind of didactic, revolutionary film. We formed a collective: Mary Lampson, Haskell Wexler and I. Forming is easier than being. Haskell worked as a cameraperson for four or five days; the collective dwindled to two and Mary and I spent most of a year making the film. With a lot of help from many people. This record is not the official voice of the Weather Underground; their writings are that. This record is the sound track of a film which we shot May 1, 1975. Since then, the Weather Underground has undoubtedly changed its position on certain issues, shifted slightly on others. Good signs, signs of acknowledging contradiction, of growth, of learning to try to make the revolution by passing through error by criticism/self-criticism. August 25, 1976.

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by Peter Biskind and Marc N. Weiss

He's a real Weatherman
Ripping up the motherland
Making all his Weatherplans
For everyone
Knows just what he's fighting for
Victory for people's war
Trashes, bombs, kills pigs and more

The Weatherman
(To the tune of the Beatles' "Nowhere Man")
(from the Weatherman Song Book)

A lot of things have changed in Weatherland since that song was written in 1969. After five-and-a-half years, people have grown accustomed to them, used to seeing their faces on wanted posters in the post office, saddened, perhaps, when they were papered over by garden variety bank robbers and disappointed when the FBI took them off the Ten Most Wanted List. People have even grown used to their bombings of public buildings, used to reading their communiques, which were eventually collected in a tasteful red volume suitable for coffee tables.

For a long time, it was their custom to detonate symbols of American power, to damage those monuments which seemed in their ponderous solidity to guarantee American predominance forever. They angrily retaliated against the savage displays of national arrogance from which the rest of us averted our eyes or protested in milder and more traditional ways. They bombed police cars in Chicago following the murder of Black Panthers Fred Hampton and Mark Clark in 1969. They bombed the Office of California Prisons in Sacramento after the murder of George Jackson in 1971. They bombed the New York State Department of Corrections after the Attica uprising in 1971. They bombed the U.S. Capitol in Washington after the invasion of Laos in 1971. They have carried out about 25 armed actions to date, most of them occurring in the period 1970 to 1972. After 1972 they seemed to become less active. It looked like they were becoming just another faded feature of the Sixties landscape, slowly disappearing from view like Huey Newton, or transformed beyond recognition like Rennie Davis.

Then, in July 1974, they clandestinely published and distributed 5000 copies of Prairie Fire, a 150-page analysis of changing U.S. and world conditions. It was an urgent invitation to groups and organizers throughout the country to respond in the form of political discussion and renewed action. Its flyleaf bears the inscription: "A Single Spark Can Start a Prairie Fire."

In spring 1975, they issued another 25,000 copies of Prairie Fire and published the first volume of Osawatomie, a quarterly "journal" named after the Battle of Osawatomie in which John Brown's abolitionists defeated an army of slavers in 1856. The Weather organization, in other words, is alive and well in underground America, perhaps more vigorous, extensive and together than ever before. The latest government estimate says there are 17 Weatherpeople living underground; other sources place the figure much higher, but no one really knows.

The Justice Department, for all its million-dollar appropriations, computers, wiretaps and grand juries, has been largely ineffectual in unearthing the members of the Weather Underground, which remains a perpetual embarrass-
ment to the legions of agents who devote their energies to their apprehen-
sion.

The latest joke on the FBI is a docu-
mentary film about the Weather Un-
derground produced by Emile de
Antonio, Mary Lampson and Haskell
Wexler. The government was not
amused. A congressman from Georgia,
James McDonald, no doubt expressed the
Justice Department’s sentiments
when he read into the Congressional
Record this statement: "Mr. Speaker,
the Weather Underground organiza-
tion terrorists have taken responsibility
for a whole series of bombings, includ-
ing one right here in the Capitol and
one in the State Department earlier
this year. Now a group of Hollywood’s
left-wing crackpots are planning to do
a propaganda puff piece on these crim-
inals. The ringleader of the Hollywood
crew is the notorious Emile de Antonio,
the maker of a number of pseudo-doc-
umentary left-wing propaganda films,
including one smearing the late Sena-
ator Joseph McCarthy and another sup-
ing the Communist aggressors in
Vietnam."

De Antonio had indeed "smeared"
Joe McCarthy in his first film, Point of
Order (although McCarthy is a rela-
tively attractive figure compared to the
film’s portrait of invertebrate congress-
people and craven Army officers). And
he had shamelessly gone on to make
Rush to Judgment (an examination of
the John Kennedy assassination), In
the Year of the Pig (the most com-
prehensive film study of the 30-year
anticolonial struggle in Vietnam) and
Millhouse: A White Comedy (a film
about Nixon, for which de Antonio
was awarded the sign honor of being
the only filmmaker on the former pres-
ident’s Enemies List).

No sooner had the FBI gotten wind
of the film early this summer than it
slapped the three filmmakers with sub-
poenas summoning them to appear,
along with their negatives and tapes,
before a grand jury in Los Angeles.
They refused to cooperate and the
Justice Department, somewhat mys-
teriously, withdrew the subpoenas ten
days later.

The project itself began last fall,
when de Antonio read Prairie Fire. "I
had always been impressed with the ten-
der loving care and attention that
ings were executed. No one was ever
hurt and they were all directed against
the symbols of oppression and authority.
"I’ve always been a sort of half-
baked radical most of my life. There
was never anything to take hold of, to
grab on to. What was left of the Sixties
was very little, frankly, just shards and
fragments, attitudes of the countercul-
ture with no program, no organization.
These are the people who are the direct
line to the Sixties and to all that had
in American society which are good.
Prairie Fire impressed me. It represent-
ed a new phase, an attempt to extend
the range of their politics, their activity,
their influence."

