

'TRUE SPIES' – Transcript of Radio 4's PM Programme 21st August 2002

Eddie Mair: "Security Service officers have admitted they kept files on the star of the Royle Family, Ricky Tomlinson. The admission comes in a BBC2 documentary, 'True Spies', which you can see in the Autumn. Here's a taster of the programme."

U/I male – Northern accent: "The file on Ricky Tomlinson said that he was a left wing agitator prone to violence and a political thug."

Peter Taylor: "How do you feel about being described as a thug in a Special Branch file?"

Tomlinson: "Speechless. It's not right. It's untrue and more... more importantly it's unfair."

Taylor: "Not a subversive?"

Tomlinson: "Not a subversive and definitely not a bloody thug."

Mair: "The officers from Special Branch were given permission to speak by their superiors so they didnt break the Official Secrets Act. They also described how they infiltrated the BBC and kept tabs on other individuals like the journalist Tariq Ali. The investigative reporter Peter Taylor has been speaking to our media correspondent Torin Douglas and he described Tomlinson's reaction."

Taylor: "Ricky Tomlinson was horrified. Ricky Tomlinson in a former life was actually a member of the National Front initially;

became an active Trade Unionist; was involved in a building workers' strike in Shrewsbury. Went to jail with one of his colleagues for a couple of years for intimidation and affray. When he came out he became very active, flirted with the Workers' Revolutionary Party. Never actually joined but was tempted to do so. Had a Special Branch file on him and I've interviewed the Special Branch officer who had the file who just.....and he said that Tomlinson's file described him, Tomlinson, as a thug, as a political thug. So I put that to Tomlinson on camera for the first time and he was outraged at it. I mean genuinely outraged and genuinely surprised. The same with Tariq Ali. What had happened was that I interviewed one of the undercover Special Branch officers from the Metropolitan Police who were known as the 'Hairies' who, under deep cover, infiltrated organisations on the left and extreme right. Lived under new identities for up to five years. One of these people had infiltrated the International Marxist Group, Tariq Ali's organisation or the organisation to which Tariq Ali was a member and was quotes 'baby sitting' some of their premises and took a copy of the keys to the offices. And I put that to Tariq Ali on camera. And Tariq was genuinely shocked and it's quite a lot to shock Tariq Ali and you can see in his face. There's a long pause and his face is searching. You can see him thinking: "who could it have been?" He doesn't say a word but you know what's going through his head. And then he says 'I wonder who it could have been. I was being betrayed.'

Mair: Peter Taylor talking to Torin Douglas. That programme again is called 'True Spies.'