

PROTESTS, RALLIES, DEMONSTRATIONS
RALLY AT DANBURY FEDERAL CORRECTIONAL INST.

**Pacifica Radio Archives: “Protests, Rallies,
Demonstrations”**
(Funded by The Ford Foundation)

Transcript of **Rally at Danbury Federal Correctional Institute**, produced by David Selvin, features excerpts from a rally protesting the holding of political prisoners—particularly Philip and Daniel Berrigan—in Vietnam and the United States. Speakers are Elizabeth McAlister and Nobel Prize winner George Wald.

Recorded on August 18 [19?], 1971 outside the Danbury Federal Correctional Institute, Danbury, Connecticut.

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Transcript

RALLY AT DANBURY FEDERAL CORRECTIONAL INSTITUTE

PACIFICA REPORTER AND HOST DAVID SELVIN: A demonstration was held this afternoon, August 19th, before the gates of the Danbury Federal Correctional Institute to protest “the deliberate use of the prison system to repress political dissent.” Danbury Prison [Danbury, Connecticut] was, until recently, the home of both Philip and Daniel Berrigan. Philip Berrigan and ten other inmates have since been moved to the federal prison in Springfield, Missouri. Sister Mary McAlister [Sister Elizabeth McAlister], a co-defendant with the Berrigans in the Harrisburg case delivered the following speech.

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SISTER ELIZABETH McALISTER: (POOR SOUND DUE TO TRAFFIC NOISE)

This is going to be largely informational. Um, and yet, at the same time, I, I think there's a, a political fact behind it. We are all fairly well used, by now, to hearing lies about Viet Nam and I think more and more, we're going to get used to hearing lies from prison officials. Just a couple of these lies that I'd like to detail for you. In June, one day in June, Daniel Berrigan was almost killed in this prison. The Warden publicly stated, "He had a spell." And no one knew what that meant and no one had access to the warden or to Dan to find out what really happened. But it was the day they almost killed him.

SISTER ELIZABETH: Last Wednesday, we heard another such story. A public statement that these men, the eleven who are now in Springfield [Missouri], were being transferred for medical reasons. That was the public statement. That there is a prison rule that, if a man is fasting, he must have medical attention. So six men who started fasting two days earlier, were shipped out two days later to the prison hospital. And five others, who were fasting a mere five days, were shipped out, as well. There remained some prisoners here in Danbury – I'm not sure of the number – who have been fasting for some ten days and they have not been shipped out, nor are they in the Infirmary, but they're in solitary confinement; nor have they had medical attention. And in private, the Warden stated to associates of ours, two reasons for transfer. "They're not going to break me." And the other, "If these men weren't guilty, they wouldn't have that many attorneys." And another such story, this one from Springfield. In answer to inquiries about the eleven men who were transferred from Danbury, the Associate Warden there said, "There was nothing unusual about the transfer. It was routine. And there were no

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objections to the transfer from attorneys or from family.” I kid you not. That was the public statement from Springfield, which was printed in the Springfield papers on Saturday, creating the impression that, of course, attorneys and family are consulted in what happens with prisoners. They were not consulted. They never are. Their objections went unheard. They usually do. But the people in Springfield don’t know that, and no one could get through to find out what the real story was. We went out there with the intention of objecting to the punitive transfer of Phil and Ted and the other nine because that’s exactly what it was. The eleven transferred out, were the eleven who leafleted here in the prison on the anniversary of the bombing of Nagasaki and Hiroshima. None of the others were shipped out. And they said to us, “No, we want no such objection. We merely want people to concentrate on those issues around which we initiated this fast, around which we leafleted to begin with.”

