

Never FBI Informer, Ousted Editor Asserts

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By Matt Yancey
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NASHVILLE, May 18—Jacque Srouji, a copy editor fired by The Tennessean two weeks ago for alleged conversations with the FBI about members of the newspaper's staff, denied today she had ever been an informer for the bureau.

Srouji, in the presence of her attorney, told a news conference, "I have never been requested by the FBI or any other federal, state or metro [local] agency to obtain information about The Tennessean or any of its staff members. As far as I know there is no investigation of the newspaper by the FBI or any other law enforcement agency."

It was her first public comment since her firing became public May 7. Srouji said she has been on vacation reflecting on the controversy.

Asked if she met with FBI agents during the vacation, Srouji first said "no," but then asked to have that changed to "no comment."

Tennessean publisher John Seigenthaler said last week Srouji told him during three conversations before she was fired that FBI agents questioned her about at least two members of the staff.

He also said Srouji told him she had supplied the bureau, through a "control agent," with information during the 1960s when she was a reporter for the Nashville Banner.

Investigators for the House Small Business subcommittee on energy and environment said last week that FBI agent Larry Olson told them Srouji had a "special relationship" with the bureau.

The subcommittee's interest in Srouji stemmed from its probe into the FBI investigation of the traffic death of Oklahoma plutonium worker Karen Silkwood. Srouji testified before the subcommittee about the case and said she had 1,000 pages of FBI reports on it.

Silkwood was an employee of a Kerr-McGee facility in Crescent, Okla., and a critic of the plant's safety record. She died en route to a meeting with a reporter and a union official at which she was to have discussed her concerns.

Srouji would not comment on any FBI documents that she has about the Silkwood case.

"As to the FBI documents in my possession, which I testified to at the congressional hearings, I am presently not in a position to

discuss this matter further because, as I understand it, this is currently under investigation by both the FBI and Mr. Dingell's committee." Rep. John Dingell (D-Mich.) chairs the energy and environment subcommittee.

Srouji, and her lawyer, William R. Steltmeier, also answered "no comment" when asked if Olsen helped her get information on the Silkwood case.

She acknowledged one conversation with an FBI agent about Tennessean copy editor Jerry Hornsby, who has been a member of the national committee of the Socialist Party, U.S.A.

"In the fall of 1975, while having lunch with an FBI agent, I teased the man as to whether the FBI was investigating a certain Tennessean reporter," she said.

"My remarks resulted from a conversation I'd had with another copy editor, Jerry Hornsby, who advised me that he had been questioned extensively by the FBI and had written an article on his experience for a socialist newspaper of which he was then publisher.

"The agent laughed, shook his head, and replied that Mr. Hornsby had walked in off the street to see us and had told two agents everything he believed and why.

"I considered the conversation incidental. This is the extent of any and all conversations with the FBI regarding the Tennessean or any of its staff," she said.

Srouji, in saying she had never been paid anything by the FBI for any information from — 1960 forward, acknowledged, "on one occasion, in the early '60's, one of my employers was reimbursed for an airplane ticket." She would not comment further except to say that the trip was to Michigan.