

# THE BIZARRE CAREER OF JACQUE SROUJI, ALIAS LELIA HASSAN

## How A Teenage Reporter Was Enticed By Her Editor Into A Netherworld Of FBI Intrigue

The New Left, the K.G.B. and Karen Silkwood were her targets.

BY IRVIN MUCHNICK

All reporters are informers in one way or another, occasionally even *agents provocateurs*. Trading information with cops and criminals, inciting them to overt acts, is not uncommon. But the case of Nashville journalist Jacque Srouji and her "special relationship" with the F.B.I. is not only uncommon, it verges on the bizarre—a story somewhere between *I Led Three Lives* and *His Girl Friday*.

Jacque Srouji's dealings with the F.B.I. first surfaced last May in her testimony before a House subcommittee investigating the controversy surrounding the death of anti-nuclear power activist Karen Silkwood. At the time, the revelation that Srouji had been given secret F.B.I. investigative reports to discredit Silkwood seemed no more than a one-day wonder. When Srouji's boss, *Nashville Tennessean* publisher John Seigenthaler fired the 31-year-old reporter for allegedly spying on fellow *Tennessean* employees and blasted the F.B.I. for its conduct, that seemed to be the end of the curious and unfortunate affair.

As it turns out, nothing about Jacque Srouji's life or lives seems to be that simple. An investigation into the history of Srouji's special relationship with the government turned up a number of interesting developments. Among them:

- Power company executives introduced to Srouji by the F.B.I. passed her information about alleged unorthodox sexual proclivities of Karen Silkwood in order to discredit the young plutonium worker;
- According to anti-nuclear power activists, Srouji had engaged in at least two attempts to entice them into committing illegal acts while "reporting" on them;
- Srouji received money which she turned over to the F.B.I. (from a high-ranking K.G.B. figure at the U.S.S.R.'s Washington embassy;
- Under an alias, Srouji had become an activist in pro-Palestinian groups;
- Srouji had begun actively informing for the F.B.I. as far back as 1964 and continued for four years while she "covered" New Left events from Berkeley to Washington;
- Srouji apparently blew her cover and exposed the whole "special relationship" at the behest of a book publisher in



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order to plug her forthcoming book on the nuclear controversy.

Srouji's F.B.I. association dates back to 1964, when she was a cub reporter for the *Tennessean's* conservative afternoon rival, *The Nashville Banner*. The late Charlie Moss, the *Banner's* executive editor, and publisher James G. Stahlman assigned 18-year-old Jacque von Stubbel to cover the radical left, particularly anti-war, civil rights and student groups. One day she was summoned to Stahlman's office and introduced to Larry Olsen of the F.B.I.'s Nashville office. Moss and Stahlman instructed her to tell Olsen everything she found out about the hippies, the blacks and the Communists. In return, Olsen saw to it that she got better stories. Furthermore, if she were ever approached by, say, John Sorace, then head of the city's police intelligence squad, she was to cooperate with him.

Srouji herself now says that if she had to do it over, she wouldn't have worked with Olsen. "At the same time, I'm not ashamed of anything," she adds. "I came from a very conservative background. I was inexperienced. And I was impressed by the F.B.I. and wanted to please my publisher." (*Banner* publisher Wayne Sargent wrote in a commendably self-critical op-ed piece on May 24: "In today's atmosphere, current *Banner* management will tolerate no formal alliance between any news source and its reporters. . . . [But the] non-secrecy of Mrs. Srouji's relationship with the F.B.I. at the time seems evidence that it was not considered evil then.")