SISTER ELIZABETH: The issue of the Parole Board and the arbitrary and, manner in which it functions, the lack of accountability that this Board gives or doesn’t give to anyone, specifically to the denial of parole for Daniel Berrigan. Because with Dan, along with his parole information were letters from physicians which stated unequivocally, “This man will never get well in prison.” That must have been ignored. We don’t know why the parole was denied. You never know why parole is denied. But it seems to me they have ignored a very serious thing here. Daniel Berrigan was sentenced to three years in prison. He was not sentenced to death, and yet I think that’s what we are dealing with, and I think we should hold George Reed, the Chairman of the Parole Board, accountable for the life of Daniel Berrigan. In Springfield right now, we have a very

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great fear that, according to their standard operating procedure, the eleven men are being drugged, as many of the other inmates in Springfield are being drugged. A drug called, uh, Thorazine. These men have eaten nothing in ten days. Thorazine is a very potent drug with very serious side effects, and I think we must hold the Warden in Springfield accountable for the life, health, and mental well being of those eleven men and, if it's not true, then we should be able to have our own doctors go in and examine those men and tell us whether it is or isn't, because they haven't been very honest with us at all.

SISTER ELIZABETH: So I say this to you today and beg you all to take the issues to heart that they are asking us to take to heart. And to begin a very serious campaign to get reasons, to get answers, from Parole Board officials, from Wardens, and from people of that sort. Thank you. (APPLAUSE)

DAVID SELVIN: Nobel Prize winner, George Wald, who recently returned from South Viet Nam was the next speaker.

GEORGE WALD (GW): (APPLAUSE) Well, my friends, I've just got back from Saigon where I went with a delegation of American students to meet with representative, uh, South Vietnamese students and others. Together with those students and others, I think our main business was to issue two joint statements, one, uh, endorsing Madame Binh's Seven Points and, uh, the other, protesting police and governmental oppression of South Vietnamese students and specifically, uh, the arraignment of, uh, one of the

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principal South Vietnamese students and, uh, twenty other students before what is, essentially, a *military* tribunal, *contrary* to the South Vietnamese Constitution.

GW: While in Saigon, my most moving experience was, uh, to meet with a group of, uh, prisoners who had been released within the previous two to three weeks from, uh, various South Vietnamese prisons, including the Tiger Cages of Con Son Island. They'd been incarcerated for anything from three to fifteen years. Many of them bore visibly the marks of, uh, long-suffering and punishment. One of them was, uh, wholly blinded by having had lime thrown in his eyes. Uh, it seems to be a common procedure at Con Son to, uh, discipline the prisoners by throwing lime on them. One of them had lost a leg. Several had difficulties in, uh, walking.

GW: I think one of the most moving things that I experienced in listening to those prisoners' stories - they all told us what had happened to them - was the realization that, quite the opposite of having been *broken* by their experiences - they were profoundly angry and their anger was principally directed against the United States government, which they blamed for all the things they'd suffered - the war and, uh, the police brutality. We're, at present, putting thirty million dollars a year just into the police in, uh, Saigon. And, uh, right now, Americans are building for American money for the American taxpayer's money, new tiers of tiger cages at Con Son Prison. So, uh, they spoke with good reason. What bothered me, however, most was to realize that all the time they were telling of these injustices that had been practiced on them, I was thinking, "Ah, but I could tell a rather similar, much too similar story, of what goes on in the

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United States.” And, after awhile, it just got to be a little too much for me, and I got up and it was not on the agenda, and said to them, “Injustice isn’t just something that’s practiced by Americans on South Vietnamese. I could tell you very similar stories out of my own country.” And, uh, I tried to tell them the story of George Jackson. George Jackson, who, uh, was put in jail at the age of 17, for allegedly having taken a minor part in a robbery involving seventy dollars, and was given something that happens in California – a sentence of one-year-to-life. And for ten years, he rotted in jail and now he’s on a murder charge, being tried for his life.

GW: They listened with some astonishment, but I think their business is *our* business; that, in fact, their stories are not unique and we have all too close parallels to them here, and just within the last couple of years, we’ve seen the subversion of the American judicial process by a whole series of new devices that, in fact, defeat the intent and spirit of the American judicial system as we’ve always known it before. One of those devices is excessive bail. One has bails reaching five hundred thousand dollars. They constitute how a mechanism of “preventive detention,” so-called - there are other devices – bringing people into, uh, court charged with *preposterous*, preposterous crimes. Uh, in the course of the trial, uh, the original charge can end up being dismissed, but meanwhile, having been subjected to this kind of experience, uh, the prisoners are, uh, under *Contempt* charges. That happened in the Chicago trial, the trial of the Chicago Seven plus One. That one is Bobby Seale. Original charges discharged, but, uh, four years still over him for contempt. John Froines was acquitted in Chicago, but has, I, as I recall, a year and a half for Contempt, uh, still facing him. (PAUSE, SHUFFLES PAPERS)