If they were "coming out," de An-
tonio reasoned that a film would be the
best way to do it. He sat down at his
typescript and pounded out a proposal,
part stream-of-consciousness, part ma-
chine-gun prose. It speaks of a "film
work" that would reach millions of
people on TV: "The mood should be
defiant and revolutionary, but not wise-
ass or cocky. It should be didactic in
the sense that it should open eyes and
point directions for others." It would
combine the analysis of Prairie Fire
with stock footage documenting the
events of the Sixties that generated the
Weather Underground events almost
forgotten in Gerald Ford’s America.
The film would sell on the strength of
the Underground’s undeniable dramat-
ic appeal. "You have created a mas-
terstroke of political theater which not
only reveals the police state but that it’s
possible to beat it." And then, scribbled
in: "It belongs on film. BANG, BANG,
BANG!!!"

The proposal finished, de Antonio
set out to contact the Weather Under-
ground. "In this case," he recalled, "I
approached the project with a certain
lack of confidence. Would these people
coopera? Would it be possible to get in
touch with them? There were a couple
of young radicals I know who I just
assumed would have the contacts.

"The first time, I approached this
guy and said, ‘I know you can get in
touch with them. Can you get the ma-
ner toomination to get a letter to
them from me?’ And he said, ‘Yes.’

"But I never knew how those letters
reached them. I wrote a letter, gave it
to somebody, and then a message came
back saying that they were interested
in the proposal and that I would be hear-
ing from them.

"At that point, a person known to
me but whom I had never thought of
in that connection came to me and
said, ‘Are you interested in meeting
with the people?’ And I said, ‘Yes, I am.’ That person then said, ‘I’ll meet
you on the corner of so-and-so and
so-and-so tomorrow afternoon.’"

The next day, de Antonio drove to
the designated corner. He was not ac-
customed to taking security measures,
but he practiced a few elementary pre-
cations that he had picked up from
movies, like driving down a dead-end
street and turning around to make sure
he wasn’t being tailed. The procedure
followed that first day established
the pattern for each of the subsequent
meetings, and once the pattern had been
set up, the same intermediary was used
again and again. The intermediary
never knew where the meetings be-
 tween de Antonio and the Weather-
people were to take place. He or she
merely took de Antonio from one de-
signated corner to another, and then
left. Each corner was observable from
any number of different directions.
There were instructions in that place
that would lead him to another place,
where there would be new instructions,
and so on. Each step of the way he
could be observed to determine whether
or not he was being followed. "It took
a long time to get there, even though I
didn’t travel far."

On that first day, de Antonio met
two members of the Underground. "I
expected to meet crazy people, mad
bombers, fanatics. And the first thing
that absolutely overwhelmed me was
how cool they were. I met were so cool, re-
xaxed. They were comfortable, self-
possessed, light—everything I expected
them not to be."

They discussed de Antonio’s proposal
over dinner. "Right away, it was ob-
vious to me that there were conditions
to this film that were not only different
from any film I had ever worked on,
but that were different from anything
anybody has worked on. The main
condition was security. They insisted,
and I agreed at once because it was ap-
parent that it was a legitimate request,
that they be in charge of security all the
way down the line: all the meetings,
the conditions of filming and, more im-
portantly, that they would have final
sensing shots that had revealed too much would be eliminat-
ated. Now this came hard to me because
I’m a freewheeling, anarchistic type. I
was always very bad at party discipline,
wherever I was. But it was obvious that
when you are dealing with people who
are political fugitives, you can’t flash
their pictures around. Because you’re simply doing the job of the police."

Later on, they arranged a system of
direct phone contact. "Those conversa-
tions were very brief. We all had code
names. In addition to their real names,
they all had underground names which
they used regularly. And in addition
to their underground names, they had
code names for this particular project,
names that had not been used before
and were never used again. Sometimes
it got very confusing."

Subsequent meetings, like the first,
were always held in public places—
parks, restaurants, busy streets. The
content of the film was worked out in
detail, and they talked about who else
would join the film crew. For a camera
derson, de Antonio had had Haskell
Wexler in mind from the beginning.
Wexler had several points to recom-
 mend him. He was widely acknowled-
ged to be one of the best cinematog-
rasters in Hollywood (he won an
Academy Award for Who’s Afraid
of Virginia Woolf?). He had solid political
credentials extending back to the late
Forties when he made films for the left-
wing United Electrical Workers, and
continuing through the last 30 years
with documentaries on civil rights, tor-
ture in Brazil, Allende, several films on
Vietnam and a feature, Medium Cool; he was able to contribute to the financing of the film (Wexler and de Antonio each put up $5000.)

Initially, Wexler was not thrilled with the idea of doing a film on the Weather Underground. "I wished it were something else. I'm basically a nonviolent person. I didn't know anything about the Weather Underground except what I read in the papers. They were strongly associated in my mind with violence."

Nevertheless, he agreed to meet with them and de Antonio. It was a more complicated logistical exercise than usual; the meeting was arranged in one part of the country and took place in another, some time later.