But cub reporter Stubbel followed Stahlman's script. She visited Berkeley and reported on the Free Speech movement. She did a series on Timothy Leary's Castalia. She covered the

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S.D.S. (On one occasion, Srouji says, the F.B.I. reimbursed the *Banner* for her air fare to Michigan for an S.D.S. conference, though present management says that it has no record of the transaction.) She took part in a pet Stahlman project, the jingoist Moral Rearmament's "Sing Out, America" nationwide tour. "MRA'ers," she wrote from Los Angeles, where a sing-out was held in the heart of Watts, "call themselves the 'New Generation.' They have looked around at the Berkeleys, the Vietnam protestors and those who generally advocate peace at any price, even if it means the loss of freedom. 'No' is their answer to this and a dynamic 'Yes' is echoed in support of 'fighting and sacrificing for liberty.'" For such "reporting," she received the 1966 Youth Award from the Davidson County Business and Professional Women's Club and was honored by the Freedoms Foundation. She was a favorite of Moss and Stahlman and few of her stories were touched by the city desk.

However, there is some dispute as to how committed Stubbel was to her employers' right-wing ideology. In fact some of the movement people on whom she reported, and with whom she spent considerable personal time, believed she had become a genuine, if somewhat sentimental and romantic, convert to the revolutionary ideals of the movements she covered. According to some former members of the Southern Student Organizing Committee (the white radical civil rights group formed after S.N.C.C. turned separatist), Stubbel was a strange bird: at times so romantic as to verge on being a radical groupie, at other times, with the indecisiveness of a chameleon, turning on the people she seemed enthralled by—a confusion of motive and sentiment not unlike that of Sara Jane Moore. Black radicals were more cynical about Stubbel, considering her a well-meaning dilettante. "When she came into an office and said she wanted to run the mimeo machine," one observer

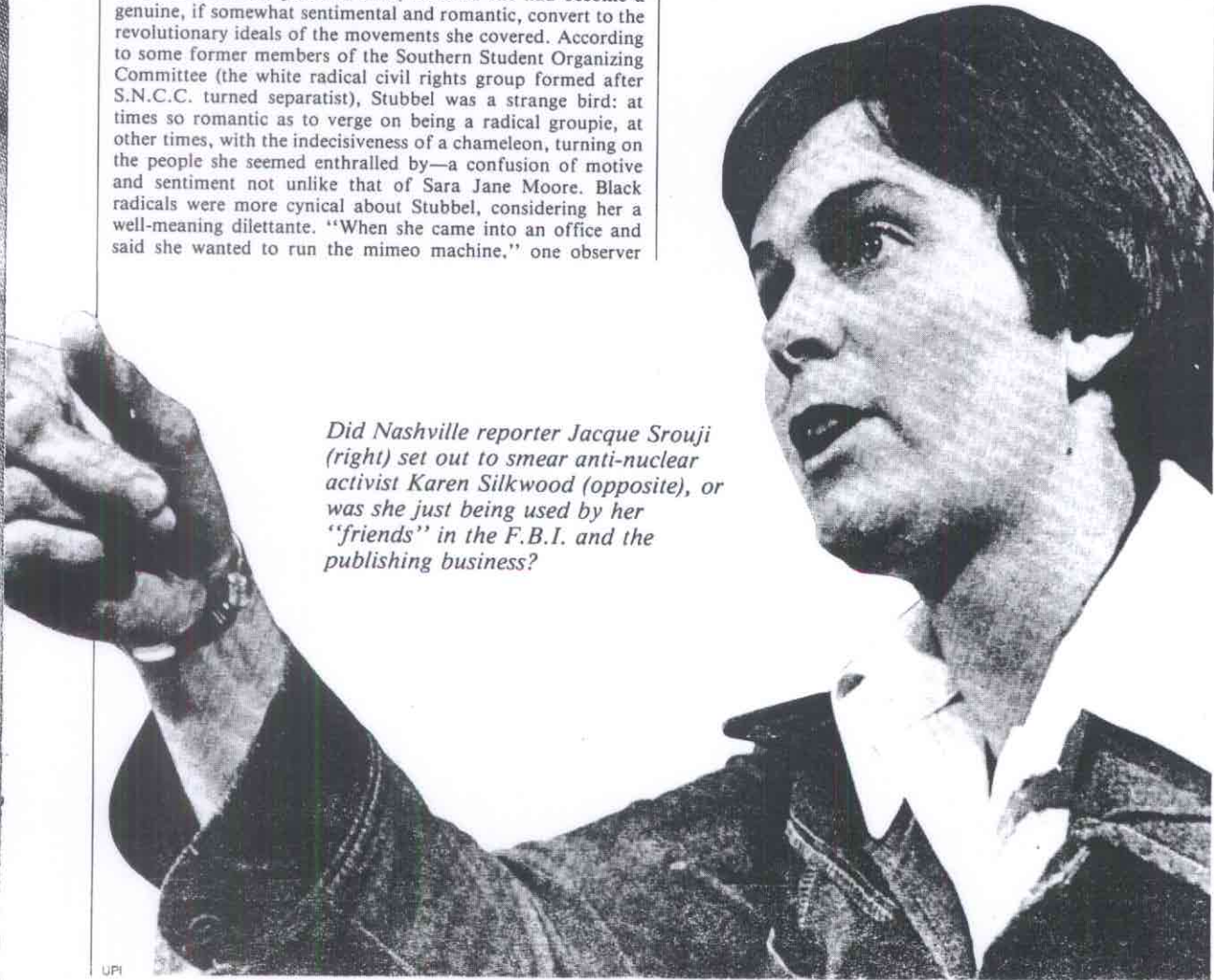
recalls, "they'd let her run the mimeo machine."