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GW: Another strange thing that is, uh, a cause of – should be a cause of shame to the entire nation, and that is the use being made of the so-called “indeterminant sentences.” Indeterminant sentences were meant to be a judicial reform, a sentence of one to six years, or that preposterous sentence, one-year-to-life. That was originally intended to be a reform. It meant that, for good behavior, a man could get out after a year, whatever the charges against him. It’s being used now, those indeterminant sentences are being used now to keep men in jail far beyond the periods that make any sense whatsoever, uh, in terms of what they’ve been accused of doing.

GW: A fourth matter: the *dehumanization* of prisoners. And, uh, I think Americans have to become used to something *new* in American life, and that is, uh, prisoners, notable among them, two we are meeting for today. Uh, Fathers Dan and Philip Berrigan. Uh, brought into Court, not just handcuffed, but *manacled* with *chains* hanging from them. What a strange sight! These two holy, non-violent priests, being brought into Court, draped in chains, made a very curious, uh, kind of, uh, news picture. And, as part of that, uh, degradation of, uh, American prisoners now, there is this very easy and increasingly *prevalent*, uh, putting prisoners in isolation and this is a kind of punishment that, uh, isn’t proper at all, uh, to the matters with which they were accused, but is being used increasingly as a form of, uh, punishment, uh, visited at the discretion of the Warden, upon these prisoners. And now, today here, we are facing a new tactic, and that is the dispersal of the prisoners. Uh, something, uh, this removal of, uh, two of the Harrisburg prisoners, uh, altogether, uh, a larger group to Springfield, Missouri. Uh,

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clearly making those prisoners, uh, inaccessible to their counsel and, uh, very clearly getting in the way of fair judicial procedures.

GW: I think a number of American Catholics think that the activities of, uh, Dan and Philip Berrigan, and their fellow priests and nuns, is somehow not proper to Catholic clergy; that they ought to keep out of that kind of thing. I want to say something about that. They have excellent precedent. When Jesus came into Jerusalem to, uh, to, uh, celebrate the Passover, the *first* thing he did was to have not a non-violent, but a violent confrontation. He went directly to the temple and, uh, upset the tables of the money-changers, and beat them out of temple, feeling that the temple was no proper place for money-changers and that's our problem. That's our problem. The money-changers are all over the temple. The President of the United States is a corporation lawyer and real estate operator, what he fondly speaks of as the Western White House in San Clemente, that's his private real estate development. He has options on four times as much land as he purchased, and that land is all being developed for him by the good citizens of San Clemente, who know a good thing when they see it, and by the American Administration for our money. Our Attorney General is a corporation lawyer from the same firm. Our Secretary of Defense, a corporation lawyer, and, uh, our Vice President, another lawyer who didn't quite make it that successfully in his private practice and is now engaged in using other means.

GW: While in Saigon, we had a longish interview, after a confrontation with the riot police, a longish interview with our Ambassador, Ellsworth Bunker. It was a rather

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astounding performance. I have the strong impression that Ellsworth Bunker, faithful servant of this same kind of corporate policy, that Ellsworth Bunker is engaged in much the same kind of business in South Vietnam that he's so proud of, having accomplished in the Dominican Republic. (NOISE OF TRAFFIC GOING BY IN THE BACKGROUND) Once again, he's producing the appearance of an election where there will be, as everyone understands, no real election. I have the strong impression that Ambassador Bunker thinks that nation happy where the Manhattan – Chase Manhattan Bank is opening new branches. He said to us kindly, "You should leave Saigon and go into the Delta, and see how well the peasants are getting along." "Those peasants," he said to us, "used to ride on bicycles. Now they're riding Hondas. Now they're riding Hondas. They have outboard motors on their sampans. I thought, "Yes, those that are left." Hundreds of thousands have been killed. Millions are refugees, their homes and land destroyed. All around the outskirts of Saigon are shanty towns where it's dangerous for an American to appear. But Ellsworth Bunker doesn't see those things. He sees, uh, his version of, uh, prosperity. And so, I think, uh, we all have our jobs before us and, uh, those of us who are here today are trying to take care of one of those jobs. We have to, not alone, take care of the way things are going in our country. They're not going well. There is a great deal of injustice and suffering and pain. There is still more in South Viet Nam and that's our responsibility, too, because as we all know now, from the beginning, that's been an American war. I used to engage in those long arguments over the years, the Right saying we were repelling a foreign aggression in South Viet Nam. My sort of person saying, "Oh, no, there was a Civil War into which we intruded." *Both* things were wrong. There was no foreign aggression. There was no Civil War until we made one.