The meeting (Wexler described it as the "usual cloak-and-dagger kind of thing") was held in a park. They were sitting on a bench engrossed in conversation. Along came a stranger and sat down beside them. "My first instinct was to say, 'Let's get out of here,'" recalled de Antonio. "Haskell looked like he was about to say that too, when the Weather guy said, 'I'm very comfortable. Are you?' The filmmakers guessed that they were comfortable too, and the conversation continued on an innocent level until the Weatherperson finally said, 'Don't you think it would be nice if we took a walk?'

De Antonio told the story with a certain admiration. "The Weather guy was in total control of the situation. His instinct was correct. It wasn't, instinct, it was training, discipline."

The Weatherpeople asked Wexler how he would shoot the film so that their faces would not be visible. Wexler explained: "We said we'd use every trick in the book except disguises. We felt disguise was untrue to the way they operate. They operate out in the streets, in the open, among people. So that we did not want to put ski masks on them, which are menacing, hostile symbols to begin with. We didn't want to make them look like they had just robbed the local A&P. We didn't want to camp them up with a lot of strange-looking makeup which would make them look grotesque and thereby confirm the government's caricature of them as crazed terrorists."

The Weatherpeople wanted the filmmakers to understand that they would probably be called before a grand jury when the film project became public knowledge. They wanted de Antonio, Wexler and later Mary Lampson to take a position of absolute noncollaboration with any investigation that might ensue. Even though they knew they were risking jail, the filmmakers readily agreed.

For their part, de Antonio raised the question of guns—what would happen if the police burst in during the filming. "I said, 'Look, are you people going to be armed? Because if you are, I would like to be too.' Laughing, they replied, 'Don't be ridiculous. We're not going to be armed. If we're surrounded, we'll just come out.' Here we were, good for people for them. The cops still don't kill filmmakers in this country. They do in Chile but not here. Not yet. Of course, I can't guarantee what the Weatherpeople would do in a different situation.

By the end of the meeting, Wexler was convinced. It remained only for de Antonio to bring a third person into the crew who would be responsible for the sound and editing and participate in the filmed exchanges.

Mary Lampson was a natural choice. She had worked with de Antonio on his last three films. She would be interested in the project, she could be trusted and, at 29, she was roughly the same age as the Weatherpeople.

Nevertheless, it was a difficult decision for her. Although she had worked on some important films, including Millhouse and Cinda Firestone's Attica, she had never, by her own description, been a political activist.

Lampson recalls hearing about the Day of Rage in October 1969, when hundreds of Weatherpeople took part in a series of violent attacks on police and property in Chicago. "I thought they were crazy, although I can re-

member sitting around with friends of mine and talking about doing that kind of stuff. We had gone on peaceful marches and not gotten anywhere. We had a tremendous sense of frustration and I didn't know what to do about it. So before, I still probably didn't know what it was about."

The following month, she was at a massive antiwar rally in Washington. A group of several thousand people broke away from the marchers and moved toward the Justice Department to protest the continuing trial of the Chicago 7. Lampson recalled: "You knew that those people were going to get maced and tear-gassed and beaten and I can remember standing there and debating whether to go or not. I didn't go.

Now, five years later, Lampson stood nervously on another street corner thinking about which way she should go. To help her decide, a meeting had been arranged. There she was confronted by the Weatherperson sitting across from her that she had never been a terribly political person. "I told him, 'I didn't agree with some of the things you did before,' The weatherperson didn't agree with some of the things. How do you feel about having someone involved in this that's certainly at a different stage? That was a welcome thing, that's what they wanted. The film was to be a dialogue. They wanted us to challenge them and they wanted to challenge us. Once I saw what it was going to be like, well, then there was no doubt in my mind that I wanted to do it.""

It had been six months since de Antonio had sat down to Fire. Now all the arrangements had been made. Wexler, anticipating long hours of hand holding a heavy camera, did his customary arm exercises.

The filmmakers were told to go to a certain place and wait for a phone call. The call would furnish them with instructions that "would set in motion a very carefully planned and elaborate series of moves," eventually bringing them to the "safe house" where the filming would take place.

Hours passed. "I was in a high energy state and irritable," de Antonio said. "Every time the phone would ring, I would run to pick it up. It would be somebody saying we hadn't paid the launder bill."

The wait continued through the night and into the next day. When the call finally came—after nearly two days—everything went like clockwork. The filmmakers piled into their car and drove to the first contact point, where they were told how to get to the rendezvous point. There they were picked up, given specially blackened glasses to wear and driven to the safe house.

"We were so heavily loaded down with equipment," recalled de Antonio, "that every time we made a turn, the tire would scrape against the body of the car. We wondered if we would make it or not. While we were driving, I said to them, 'Don't you think any policeman who sees three people wearing dark glasses in a car is going to be suspicious of the car?' So they said, 'Okay, take yours off.' I took my glasses off and closed my eyes. I never opened them once."

When they arrived, the filmmakers were led from the car into the house. The equipment was unloaded and the car stashed.

A safe house is a house with no history. It is anonymous. Books had been put on the shelves, soap and towels in the bathroom, sheets on the bed—all the props necessary to make it look lived in and livable for the three days they would spend there. The windows had been sealed up so that nobody could look in—or out.

"That night," recalled de Antonio, "I don't think anyone slept too well. I mean, there we were in that strange safe house. Believe me, a safe house may be safe but it sure is strange."

