

*Top Ten
Reasons*

*NOT to Talk -
or Listen -
to
CSIS*

Talking with CSIS can be dangerous for you

Over the past months, reports of Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) visits to the homes and even workplaces of people working for social justice have multiplied. In addition to its longstanding and ongoing harassment and intimidation of indigenous peoples, immigrant communities and others, the spy agency has become much more visible in its surveillance of movements for social justice.

The People's Commission is aware of dozens of such visits in the Montreal area alone. People visited range from writers and artists to staff at advocacy organizations and anarchists living in collective houses. Unannounced, in the morning, the middle of the day or the evening, CSIS agents knock at the door of private homes. Their interest is far ranging: from the tar sands, to the G8, to indigenous organizing, Palestine solidarity, Afghanistan; who you know and what you think. Their very presence is disruptive, their tone can be intimidating, and their questions intrusive, manipulative and inappropriate. They guarantee confidentiality – “just like in security certificate cases” – and invariably ask people to keep quiet about the visit.

The People's Commission Network advocates total non-collaboration with CSIS. That means refusing to answer questions from CSIS agents, refusing to listen to whatever CSIS may want to tell you, and breaking the silence by speaking out whenever CSIS comes knocking.

If you are in immigration proceedings, or in a vulnerable situation, we strongly advise you to insist that any interview with CSIS be conducted in the presence of a lawyer of your own choosing.

Here are 10 good reasons not to talk – or listen - to CSIS.

Even though CSIS agents do not have powers of arrest and detention, CSIS can and does use information it gathers in seemingly innocuous conversations to write security assessments for immigration applications, detention and deportation under security certificates, various blacklists (the no fly list, border watch lists, etc.)¹ and other purposes. Innocent comments you make can be taken out of context and misinterpreted, but you will have no opportunity to correct errors, because intelligence information remains secret.² This information can have a serious impact on your life.

Talking with - and listening to - CSIS can be dangerous to others

Just as CSIS can use your words against you, they can use innocuous things you say against others. In extreme cases, this can lead to situations where people's lives are at risk. For example, in the case of Maher Arar, security agencies passed on hearsay information to the Americans that not only proved baseless but led to his rendition to Syria. CSIS later led efforts aimed at preventing Mr. Arar's return to Canada.³ Hearsay information relied on by CSIS certainly contributed to Adil Charkaoui's six and a half year struggle against arbitrary detention and deportation to torture under a security certificate.⁴

1. Report of the Information Clearinghouse on Border Controls and Infringements to Travellers' Rights, International Civil Liberties Monitoring Group, February 2010

2. This is true even decades after the fact: see, for example, “CSIS won't open full Tommy Douglas file”, Canadian Press, 10 February 2010

3. Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Actions of Canadian Officials in Relation to Maher Arar. Available at www.sirc-csars.gc.ca/pdfs/cm_arar_rec-eng.pdf.

4. See, for example, Charkaoui, Re 2005 FC 149 Date: February 1, 2005.

Moreover, CSIS is known to spread false information about others. Listening to CSIS creates doubt and can make people afraid to associate with the targets of rumour-mongering, effectively isolating them.⁶

3

Uphold your privacy and that of those around you

You have the right to privacy, to be free from surveillance, harassment and intimidation. Refusing to speak with CSIS is one way of asserting those basic rights; talking with CSIS gives the green light to further intrusion and control. Moreover, the more you tell them, the greater material they have to justify further surveillance.⁷

4

The more you talk, the more they come back

Many people believe that, if they cooperate with CSIS, they will be left alone because they “have nothing to hide”. Evidence suggests that the contrary is true. Once you have been identified as a collaborator, CSIS will continue to come back whenever they think you can provide information. The best way to get CSIS to leave you alone is to refuse to collaborate.

5. For one example, see www.rabble.ca/news/2010/06/two-activists-speak-out-about-g8g20-csis-intimidation-stefan-christoffs-story.

6. See **People’s Commission 2006 Hearings Final Report (February 2007)**, p. 20 and elsewhere; available for download at www.peoplescommission.org.

7. “**CSIS has easy time getting warrants, documents reveal**”, Colin Freeze, *Globe and Mail*, 15 November 2004

5

There is nothing to gain from an encounter with CSIS

People are often tempted to sit down with CSIS out of sheer curiosity. However, CSIS agents are well trained. What they will let you know is what they want you to know; it is deliberate. They may also deliberately spread misinformation either directly or through innuendo and implication. You have no way of knowing if what they’re telling you or leading you to believe is true.