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It's an American war and all the people of South Viet Nam want, above all things, for the U.S. to get out. To get out completely. Ground troops, air war, everything. And I can assure you that once we get out, if we get out, a precious, small war, if indeed, any war at all, will remain. Thank you. (APPLAUSE)

DAVID SELVIN: I later spoke to Dr. Wald about his recent visit to South Viet Nam.

GW: Well, I'm George Wald and, uh, here beside me is, uh, Peggy Davis, who is a member of the staff of what is, essentially, the student wing of the United Nations Association, an organization called CIRUNA, which is the Committee on International Relations of the United Nations Association [Council on International Relations and United Nations Affairs]. We spent ten days in South Viet Nam. We talked with many groups over there. A principal object was for the seven American students, who were reasonably representative of large groups of American students, to meet with representatives of the South Vietnamese students and the major South Vietnamese universities. But, besides that, we met with many *other* groups. For example, there's a Women's Peace group called, uh, The Right to Live, uh, Committee on the Right to Live. There's a very powerful nucleus for the South Vietnamese, uh, peace movement. Uh, I think the most powerful and effective committee at work in the Peace Movement just now, uh, which is called the Committee on Prison Reform and, uh, has representatives of the Buddhist Church, the Catholic Church, uh, various peace groups, women's groups and students. Um, there is a big peace movement in South Viet Nam. As a matter of fact, uh, there's an astonishing unanimity that we've discovered among the people of South Viet Nam, and I think I'm talking without prejudice. I think there's an astonishing degree of unanimity which I've never expected to find there and that we found on every

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hand. Uh, the people of South Viet Nam seemed to be almost universally united in wanting four things, above all. One of them is an end to the American presence. They want the Americans out. They view the whole American presence as a domination that's, uh, subverting and corrupting, uh, the whole country and they want them out, completely. Uh, second thing, they want an end to the War, complete end to the war. They want peace. Third thing, they want to get rid of Thieu [President of South Vietnam, Nguyen Van Thieu]. In the course of ten days there, we really didn't find anybody who wanted Thieu. As a matter of fact, uh, except, except our Ambassador, Ellsworth Bunker, he wants Thieu, but he wants also the appearance of an election. And the curious thing is that it's perfectly clear that Thieu would like to run alone, and this is a big embarrassment to our Ambassador Bunker, and, as a matter of fact, there's a tension now between them. Uh, when we spoke with Ambassador Bunker, we asked him, "Could we speak to Thieu?" as we were about to speak that afternoon with Big Minh [General Duong Van ("Big") Minh]. His reply was, "Well, I haven't been able to see him lately myself. He's sick in bed." Nonsense! Next morning was a National Day of, uh, of uh, Civilian Defense Forces. Uh, that was very funny, but uh, there was Thieu, big as life, reviewing, uh, something that wasn't there. It was just, uh, an elaborate, uh, set up for news pictures. There was, in fact, uh, no parade. There was, in fact, no, uh, celebration. The streets were empty, except for a few civil servants had been given off the morning and *told* that's where to be. And when, uh, President Thieu, uh, *reviewed* his, uh, constituency, uh, it was very strange, because there was no constituency. The street was virtually empty and, at one point, when from his reviewing Jeep, he waved and smiled to the crowd. There was a line of about fifteen civil servants who were applauding weakly.

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Behind them, a few civil servants chatting about the weather or whatever. Uh, simply unconcerned. The biggest thing out that day, was, uh, a turn-out of dignitaries, uh, South Vietnamese brass, American brass and about, uh, twenty people who seemed to be from the American Embassy. A great, uh, group, seated under a canopy of parachutes and, uh, I would say that they were the biggest representation, uh, there that day of anything.