The next morning, they set up a large piece of scrim—a gauzy material that would be used to conceal the details of faces but hopefully allow gestures and even lip movements to be seen. They taped up the posters they had brought
with them—Ho, Allende, Fidel—and did those things that filmmakers do like look for the fuse box, figure out where to place the lights and so on. Everything was ready.

"We still didn't know who was going to be there," de Antonio said. "We never asked. We had placed ourselves implicitly in their trust. We knew they would do the right thing, so we anticipated it would be the national leadership of the organization. The door opened and in walked five people: Bernardine Dohrn, Bill Ayers, Cathy Wilkerson, Jeff Jones and Kathy Boudin."

"We shook hands," Lampson remembered. "Everybody was extremely nervous and we all sat down around this table. There was silence for a moment. Then, all at once, everyone just totally and spontaneously started to laugh and clap their hands. We were finally all together."

Was this the first time these five Weatherpeople had seen each other in a long while? "We tried to avoid knowing that," replied de Antonio, "so I can't give you an answer to that question. It's the kind of question I wouldn't answer even if I knew what the answer was. We were operating on a need-to-know basis. We never asked them if they belonged to the same collective or not. We didn't ask them how many collectives there were. All that kind of information is highly useful to the police.

"They themselves at the time described the filming as one of the most dangerous things they'd ever done. They had to anticipate that every mistake I made, or Haskell made, or Mary made, would be a mistake they made. Every mistake they make leads to their arrest or death."

There was an immediate good feeling among the group, Lampson recalled, and as they sat and talked about where to begin, she suddenly realized what an incredible moment it was. "We were sitting in this room with these people, doing this." De Antonio felt it too. "You suddenly felt, you know, Christ, look at these people. You could almost see them on the wanted posters. There was a kind of thrill and excitement about being there with them.

This was like sitting with Robin Hood. I mean, these people are fugitives, the whole state was against them. Now they themselves reject the myth that's grown up around them but people who live on the outside can't help but be aware of it. We had to break through that romance and show that their history is our history."

In March 1970, because of a technical error, a bomb exploded in a townhouse in New York City, killing three Weatherpeople: Diana Oughton, Ted Gold and Terry Robbins. Two women, Kathy Boudin and Cathy Wilkerson, escaped the burning house and went underground. Within hours, the entire organization disappeared.

Now, five years later, a woman sat in front of a camera and said: "My name is Bernardine Dohrn. For a long time I watched the political developments of the Sixties taking place, especially in the South. I thought about joining them but I knew that taking the first step would change my life. And I hesitated for a long time. The first demonstration I took part in was an anti-HUAC demonstration, and then increasingly I became involved in organizing work in Chicago. I joined the open-housing drives for equal housing rights that took place on the West Side of Chicago in 1966. I helped organize rent strikes. This was for SCCLC when Martin Luther King was in Chicago. At the height of the student movement I joined SDS. This was long after I was a student myself. I was elected national officer of SDS and traveled for two years as an organizer and speaker. During this time, I had the opportunity of meeting with the Vietnamese and the Cubans. This experience in particular made me a full-time revolutionary and really changed my own idea of myself and what the revolution was going to be."

Cathy Wilkerson spoke next: "In my freshman year of college in 1962, I met, in Cambridge, Maryland. There I heard Gloria Richardson speak, and that was the beginning of realizing that there was a struggle going on that had deep importance for everybody's life, including mine. But I was still somewhat of a spectator until 1964 when I went on a picket line against segregated schools in Chester, Pennsylvania, and was arrested for the first time and found that even the jails were segregated. But mainly I found out that there are masses of black people in this country who are fighting for their freedom and that they are going to win."

Each of the others spoke in turn. Bill Ayers and Jeff Jones described the events that had shaped their lives and given direction to their politics. Ayers had been arrested at a draft board sit-in and taught at a community school before becoming active on Ohio and Michigan campuses for SDS; Jones, an antiwar activist from Philadelphia, had traveled to Indochina in 1967 and met with representatives of the NLF. Kathy Boudin completed the introductions. "I think the turning point in my life came when I went to Cleveland with an SDS organizers' project in 1964. One of the kinds of work that we did there was to try to organize a movement of women who were on welfare, to demand adequate living, housing and food for children. We used to go down to the welfare department and ask people if they needed any help and wanted to see the caseworker because it was hard to do that alone. Being on welfare is like being in captivity. One day, a woman asked me to come down with her to the welfare department. I went to pick her up. She lived in Hough. Hough is the place where people were rioting because of lack of food, lack of housing. The day after the riots happened, I picked her up and her two children, and we drove down Hough Avenue. Hough Avenue was lined that day with jeeps, tanks, soldiers and rifles.

"She turned on the radio real loud and started to sing and we drove down through the middle of the tanks to the welfare department. She looked at me and she said, 'We're gonna get our welfare today and my people gonna get what we need.' I went to Cleveland to organize and teach, and it turned out that the people who I was working with, and in the struggle with, were people that taught me about the possibility of change in this country."

The initial attempts at filming did
not go well. Both the filmmakers and the Weatherpeople were nervous. "One of the problems in the beginning," recalled De Antonio, "was that we were being overpolite with one another. It would have been easy if we were the usual media. They would have been able to act as they have in the past with the media—very tough, everything on their own terms. But when there's any solitude involved, you're a little more careful of yourself, you're a little more hesitant, a little more withdrawn, and this applied to all eight of us. One of them put it better than anybody: 'We want it to be our best and we want you to be your best.'"