While taking a Russian course at Vanderbilt University, Stubbel met S.H. Srouji, a Catholic Palestinian engineering student, who is now a state highway engineer. They were married in Bethlehem by the Archbishop of Galilee, and the new Mrs. Srouji (who had converted from the Church of Christ and had become fervent in her Catholicism) fell in love with the land and the people there. At home, she made contact with Arab students at Vanderbilt and, under the alias Lelia Hassan, became active in the local Palestinian movement.

Since leaving the *Banner* in 1968, she had done some freelancing, notably for *Nashville!* magazine, and had also put in a short stint as a part-time copy editor at the *Tennessean* from 1969-70. In 1975, with the youngest of the three Srouji's children saddling them with huge medical bills, Jacque Srouji went back to the *Tennessean*, again on a part-time basis.

Even earlier that year, Srouji had begun to involve herself in what seems in retrospect to have been more than journalistic adventures with leftists and anti-nuclear activists in the

*Did Nashville reporter Jacque Srouji (right) set out to smear anti-nuclear activist Karen Silkwood (opposite), or was she just being used by her "friends" in the F.B.I. and the publishing business?*



Nashville area. Among them were Frank Russo and Peggy Wilkerson, the husband and wife co-founders of the Nashville chapter of something called the U.S.-China Peoples Friendship Association.

Srouji—who often assisted in organizing July 26 demonstrations in Nashville to celebrate National Solidarity Day for Cuba—tried unsuccessfully to interest Wilkerson in making a trip to Havana. Later, last fall, Srouji took Russo with her to the Air Force Systems Command's Arnold Engineering Development Center in Tullahoma to take photos for an article she said she was preparing for *Nashville!* magazine. She picked up Russo, drove her car to the Nashville airport and inexplicably rented a car for the 70-mile trip to Tullahoma. At the Air Force base, the two were admitted to highly classified areas, where Srouji, according to Russo's friends, tried to provoke him into taking pictures of things he had been ordered by the AEDC authorities not to photograph. At any rate, the article and photos were never published. Russo and Wilkerson, baffled by Srouji's behavior, naturally asked the F.B.I. to open its files on them, but their requests, like so many others', were just as naturally ensnared in red tape.

Then there was Srouji's involvement with the Coalition for the Protection of Political Rights. The organization, ironically, was formed in the fall of 1975 in response to reports that Nashville police had been using informants and keeping extensive files on "troublemakers and subversives"; it consisted largely of socialists, including a *Tennessean* copy editor named Jerry Hornsby. Remembering her work for the *Banner*, the group's members distrusted Srouji the first time Hornsby introduced her at a meeting. But in time she was able to convince them that she was now a member of the anarchist Catholic Workers and could be



**John Seigenthaler:** he consoled her, then he fired her. Did he tape her as well?

of invaluable assistance in compiling a list of informants, which they were planning to make public and present to police chief Joe Casey.