GW: Uh, so, uh, Thieu is the most unpopular man, I would say, in South Vietnam. And, uh, though he will almost surely “win” this rigged election, uh, it is – there’s a widespread feeling in South Vietnam that – the South Vietnamese simply cannot contemplate another four years of Thieu and there is widespread talk of getting rid of him somehow. Uh, he would like to run alone. Uh, Big Mihn, whom we interviewed - talked with for about an hour - Big Mihn told us that, in that very room that morning, he’d been visited by one of his forty-four Senatorial supporters who told him that he’d just been offered one and a half million piastres to shift his vote. If, uh, five men could be bought off in that way, it would be relatively inexpensive. Uh, Thieu has a lot of money to spend. That would bring Mihn’s support down to thirty-nine, one short of the forty he needs and disqualify him, uh. Thieu seems to be working on that. He’s got rid of Ky [South Vietnamese Vice President Nguyen Cao Ky] and, uh, now he’s working on, uh, Big Mihn. Uh, if Big Mihn succeeds in being qualified by the Supreme Court, which will happen in a few days, then there is widespread talk that, uh, just before the election, he may pull out – a gesture of his own – uh, to demonstrate that it, indeed, will be a phony election, as everyone confidently expects it to be. Because Thieu, over these years, has

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built up a very wide spread and venal machine and, uh, it's a machine quite capable of delivering almost any vote he chooses to have.

DAVID SELVIN: Dr. Wald then asked if he could make a statement to American Catholics, something that he had wanted to do for a long time, and felt to be of the utmost importance.

GW: I've just come back from Saigon and, through that and earlier experiences, I think I have a message for the Catholics of America. There are about forty million Catholics in America, many of whom think that, uh, what this Viet Nam War is about is, uh, very largely to protect Catholics from Communists. I've even heard talk of the possibility of a Catholic bloodbath in South Viet Nam, uh, when the Americans, if the Americans withdraw. This is a pure myth. Nothing could be further from the truth. I'd like to say what the truth is and I think I can document everything I'm about to say.

GW: Uh, first of all, when, uh, Viet Nam was divided after the 1954 Geneva Convention, divided at the 17th Parallel, there were two large migrations from the North to the South. One of those was the French Colonial Army, which had been fighting on the French side against the Vietnamese. They, they thought it would be a good idea to get out of there and, uh, they left with their families. It was a migration involving something like, uh, a million one hundred thousand people. The other big migration was of North Vietnamese Catholics. On the heels of an enormous campaign to frighten them, and persuade them to leave North Vietnam, at all costs. They were told such things as

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“God is leaving North Vietnam.” That there would be no more masses said in North Vietnam, that there would be no Absolution, that there would be, uh, no Confession. Uh, uh, the Virgin Mary is going South. All such slogans we used. The people were thoroughly frightened and about six hundred thousand Catholics left North Viet Nam for the South, including all the Bishops and a large number of priests, leaving behind in North Viet Nam about an equal number of Catholics.

GW: Now, uh, we are deeply interested – I had heard as long as two years ago – I had seen a document, uh, issued by, uh, and signed by, uh, as I recall the number 93, South Vietnamese Catholics asking for an end of the War and of the American presence and, uh, for a time, I was, uh, trying my best, along with, uh, Catholics and Protestant clergymen, uh, to uh, bring a delegation of South Vietnamese priests to this country, priests and prominent Catholic laymen, to tell Americans, American Catholics principally, the surprising news that there was a big peace movement among South Vietnamese Catholics. On this trip to Saigon, I had direct contact with two such, uh, Catholic groups, uh, very much in the Peace Movement. One of them was so-called Catholic Labor Youth. Uh, the other one was, uh, uh, Catholic priests who are, uh, the nucleus of a Catholic Peace Movement that includes, uh, large numbers of the younger priests, uh, young Catholic students. The youth – in a way, the Catholic Labor Youth, includes most of the young people, uh, among the workers and in the army. And, uh, this other group, uh, centering around these, uh, priests whom I met, includes large numbers of students and middle-class Catholics. Deep into the Peace Movement. And, uh, I, uh, talked at length with them and, uh, one of the most interesting things, I found, to ask