6

CSIS cannot be trusted

Over the years, CSIS has demonstrated time and again that they lack competence⁸ and may act in bad faith. CSIS played a key role in bungling the Air India investigation⁹ (and, according to the *Globe and Mail*, a CSIS mole may have actually played a role in the bombing);¹⁰ they destroyed evidence in the Charkaoui security certificate case;¹¹ they suppressed the fact that a key informant had failed a lie detector in the Harkat and Almrei security certificate cases;¹² and they lied to their own oversight body (the Security Intelligence Review Committee—SIRC) in the Bhupinder Liddar case.¹³

8. “Spy watchdog growls over ‘deeply concerning’ mistakes by CSIS”, Jim Bronskill, *The Canadian Press*, 12 June 2010

9. “CSIS erasure of Air India tapes to be examined”, Bill Curry, *Globe and Mail*, 13 September 2007

10. “Canada needs truth in the Air-India case”, *Globe and Mail*, 17 March 2005

11. *Charkaoui v. Canada (Citizenship and Immigration)*, 2008 SCC 38, [2008] 2 S.C.R. 326, at paras. 11 and 30.

12. *Harkat (Re)*, 2009 FC 1050; “CSIS failed to give judge info on Almrei”, June 30th, 2009, *CBC News*

13. “Watchdog ‘misled’ by CSIS”, Bill Curry and Colin Freeze, *Globe and Mail*, 14 Sept 2005; “Liddar probe is an example of how CSIS ‘destroys lives’: former CSIS member”, KATE MALLOY and F. ABBAS RANA, *The Hill Times*, September 19th, 2005

Solidarity against racism and racial profiling

CSIS also routinely engages in unethical tactics of intimidation and harassment in their efforts to recruit informers: visiting people at home and at work unannounced, offering money and favours for information, intimidating those with precarious immigration status,¹⁴ intrusive and irrelevant questioning,¹⁵ improper identification, discouraging people from contacting lawyers or suggesting that they contact a lawyer chosen by CSIS.¹⁶

7

CSIS shares information with untrustworthy and brutal partners

Information provided to CSIS will not stay with CSIS. The agency admits to having intelligence-sharing agreements with the spy agencies of 147 other countries;¹⁷ its contemporary colleagues include the CIA, Mossad, the mukhabarats of Syria, Jordan, Morocco, Sudan and Egypt, Turkey's MIT and many more. Information sharing continues, despite SIRC's finding that CSIS "is rarely in a position to determine how information that went to a foreign agency is used, or how information it receives was obtained."¹⁸ Anything you tell CSIS could be shared with one of those other agencies, potentially affecting your travels and family abroad.

14. For example, the National Council on Canada-Arab Relations reported that Arab students have been threatened with deportation and revocation of their status if they fail to provide information about community members. "In The Shadow of The Law", International Civil Liberties Monitoring Group (ICLMG), 2003.

15. See People's Commission 2006 Hearings Final Report (February 2007), p. 19; available for download at www.peoplescommission.org.

16. See Faisal Kutty, "The Dirty Work of Canadian Intelligence", April 2004. Also see CAIR-CAN's community survey, "Presumption of Guilt", 2004.

17. Actualité, Les Années fastes du SCRS, 22 mai 2010

18. "CSIS promises on torture baseless, Watchdog says", Jeff Sallott, Globe and Mail, 1 November 2005. Abdullah Almalki and others who were detained while travelling outside Canada report that they were asked questions in situations of torture based on information they believe came from Canadian sources.

CSIS targets entire communities based on profiling, association and racist conceptualizations of "threat" and "national security". Although indigenous peoples,¹⁹ queer²⁰ and racialized communities and immigrants²¹ have long been in the sights of colonial Canada's security agencies, Muslims and Arabs have been the most heavily targeted groups in recent years.²² Total non-cooperation with CSIS is the best way to oppose racist "threat assessments" and uphold the freedom, rights and security of communities who are being profiled and targeted. Collective non-collaboration will decrease the pressure on more vulnerable persons and groups who might otherwise be too afraid to assert their rights to privacy and silence.