In order to gain the trust of members of the political rights group, Srouji told them she could prove that freelance photographer Harold Lowe, who could often be seen hanging around the *Tennessean* office and who occasionally contributed to the newspaper, was a police informant. She promised to send Lowe "on a wild goose chase." Lowe remembers that one winter day, in a conversation in front of the newsroom coffee machine, Srouji whispered something about how he could find a cache of M-16s stashed in northwest Nashville. Members of the political rights group add that Srouji reported to them that Lowe later confronted her and said he would "never believe anything you say again." Another time, Srouji lured Lowe within sight of Hornsby at the copy desk and got the photographer to demonstrate how he took concealed pictures by inserting a tiny Minox camera inside a pack of cigarettes.\*

Another suspicious escapade was the night Srouji and *Tennessean* news editor Dolph

Honiker, an anti-nuclear activist, entered the local Federal office building after regular hours. Once inside—the door was unlocked for reasons unknown—she tried to goad him into tearing down the photo of President Ford in the hallway, but Honiker refused. "I realized that if I touched the picture, the place would have lit up like a pinball machine," he says.

### The Silkwood Trail

Something like that happened to Jacque Srouji's life as soon as she touched the case of Karen Silkwood. Last year, Srouji was commissioned by Aurora Publishers, Inc., a small Nashville publishing house, to write *Critical Mass*. Aurora's president, Dominic deLorenzo, describes the book as "a balanced, objective account of a very difficult issue of public policy." Srouji got the book contract after capturing deLorenzo's interest with two articles on the news of proponents and critics of nuclear power for *Nashville!* But if it had not been for the Silkwood chapter, it is doubtful that many others would ever have noticed *Critical Mass*.

Ever since November 1974,

when Silkwood's Honda Hatchback plunged off Highway 74, seven miles outside Crescent, Oklahoma, nuclear opponents have been screaming bloody murder. Silkwood, they pointed out, had been driving to a meeting with David Burnham of *The New York Times*, where she had intended to document her claim that the Kerr-McGee atom plant had lax health safeguards. In the months following the incident, investigative reports in the *Times*, *Ms.*, *Rolling Stone*, *New Times* and elsewhere questioned the official ruling of the death as an accident. Srouji, however, uncovered fresh material casting doubt on the doubters.

Her main source was F.B.I. agent Larry Olsen, her former friend in Nashville who was now based in Oklahoma, where he supplied her with photocopies of close to 1,000 pages of F.B.I. papers. He also introduced her to two Kerr-McGee executives, who, in Srouji's words, trusted her "with the documented facts to tell the story as it has never been told."

Without making a judgment about the facts, one can note that the smear job on Silkwood was, at the least, terribly unsubtle. At one point in the uncorrected galleys of Srouji's book, she interviews an anonymous Kerr-McGee official who agrees to speak with her "only at the request of a third party." The K-M executive talks about several factors "which throw doubt on Ms. Silkwood and her allega-

\* Lowe says it is his "duty as a citizen" to report to the police anything suspicious, but he denies he was ever an informant. He does admit that, as a photographer for WSM-TV in the 60's, he was, like Srouji at the *Banner*, sometimes assigned to cover leftist events that never made the evening newscasts. He assumes now that his film on those occasions was dispatched by his superiors to the federal building at Eighth and Broadway. A few days after Srouji was fired from the *Tennessean*, Hornsby related to John Seigenthaler some of the events described above. Seigenthaler had Lowe notified that he was no longer to set foot in the *Tennessean* office. His story has not been told publicly until now.

tions"—one of those being her "apparent 'free love,' or bisexual relationship with a blonde, rawboned rodeo buff who liked to dress up like a man." When this line is pursued, Srouji reports, she glances up at the K-M chap and her eyes widen. (The coy ellipses that follow here are not textual deletions; they are Srouji's). She continues:

As far as I was concerned, a person's sexuality is their own business. . . . "The girl is dead," I muttered, not really wanting to cloud her reputation in this manner.