The situation was unnatural for everybody in the room. No one had photographed the Weatherpeople for five years; they were not accustomed to being looked at, particularly in the way a camera looks at you. The fact that the project had been in the planning stage for six months created an almost unbearable sense of anticipation, a feeling that a great deal was riding on each word.

Moreover, in years of meetings and collective work, they had developed a style of discourse that was contrary to the requirements of film. They were used to speaking at great length, to developing their ideas in a leisurely fashion without interruption. But a magazine of film only lasted ten minutes. As Lampson described it: "Ten minutes would go by and everybody's getting oiled up and then, boom. The roll was over, we had to stop, change rolls, and start over again. It totally destroyed the atmosphere that had been built up. We always bounced back to the fact that here we were in this room with these machines and these lights."

De Antonio described the first frustrating attempts at filming. "We had a long horizontal mirror. Haskell shot into that, a long slow pan across us, continuing to one of them, Jeff Jones, behind the scrum. The others were seated next to him. Jeff identified himself and then, pointing to the others, identified them one by one. But in saying, 'I'm Jeff Jones,' he said more than 'I free ourselves from the economic, political and psychic snare of male-dominated melting-pot liberalism; young women and men rejected the dominant values of conformity, materialism and security; white middle-class youth discovered that imperialism was not just a term in history books but that it could be used without quotation marks to describe the political realities of mid-century America.

Moreover, all these revelations hung together. As Prairie Fire put it: "We also came to recognize that issues which once seemed separate had a relationship to one another. Imperialism was 'discovered' as a whole, one system. This was a tremendous breakthrough—it made sense of the world and our own experience. The same school which tracked students by sex, race and class into the appropriate niche, turned out to own slums in the black community and to develop antipersonnel weapons and strategies against revolution—to be in fact a tool of the corporations and the military."

At the same time that it became apparent that imperialism was woven out of whole cloth, the cloth itself began to fray. Vietnam, according to Prairie Fire, taught us that "the U.S. imperial system is not permanently superior, not invulnerable even at the height of its power, not loved by the people of the world, not satisfying the needs of the great majority of the U.S. people."

After the morning session was over, they broke for lunch, which consisted of salads and sandwiches. "The Vietnamese influence on them was extraordinary," recalled de


Weather film

"They used chopsticks and drank tea most of the time. You will hear slurping sounds on the sound track that sound like someone taking a leak. It’s the pouring of tea from a distance."

While they were eating lunch and later during the filming, they were startled by sounds from the street. "We heard the noise of backfires or motorcycles, noises that one ordinarily hears that have no meaning. Under the conditions of being in a closed space with the leaders of the Weather Underground, noises like backfires become magnified, as they must for anyone who’s lived underground for a long time, let alone for the few days we were."

In your mind, everything becomes something it isn’t."

When they resumed filming, the filmmakers posed certain questions that the Weatherpeople were hesitant to answer fully. "We didn’t want you to give a detailed description of an action. He wanted to know how a target was selected, who was chosen to go, how the action was carried out, what kinds of mistakes were made, how the mistakes were remedied.

Response, they described the bombing of the U.S. Capitol Building in 1971. This sequence, edited for inclusion in the film, reflects the peculiar constraints of life underground, which force the film into a modernist, almost Bressonian mold. The traditional documentary forms are turned inside out. The filmmakers, de Antonio and Lampson, are almost constantly in view, peering into the camera, while the visual center of interest is absent. The Weatherpeople in-
And not have risked anybody's life.

"You know, I was in Chicago for the Days of Rage, only I didn't know at the time that it was the Days of Rage. I thought it was going to be an ordinary antiwar march. I was near the front, walking behind some people who started all the fracas. One of the people who was there was one of the people we were filming. I told him that at the time I was really shocked, because I had marched in a lot of peace marches and wherever there was any violence, it had always come from the people along the curb and never from the marchers. But in this case, the people I was marching with all of a sudden looked like they went bananas. They started to throw rocks and they did it right in front of the police, too, which I thought was kind of dumb.

"But I changed my mind about a lot of things during the filming," Wexler continued. "They were good people, dedicated people, very sensitive to one another and to us as people and not just as political beings. And I sensed that it was not an act that they were able to turn on for special occasions. It seemed very much a part of the way they were all the time."

"The next morning when we got up it was dark," de Antonio said. "The sight of all that fucking film gear lying around was depressing as hell. We hadn't taken anything down. You see that camera and the tripod and the lights and all that stuff, and you think, 'Man, we're going to go through this all over again.' And that's when they came in from another room, where they'd slept, very much on the up—they were very big on the up—and said, 'Now we have to have a critique on everything we've done,' which apparently they had decided to do in a meeting they had held the night before while we were having ours."

They discussed what it had been like the first day. The Weatherpeople made it clear that it had not been what they anticipated. It was decided that the physical arrangement of the shots would be changed in order to dispense with the scim. The Weatherpeople would face the film crew directly with Wexler shooting into a mirror, so that only their backs were revealed.

This criticism generated a discussion of the filmmaking process, during which it became clear that each group had, to an extent, different priorities.

One of the areas of disagreement was over the Weatherpeople's use of political rhetoric. "As any filmmakers would," Lampson said, "we kept pushing them to be more specific and not so rhetorical: 'Get more concrete, get more personal.' And they resisted because they didn't want the film to be an expose of the Weather Underground. They didn't want it to be too personal—what kind of toothpaste or deodorant Bernadine Dohrn uses—the kind of thing that the media is always doing. They wanted the film to be about their ideas, a tool around which people can organize and be organized.

