

Green leader wants CSIS to justify security risk branding

APEC SCREENING

BY JIM BRONSKILL

OTTAWA • Joan Russow, the federal Green Party leader, has filed a formal complaint with the watchdog that oversees Canada's spy agency about her appearance on a secret threat assessment list at the 1997 APEC conference.

Ms. Russow wants the Security Intelligence Review Committee to determine why she was branded a potential risk to the Asia-Pacific summit in Vancouver.

"Who put the list together, at whose request, and what justification was there?" she asked in an interview. "I'm just not getting any answers."

The review committee, which keeps an eye on the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, investigates complaints from the public about CSIS activities.

Ms. Russow's problems began when officials revoked her accreditation for the summit, which she attended as a reporter for the *Oak Bay News*, a community paper in Victoria.

At the time, summit security staff questioned the existence of the small newspaper, prompting a tense exchange with Ms. Russow, who was prevented from covering the remainder of the meetings.

"It was quite clear that something funny was going on," she said in an interview.

Ms. Russow's suspicions were confirmed in late 1998 when copies of the threat assessment, including her photo and vital statistics, were tabled with the RCMP Public Complaints Commission. The commission is conducting hearings into complaints from protesters who were pepper-sprayed and arrested by police at the University of British Columbia, where the APEC leaders met.

Documents made public during the last year indicate the summit threat assessments were prepared by an ad-hoc group comprising members of the RCMP,



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Joan Russow, leader of the federal Green Party

CSIS and several other agencies.

Almost two years after the summit, Ms. Russow's case raises several thorny questions. Did CSIS or the RCMP spy on a political party leader? Was freedom of the press infringed in the name of security?

Ms. Russow, who says she has no criminal record, recently took her case directly to CSIS.

Under the CSIS Act, the intelligence service is permitted to investigate only people engaged in activities considered a threat to Canadian security.

In July, CSIS official T.J. Bradley replied to Ms. Russow that while he could neither confirm nor deny specific operations of the service, "I can assure you that, with respect to your inquiry, CSIS has fulfilled its mandated obligations within the parameters of the CSIS Act."

Not satisfied, Ms. Russow complained this month to the review committee. It does not openly discuss cases, but issues findings to the complainant.

The APEC threat assessment describes Ms. Russow as a "Media Person" and "UBC protest sympathizer."

In recent years, Ms. Russow has been an outspoken critic of federal policies, expressing concerns about an APEC environmental agreement, genetically engineered foods and uranium mining.

A separate document, prepared by threat assessment officials during the summit, describes Ms. Russow and another media member as "overly sympathetic" to APEC protesters. "Both subjects have had their accreditation seized."

The document lists Ms. Russow's date of birth, hair and eye colour and weight — though the latter figure is so outdated she wonders just how long officials have kept a file on her. It also identifies Ms. Russow as leader of the Green Party.

Ms. Russow has also filed a grievance with the RCMP complaints commission.

A briefing note prepared by the Solicitor General's Department recommends no public comment be made about Ms. Russow's concerns for fear of jeopardizing the integrity of the RCMP commission hearings.

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