Smoke drifted over to my side of the table as my faceless companion shot back, "You don't understand. The girl was a lesbian. A queer. If she was any kind of human being at all, do you think that she would have left her three children? 'Lesbians' don't care. They got no feelings at all. No ties. They'll do anything, and that is a significant factor in this investigation whether it insults your sense of decency or not. . . ."

It does. It really does.

But not enough for her to exclude it from her widely circulated galleys.

In December, Srouji traveled to Washington to fence with Congressional investigators probing the thoroughness of the F.B.I.'s Silkwood investigation. They concluded that she knew more than they did, and eventually they coaxed her into testifying before a House subcommittee. With very little prodding, much less a subpoena, and without so much as a lawyer at her side, Srouji blurted out in open session on April 26 that she had come across "a ton of material" on Silkwood—and that she had been led to it by the F.B.I. Agent Olsen later refused to answer questions under oath, citing the bureau's "special relationship" with Srouji, and the whole affair became a matter of public record.

Why did Srouji disclose her confidential sources so cavalierly? As a straight journalist, she should have flatly refused to testify on First Amendment grounds. As a person fronting for the F.B.I., she should have been, if anything, even more unwilling to talk. The usual theories have been bandied about—various ones have the F.B.I., Seigenthaler and the subcommittee staff framing her for a matrix of cloak-and-dagger reasons—but the best explanation is the purest and simplest, the one for which publisher deLorenzo accepts the credit and the blame: Srouji was trying, ineptly, to pull off a book hustle. "All along I was hoping we would get some fallout in the way of publicity," deLorenzo says. "I'm being candid with you now. I mean, you know what two lines in *The New York Times* can mean."

The public disclosure of Srouji's special relationship with the Bureau led immediately to a breakdown in her relationship with her own newspaper and raised some questions about the conduct of that relationship. On Tuesday, May 4, Srouji returned from her Washington appearance and poured out all the secrets of her F.B.I. work to her boss at the *Tennessean*, John Seigenthaler, in his office. Yes, she said, she had performed a variety of tasks for the F.B.I. for a number of years. Recently agents had asked her questions about *Tennessean* staff members Hornsby and Honiker. Yes, Olsen had given her the Silkwood documents. She went on to provide unsolicited details about how, during the research for her book, she had visited the Soviet embassy in Washington and become friendly with Dr. Sezgei F. Zaitsev. She soon discovered that he was more than a leading authority on fusion; he was also one of the U.S.S.R.'s highest-ranking intelligence officers in this country. As Seigenthaler testified before the Dingell subcommittee on

May 20, Srouji said Zaitsev began giving her money—\$200 once, a total of \$400 over several visits. He also began pumping her for information about the American Seafarer submarine communications system, of which she somehow had intimate knowledge through her service in the Naval Reserve. But she had remained loyal to the United States, she told Seigenthaler. She had resisted becoming a double agent, and she had turned the money over to the F.B.I.

Faced with the total picture for the first time, Seigenthaler did two things. He consoled Srouji, and he fired her, effective immediately. Not that he had much choice. But what Srouji, in her emotional state, must not have realized, was that her confessional had been performed before a newsman, not a priest. And that, without her knowledge, Seigenthaler had probably been taping their conversation (see box, p. 28).