"But I had always had an aversion to words like 'imperialism' and 'capitalism.' I had never really understood what those words meant and I had never trusted people who threw them around freely. But when you really know what you mean when you use those words—as I found they did when I listened to them—the words can be very useful. The struggle is to constantly redefine those terms and make them mean something. And that's the purpose of the movie."

"Of course, those words must be attached to life, to lifestyle, because that's where politics is finally measured, in what you do. That's why we felt that those personal things were very important. We tried to convince them that if they trusted us enough, we would not abuse that element, not sensationalize it. We felt that these were precisely the kinds of things it was important to get into, to explain to people where they came from, personally and politically." De Antonio explained, "None of these people just dropped from the sky. 'I'm Lenin' or 'I'm Mao.' Every one of them has a long personal history, and when they finally did agree to speak about themselves, they talked about their childhoods, the kinds of homes they were brought up in. Every one of them speaks with a certain bitterness about having tried to deal with the system, as they all did in the beginning.

"One question seemed to bridge the personal and the political. 'Haskell suddenly asked an overwhelming question,' recalled de Antonio. "He said, 'When you go out on an action, are you afraid?' That was a big moment, because fear is an intensely personal thing and they responded in a uniquely personal way. They stressed the fact that you aren't politically mature until you recognize your fear and then you can both use it and understand it. It's the sort of mad person who pretends to experience no fear that becomes dangerous.'"

Jeff Jones answered Wexler this way: "Fear, yes. Every time, I think, for all of us. I know for me, every time I see a policeman I have this rush of adrenaline. And I take a defensive stance, in a martial-art type of sense. I mean, not a fighting posture but an alert posture. I remind myself who I am, what my name is, what my various numbers are, where I'm going, where I've been. That's an interesting way to live. There are risks every day. I wake up in the morning and I wonder how many times I'm going to be nervous today, 'cause it happens every day."

"It was about a year after I went underground, I was standing on the sidewalk next to this orange juice stand, and suddenly two police cars screeched to a halt in front of me. The cops jumped out with their guns drawn, grabbed me and threw me into the back of a paddy wagon. I didn't know if they knew who I was or what. We went a couple of blocks; the paddy wagon stopped, the door opened, a guy looked in and said, 'That's not him.' They'd mistaken me for somebody else. The cops were very apologetic and offered to drive me home. I said, 'No thanks,' and walked away.

"And then there's the other side of it, which is that we don't feel good about what we're doing, what we've done, and right now it would be pretty hard to feel any better, 'cause we feel there's been a victory in Vietnam, which is a victory for the American people. We certainly identify it as a victory for ourselves. It's something that we fought for for ten years. I'd have to have my foot run over by a police car to feel bad today.'"

Cathy Wilkerson: "The other thing to say about fear is, I think, that because of the nature of American society, a lot of people wake up that way, like the people in Appalachia who fear the day that the strip miners are going to come, or people who are in prison. That fear is everywhere. And the government means no good by the people. It only means bad, only means hurt."
people stressed that this could not be further from the truth. They circulate freely. Many have aboveground jobs and they do aboveground organizing as well.

"There is something that is not in the film," said de Antonio, "and that's the fashion in which we parted. We all held hands and they gave us presents. It sounds corny to say a group of people sat around in the middle of a room and held hands but it was a very moving experience. The most touching thing in the whole film for me was that the men and women of the Weather Underground had made a very beautiful quilt which they gave to me, a political quilt with a political message. It says: THE FUTURE WILL BE WHAT WE THE PEOPLE STRUGGLE TO MAKE IT. It is a message which I happen to accept and believe very strongly and it's one which they were believing and living.

"When we were done," de Antonio went on, "they loaded the car; then we were led out to the car and put into it. Again, they employed various methods to make sure that we did not observe which way we were going.

"As we drove back, we all started laughing and making jokes about the funny things that had happened during the shooting. Like, I remember after it was all over, one of them at the back seat was yelling, 'I can't smoke that, it's breaking the law!'"
of working around the tire—so then I knew something was going on. And then later my son saw a guy out in front of the house taking pictures of the car, of the house, and so forth. Obviously an FBI guy, you know, the way he was dressed. And then I saw a guy up on the hill with binoculars, watching the house. It seemed like the FBI was sending people around just to make sure I knew they were watching. They didn't even bother to be surreptitious. If someone wanted to take a picture of the cars in front of my house, they could just go by with a Minox and click off a couple of shots, but to stand out in the middle of the street with a Polaroid—that's a little much!

“We were sitting up at night biting our fingernails,” continued de Antonio, “saying, ‘Where is the leak? Everything seemed airtight. You know, you started getting those terrible ideas that the FBI was omnipresent and omnipotent. Which we know is not true. There are two great mistakes: One is to think that they know everything; the other is to think that they know nothing. The truth is they are very thorough. Every time you talk to them you make a mistake.

“We spent days and nights reconstructing how the FBI found out that we were up to something. We exhausted every possibility the human mind can think of. We worried that x, y or z had happened. We went into the realm of the insane, speculating that the sound studio was suspicious and that they had some kind of an outlet off the transfer machine, that they were making a 3/4-inch tape for the FBI.”