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them, because it was quite surprising to see how outspoken they were – Uh, they weren't afraid of Communism. Uh, no one, in fact, is threatening South Viet Nam, at this point, with Communism. They weren't afraid of Communism. Uh, uh, why is that? Well, they explained to me that, you see, Vietnamese Communism is much more Vietnamese than it is Communist and, uh, it's *highly* nationalistic. Uh, we've been sold a whole series of myths, one of which is that, uh, the Vietnamese Communist movement is tied to China or tied to the Soviet Union. Nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, it was, uh, a South Vietnamese Catholic priest who said to me the significant words, "Just as, uh, North Viet Nam is helping us to kick out the Americans, the day *may* come when we can help North Viet Nam, if that becomes necessary, to kick out the Chinese." Uh, so, uh, that's the way it was. (BACKGROUND NOISE)

GW: The most surprising thing, however, happened when I asked them, "Well, how are the Catholics getting along in North Viet Nam?" And the surprising answer is: they're getting along fine. They lost all of their Bishops. In the last two years, they've consecrated twelve new Bishops, all approved by the Holy See in, uh, Rome. They've, uh, they have three hundred priests. They have a seminary at Vin that's turning out, uh, large numbers of priests. They feel a shortage of priests. Uh, the government itself declared Christmas a holiday last Christmas. Uh, they're getting along fine and, uh, Catholic priests from both North and South Viet Nam appeared at a meeting in May in Paris, uh, that brought together representatives of the whole Indochinese, uh, Catholic Church and, uh, they celebrated Mass together. Incidentally, together with an American friend of mine, Father Griffin, the Chaplain, the Catholic Chaplain at Harvard University.

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GW: So, the American Catholic people have been *sold* a myth. I wish it were possible for Vietnamese priests, North and South, to come and straighten them out, but in the absence of those people, who, on the one hand, the South Vietnamese aren't allowed out of South Viet Nam by the present South Vietnamese government. The North Vietnamese wouldn't be allowed to enter this country by our government. In the absence of those priests who were the proper people to tell them this story, I've tried to tell you myself.

DAVID SELVIN: The preceding program featured excerpts from the August 18th rally at Danbury, Connecticut, protesting the plight of political prisoners in South Viet Nam and the United States, particularly Father Daniel and Philip Berrigan. The program featured speeches by Sister Elizabeth McAlister and Dr. George Wald. This program was edited and produced by your reporter, David Selvin.

End of Transcript of Rally Outside of Danbury Correctional Institute

NOTES:

1. The Berrigan brothers (Philip, 1923-2002) and Daniel (1921-), both Catholic priests, both outspoken anti-war activists, were serving time in Federal prison for breaking into the Catonsville, MD, draftboard and burning draft records with homemade napalm (1968). Philip Berrigan later left the priesthood and married the former nun, Elizabeth (Liz) McAlister. All three were indicted (1971) for conspiring to kidnap U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger. Their trial ended in a hung jury. [See Pacifica Archives, BB4264, "Rally for the Harrisburg 13"]

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2. Biochemist George Wald (1906-1997) was awarded the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine in 1967. He was a vocal and persistent critic of the role of the United States in the Viet Nam conflict.
3. George Jackson (1941-1971), African-American freedom fighter, prisoner-activist, member of the Black Panther Party leadership. He was killed by guards during an attempted escape from San Quentin prison. Author of Soledad Brother and Blood in My Eye.
4. Bobby Seale (Co-founder, Black Panther Party for Self Defense) and John Froines were tried for conspiracy stemming from the demonstrations in Chicago at the 1968 Democratic National Convention. [See Pacifica Archives BB2159, “A Night in Chicago”]
5. Presidential elections were scheduled for South Vietnam in 1971. Incumbent President Nguyen Van Thieu eventually ran unopposed. He held office until the fall of Saigon in 1975. Thieu’s strongest purported opponents were “Big” Minh (General Duong Van Minh) and Vice President Nguyen Cao Ky.
6. Search the Pacifica Radio Archives public access catalog for: Philip Berrigan, Daniel Berrigan, George Jackson, Bobby Seale, Viet Nam.

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