Seigenthaler says that he hadn't started to wonder if the *Tennessean* was being used by the F.B.I. until sometime last spring, after the newspaper sent Srouji to South Dakota and Minneapolis to acquire documents there relating to alleged perjury by Joseph Trimbach, an F.B.I. agent who was on the scene when two other agents were slain last year on the Indian reservation at Pine Ridge. Srouji wrote a series of articles based on the documents, which, according to *Tennessean* editors who inspected them, appeared unassailable in their accuracy. But when Seigenthaler read Srouji's first installment, it didn't smell right. The story rambled and was filled with accounts of internal politics at the F.B.I.'s Memphis office. Since it occurred to Seigenthaler that agents who held grudges against Trimbach might have been getting back at him through Srouji, the publisher spiked the Pine Ridge series.

"Prior to the Trimbach story, I had not the slightest question in my mind that there

was anything other than a friendship—a family friendship or a church relationship or a personal relationship [with her F.B.I. source]," Seigenthaler says. "All I knew was that somebody up there liked her enough to help her, and I thought we were being helped by it. Before that, did I suspect anything? I didn't. In retrospect, do I wonder what happened? Of course I do. I wonder whether she went to the Soviet embassy and came back and said 'Look, I've been up there. Are you interested?' Or did she go up there and they come to her and say, 'Tell us what you found out?'"

Nevertheless, if Seigenthaler had recalled certain events of the previous winter, he might have found grounds for suspicion, particularly since Seigenthaler himself had worked so closely with the Bureau when he was in Bobby Kennedy's Justice Department.

On December 16, 1975, an F.B.I. raid on a reputed Nashville bookmaker made big headlines in the *Tennessean*. One reporter after another struck out on finding hard leads until Jacque Srouji overheard a group of editors talking about the raid and volunteered to try her hand. With a single phone call she got names, facts, the whole story. The following day she gave the city desk tips about the arrests of 10 persons in connection with a nationwide mail and telephone fraud scheme based in Nashville. Both stories were extremely complex, and her colleagues were amazed at the ease with which she ferreted out the information.

For more than three months after that pre-Christmas blitz, Srouji was a fountain of knowledge about F.B.I. affairs. If there was a bank robbery in the area, she could find out how much money had been stolen. If there was a criminal investigation under way, she could dig out useful morsels of background. Not everything she got was of great news value, *Tennessean* staffers recall; once she brought in an

## DID JOHN TAPE JACQUE?

Did John Seigenthaler bug the conversations in his office with Jacque Srouji? John Seigenthaler should know. Following are excerpts of an interview with Seigenthaler by Alan Griggs, a reporter for WSM-TV in Nashville. During the four days after WSM news director Mike Kettering nearly resigned in protest when the station's president, Irving Waugh, refused to allow the tape of the interview to be aired. It finally was shown in conjunction with Seigenthaler's appearance on a WSM talk show, in which he conceded that "the question is valid" and "I obviously lost my temper."

**Griggs:** During your conversations with her over, I believe it was a three-day period, did you by any chance tape any of those conversations?

**Seigenthaler:** Well, I, I've, uh—did she say I taped her conversations?

**Griggs:** No, sir, I was just asking you.

**Seigenthaler:** Well, why would you ask that?

**Griggs:** Well, I was just asking you that.

**Seigenthaler:** Well, I, uh, I will say, uh, based upon the conversations I had with my attorneys, after each conversation I called my secretary in and dictated extensive memoranda. And those memoranda are what I reviewed today and—

**Griggs:** Did you tape them while they were actually under way, though?

**Seigenthaler:** Well.

**Griggs:** Yes or no?

**Seigenthaler:** Well, now don't ask me yes or no. I mean, what the hell do you think you're doing, yes or no?

**Griggs:** That's all I'm asking you.

**Seigenthaler:** Well, I mean, I don't want to give you a yes-or-no answer.

**Griggs:** Well, why not, sir?

**Seigenthaler:** Well, I mean, it's none of your business, why yes or no. Well, it's none of your business, yes or no. I mean, well, what do you mean, asking me?