Their most likely mistake turned out to be something much more obvious. The day after they left the safe house, Lampson, Wexler and two Weatherpeople turned up at Martin Luther King Hospital, Los Angeles, where a doctor’s strike was in progress. They only stayed for ten minutes, leaving when they were questioned by a hospital administrator, but that was apparently long enough. There was a rotating video camera on the hospital roof, scanning the crowd, and the chances are good that they were photographed by the LAPD as well. “My guess,” said de Antonio, “is that the LAPD didn’t know who they had. By the time they took the pictures to the Red Squad and the FBI, they had time to get the film processed and out of the lab.”

The filmmakers thought the attempt to film at the hospital was a spoof. They knew King was foolhardy but they were overruled by the Weatherpeople, who apparently felt the risk of discovery was small compared to the dividends—the chance to speak to striking doctors and the opportunity to show on film that they could move freely aboveground.

FBI surveillance continued after de Antonio and Lampson returned to New York. Friends and families were interrogated. De Antonio finally called the New York office of the FBI and told them, “Get your fucking gumshoes off my back.” The next day, as if in response, he, Lampson and Wexler were subpoenaed before a federal grand jury in Los Angeles and ordered to appear before the 12th. They were told to bring with them “any and all motion picture film, including but not limited to all negatives, working copies and prints, and all soundtracks.”

Weather Underground Organizational Policies

The list included Hal Ashby, Warren Beatty, Harry Belafonte, Peter Bogdanovich, Jeff Bridges, Mel Brooks, Peter Davis, William Friedkin, Shirley MacLaine, Jack Nicholson, Arthur Penn, Rip Torn, Robert Towne, Jon Voight, Robert Wagner, Paul Williams, as well as Stanley Sheinbaum of the ACLU.

The subpoenas were withdrawn.

Four months later Assistant U.S. Attorney Robert C. Bonner said: “At this point it is extremely unlikely that new subpoenas would be issued to the filmmakers.” Bonner declined to comment on the reasons the subpoenas were withdrawn.

Lawyer Leonard Boudin is of the opinion that the whole operation was poorly thought out. “They operated from the hip,” he told us, “the way they did when they indicted Eqbal Ahmad for conspiracy to kidnap Henry Kissinger. Or when they filed a criminal complaint against Dan Ellsberg the night before the Supreme Court argument in the New York Times case. It’s that kind of fast moving thing, without thinking what will happen if there’s a fight back. I don’t think John Mitchell ever thought that the New York Times was not going to capitulate, when those powerful calls came from Mitchell himself and Robert Mardian. The government did not anticipate the fact that its basic power would be challenged.”

Michael Kennedy explained it this way: “In the good old Nixon days, a Weather grand jury like this one would have been handled by Guy Goodwin and his representatives from the Internal Security Division of the Justice Department. And what they would do is get a warrant in the local U.S. Attorney’s office, wherever they happened to set the circus up. That was not done in this case. Bonner is a local man. We heard through two sources that Bonner got jumped on very hard by Justice for having moved so precipitously. There was a tactical fuckup by him and the local FBI office in that they should have waited, put on a vise, and then forced the substitution of a sloppy surveillance, and not called a grand jury at all, hoping that the filmmakers would lead them to the fugitives.”

The withdrawal of the subpoenas leaves Lampson, Wexler and de Antonio in a legal lurch, subject to a variety of possible indictments, including conspiracy to kidnap, as a result of an attempt to challenge the constitutionality of prior restraint. Although they will continue to remain under FBI surveillance, their lawyers feel that it is unlikely they will be subpoenaed, because legal and political conditions are not favorable to a government victory.

Legally, the case is unusual because it is perhaps the first time that the federal government has attempted to suppress a documentary film, especially before it is finished. The government, of course, denies that it wishes to suppress the film, nor does it concede that prior restraint. The subpoena was prior restraint that would really have stopped the production process. Or, as Haskell Wexler put it at a press conference in Los Angeles: “Fighting a constitutional battle against the government is demanding is...
shown no signs of waver. Haskell Wexler was cautiously optimistic: “People are still sensitive enough to the way things are to know that if they come out to sign a public statement like this in our defense, the possibility exists of some kind of pressure being exerted against them. It did take a certain amount of courage. I don’t think it was just because people learned the lessons of the Fifties. I think they learned the lessons of the younger people who showed that defiance of the established isn’t always death to those who defy. Sometimes you can come out and you can win.”

And Bert Schneider, who made most of the phone calls to rally support, put it more bluntly: “The only way to fight oppression is aggressively. You should fight back right away. The government will harass people, will intimidate people, will fuck them over just as far as people will let them. We have to learn to mobilize ourselves to fight repression every step of the way. As soon as it shows its head, you’ve got to be there to chop it off.”

The most notable exceptions to the enthusiastic declaration of solidarity were unexpected: Jane Fonda and Tom Hayden, who had worked with Wexler on Introduction to the Enemy. Hayden, one of the founders of SDS, felt that as a candidate for the Senate (running against John Tunney in the California Democratic primary) it was necessary to issue his own statement. He protested the “harassment” of the filmmakers and placed it in context of the government’s other attempts to block the disclosure of embarrassing information like the Pentagon Papers. But he failed to mention the Weather Underground by name.

Hayden insisted he had never accepted the Weather analysis of the American political situation, and still doesn’t. “The original theory of Weatherman,” he argued, “was that we were in a situation of virtual fascism, because of Nixon’s policies and because of popular opinion being adjusted to these policies. And therefore, the only recourse, in their view, was resistance against this closed system. That’s proven, I think, to be a fear that did not unfold. The democratic process came through.”