9

CSIS is the 'political police'

The stated purpose of CSIS is to gather intelligence on any person or group who, in their opinion, might constitute a threat to the security of Canada or to Canadian interests. The highly political question of how CSIS defines "threat", "security" and "Canadian interests" is rarely, if ever, subject to public debate.²³ According to SIRC, for example, CSIS has "displayed a 'regrettable' attitude that supporting Arab causes can be suspicious".²⁴

19. For example, "CSIS turning to Natives in search of Information", Joe Friesen, Globe and Mail, November 29th, 2008

20. See Gary Kinsman, *The Canadian War on Queers: National Security as Sexual Regulation* (UBC Press, 2010)

21. For example, "Young Somalis fear CSIS is targeting them", Louisa Taylor, Ottawa Citizen, January 5, 2010.

22. CSIS's own 2008-2009 Public Report to Parliament states that the agency's focus remains on "Islamic extremism".

23. See Gary Kinsman, Dieter K. Buse, Mercedes Steedman, eds. *Whose Security? Canadian State Surveillance and the Creation of Enemies* (Between the Lines, 2000)

24. "Watchdog 'misled' by CSIS", Bill Curry and Colin Freeze, Globe and Mail, 14 Sept 2005

Talking to CSIS can jeopardize collective social justice work and community organizing

CSIS surveillance is by no means limited to groups and individuals who are thought to pose a risk of violence. CSIS is explicitly mandated to provide “security assessments” to the government. Security assessments are “an appraisal of the loyalty to Canada and, so far as it relates thereto, the reliability of an individual”.²⁵ This clearly gives CSIS wide ranging authority to collect intelligence and report on anyone whose activities may challenge - or may be perceived to challenge - the status quo in Canada or elsewhere. In practice, we have seen numerous examples of CSIS targeting unions, social justice groups and activists.²⁶

In short, collaboration with CSIS means participation in the repression of dissent. Over the past ten years, CSIS’s budget has increased by 140% and its number of employees by almost 40%.²⁷ Political police have no place in our society, and we should not allow them any further legitimacy or room to grow.

By intimidating and harassing individuals,²⁸ casting fear, spreading rumours, isolating leaders, using manipulation based on psychological profiling and recruiting informers or even provocateurs, CSIS can create or exploit divisions between activists and community members and disrupt community organizing and social justice work.²⁹

Complete non-cooperation with CSIS is the best way to maintain unity and solidarity and continue our work for social justice and supporting members of our various communities in their struggles for justice and against repression.

25. CSIS Act, sections 2 and 13.

26. “Green Party leader files complaint against CSIS: Spy agency put political party head on secret threat list for APEC summit”, Jim Bronskill, *Ottawa Citizen*, September 23, 1999; “Security and Control: The case of the Canadian Union of Postal Workers”, Evert Hoogers, paper presented at the People’s Commission Hearings, April 2006, Montreal. See, for more examples, “The Criminalization of Dissent”, David Pugliese and Jim Bronskill, *Ottawa Citizen*, 18 August 2001.

27. *Actualité*, *Les Années fastes du SCRS*, 22 mai 2010

28. “Lacking a case, CSIS disrupted suspects’ lives”, *Globe and Mail*, Colin Freeze, 31 May 2006. Abousfian Abdelrazik states that intense CSIS harassment is one of the reasons he fatefully decided to travel to Sudan in 2003 (See the 25 June 2008 affidavit of Mr. Abdelrazik, filed in Federal Court file number T-727-08, available at <http://nathanosgoode.yorku.ca/databases/abdelrazik-v-minister-of-foreign-affairs-et-al-2/>) where he was arrested on the request of CSIS and later interrogated by CSIS agents while held in a Sudanese prison without charge (*Abdelrazik v. Canada (Foreign Affairs)* 2009 FC 580 at para 91).

29. There are numerous historical examples of policing and intelligence agencies engaging in such activities. The RCMP issued a fake FLQ communiqué denouncing a high profile member of the FLQ (Front de libération du Québec) in 1971. The subterfuge was designed to create divisions in the organization (Front de libération du Québec). See “Mounties can’t recall details of FLQ fakes”, *Montreal Gazette*, February 21 1979, page 3. The FBI in the U.S. famously engaged in such tactics against the Black Panther Party and the American Indian Movement. See Glick, Brian (1989). *War at Home: Covert Action Against U.S. Activists and What We Can Do About It* (South End Press, 1989) and the U.S. Senate document “Supplemental Detailed Staff Reports on Intelligence Activities and the Rights of Americans”, Book III, Final Report, of the Select Committee to Study Governmental Operation With Respect to Intelligence Activities, United States Senate, April 23 (under the authority of the order of April 14), 1976.

*The People's Commission Network is
a Montreal network monitoring and opposing the
“national security agenda”. The network is a space for
individuals and groups who face oppression in the name of
“national security” - such as indigenous people,
immigrants, racialized communities, radical groups,
social justice organizations, labour unions - and their
allies, to form alliances, share information, and
coordinate strategies to defend their full rights and
dignity.*