*Tennessean* president Amon Carter Evans and lawyer Bill Willis subsequently issued a statement saying that they had urged Seigenthaler to tape his conversations with Srouji. "As to whether he did, I have no comment," Evans added. "I fully support his decision to make no comment." Here is Seigenthaler's final word: "It is something that is offensive to me, the idea of taping. However, it is legal. . . . I've said that if I thought what was to be said was of such moment and impact, such importance, as to be vital to my interests, that might weigh against my conviction against recording conversations. And that's as far as I can really go, and that's as far as I'm going to go."

—I.M.

inch-thick stack of F.B.I. papers that contained little substance. But nobody suggests that her F.B.I. conduit was an overnight development.

Rather than announcing her dismissal immediately, however, Seigenthaler proceeded

to leak carefully selected bits and pieces of her story to the press. To cite the most glaring example, John Crewdson of *The New York Times* reported two days before the *Tennessean* that Srouji had told Seigenthaler that K.G.B.'s Colonel Zaitsev had given her

\$400. There is some evidence that the F.B.I. attempted to retaliate against Seigenthaler for his Srouji leaks by planting a story about him with the *Times*.

On the morning of Thursday May 13 *Timesmen* Crewdson and Bill Kovach, a former *Tennessean* staff member and now news editor of the *Times* Washington bureau were meeting in the *Times* office with F.B.I. official Homer Boynton. Boynton, who was up to his ears in the bureau's campaign against the anti-nuclear movement, was telling Crewdson he ought to look into a Federal grand jury investigation in Nashville involving a life-long friend of Seigenthaler.

What the F.B.I. didn't know was that Kovach, a friend of Seigenthaler's from Kovach's own days at the *Tennessean*, was informing on the F.B.I. Kovach called Seigenthaler to let him know that the F.B.I. was going around calling him "not entirely pure". Seigenthaler then printed an account of the "not entirely pure" conversation in the *Tennessean*, calling it "shocking" to learn that the Justice Department was "leaking to news sources information that I was not a decent member of society." Jacque Srouji never had that kind of journalistic buddy system to protect her interests.

### Black Market Murder?

Through it all, Srouji has said little for the record. In an interview with MORE, Srouji offered little except her blanket assertion that she has done nothing for the F.B.I. since 1968. But people close to her believe there is considerable disjunction between her 1964-68 and 1975-76 roles for the bureau. During the more recent phase, they say, she probably attempted to justify her activities by telling herself that she was actually protecting her liberal and radical friends from the full force of the F.B.I.'s wrath. She may have thought that she could simultaneously avoid

violating their privacy and stage a series of harmless escapades that would keep her credibility intact with her F.B.I. sources. This version is supported by the fact that it was Olsen who first cited their "special relationship," perhaps because he was unhappy with the half-hearted manner in which Srouji was using it.

As for *Critical Mass*, Aurora has no plans to cancel publication. Far from it. Publicity surrounding the book has persuaded deLorenzo to increase the press run from 10,000 to perhaps 20,000 to 25,000. The Silkwood chapter is being reworked "to reflect recent developments." DeLorenzo has deleted the section on Silkwood's alleged lesbianism, conceding it is of dubious relevance. The major new material in the book, now tentatively scheduled for publication on September 30, deals with the possibility that Silkwood was murdered because she may have had knowledge about plutonium that might have been smuggled out of the Kerr-McGee facility and sold abroad in a lucrative black market. According to deLorenzo, there are irregularities in Kerr-McGee's MUF (material unaccounted for) figures. If Silkwood was indeed rubbed out, he and Srouji have reasoned, money would have been a much more plausible motive than ideology. Whether this fresh angle amounts to an honest effort to ascertain the truth or a ploy to salvage the book—which may, in any event, be a hopeless venture—remains to be seen.

Reading the galleys of *Critical Mass*, one gets a sense that Srouji reads much of her own confused and not entirely pure situation into her portrait of Karen Silkwood. Silkwood, Srouji writes, "was not as chaste as Joan of Arc, but on the other hand, she wasn't, as one investigator implied, an accident waiting to happen. Long before Crescent, she was a girl who started sending out signals that no one apparently took the time to pick up." ■