“We’re not living under a police state, precisely because people can be reached by political methods, by organizing, by education and so on. So what’s the sense of blowing up? If you’re doing it, you’re blowing what political work of a legal nature and you’re identified with Weather politics, aren’t you bringing grand jury and police heat down on your head? The dilemma of those who politically support the Weather Underground, is, how can they advocate both legal and illegal activity simultaneously without bringing enormous strains and contradictions to an organization?”

Hayden’s optimism may be premature. It remains to be seen whether events of the last few years can be parlayed into any significant social change through electoral politics. Many of those who are identified with Weather politics would probably agree that the Weather analysis which predicted the imminent of fascism was incorrect. But they would argue that the breathing space we now enjoy was created by just those kinds of extra legal protests and resistance Hayden disparages. “We are up against the ruling class,” they say in Prairie Fire, “and it makes no sense to ask them to reform themselves.”

And what of the film now? Work was resumed after a brief interval pending assessment of the government’s intentions. It is scheduled for a November 7th release.

We asked de Antonio what he anticipates. “Obviously, the main political aim is to get the film made,” he replied. “What can the government do now but subpoena us again or come with a search warrant to get the film. We’ve gone through all this with our lawyers, and we’re prepared for any eventuality.”

With mock indignation, he went on: “They’d be creamed if they came and took it. If the government were to destroy the footage, we would be outraged! This film is private property. I mean, are we living under capitalism or not?”

**SIDE 1**

**BAND 1—**Jeff Jones: We’re in a house... Bernardine Dohrn: The reason we’re underground... Kathy Boudin: Many people think that we... Mary Lampson: Because most people... K.B.: Being forced... M.L., K.B., M.L.: They’re after you... Billy Ayers: We think of building an... J.J.: We’re a group of people... Cathy Wilkerson: We all were produced by...

**BAND 2—**H. Rap Brown: I say that violence... Cathy Wilkerson: I remember really... Malcolm X: I hope I haven’t put anybody... B.D.: My name is... M.L. King Jr. (Chicago 1966): We’re going to march... B.D.: Black people of Chicago... Fidel Castro (rally in Havana)... K.B.: My name is... B.A.: My name is...

**BAND 3—**Anti-war demonstration (Pentagon Oct., 1967): Peace now... J.J.: As long as we’ve been... “The War Is Over” song... Ho Chi Minh: (1966) Comrades and friends, what... Nguyen Thi Dinh, Phil Ochs, President Ford (1975): Today, America... J.J.: We are not... B.D.: Everything the U.S. had... B.A.: I do think that the most... B.D.: This belief... B.A.: What you do doesn’t make... B.D.: The lessons of the war... K.B.: You need this war... B.D.: Both political parties... J.J. (Chicago 1968): Power belongs to the young...

**BAND 4—** B.D.: SDS came out of conditions... Jonathan Lerner (Chicago Oct., 1969): We no longer simply... Chicago Statue bombing... B.D.: We tried everything... J.J.: I believe that there’s... B.D.: I would say that we... Mayor Richard Daley: What right has anyone... B.D.: I think Rap Brown... K.B.: Very quickly after the... B.D.: Not only was it not...
BAND 1—Emile de Antonio: Mary and I found... B.A.: There was a period of time... C.W.: One of the things that... B.D.: Imperialism has as... C.W.: One of the hardest... B.A.: It was really the women... E.d.A.: The Days of Rage was... B.D.: The next acts were... Fred Hampton (addressing a rally in Chicago 1969): Bobby Seale is going through... Deborah Johnson: Someone came into the... Edward Hanrahan: The immediate... D.J.: I heard the pigs say... Reporter: Sergeant Groth described... B.D. (press conference Chicago Dec., 1969): it's two and a half... B.A.: At that time... Reporter... B.D.: Well, we'll march... R: If there... BAND 2—B.A.: I think that we... M.L.: Do you... B.D.: We believe in... J.J.: For a successful... B.D.: Our actions... BAND 3—Police Detective (N.Y.C. June 1975): One copy was... B.D.: Puerto Rico is a... poem "Mingo Affair"... B.D.: Puerto Rico has a long... P.D.: The letters were... BAND 4—B.D.: We get CBS... J.J.: It certainly seemed... B.A.: I find all of... M.L.: The problem is we're... J.J.: I feel like I've... B.D.: Here we are... E.d.A.: And we, no matter... BAND 5—B.D.: There is no question... E.d.A.: That's what makes... K.D.: What is the best... E.d.A.: By telling us how... J.J.: We're scientists... C.W.: The point of view... B.D.: So, it definitely... B.A.: I think that we agreed... BAND 6—K.B.: There's a poem that... Fireman (N.Y.C. March 6, 1970): As far as we can... B.D.: It was a long... J.J.: The people who were... B.D.: Everybody looked at the... C.W.: And from that... K.B.: One of the amazing... B.D.: People that we went... M.L.: Can you tell... C.W.: Ted Gold, Terry Robbins... B.D.: Diana was a teacher... E.d.A.: Who chose... B.A.: Terry was an... B.D.: He knew every... C.W.: Terry had dropped... B.D.: Terry was a New York... J.J.: B.D.: It wasn't the... B.A.: Every year on... C.W.: One of the errors... B.A.: Mistakes were made... C.W.: We saw going... K.B.: "For Assata Shakur" Underground is not...