

# The Sunday Tribune

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INSIDE

**BECKHAM HAS BEEN FOUND OUT IN EUROPE**

Liam Brady Sport Page 6

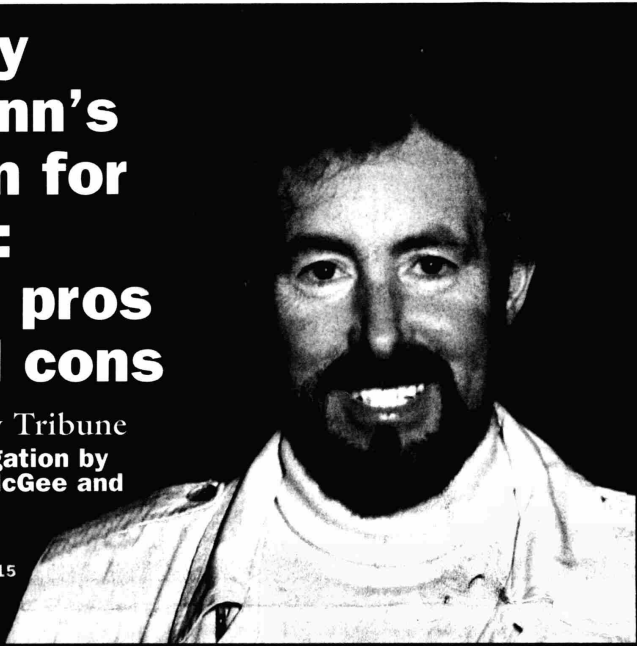
**Audrey Hepburn back in Tiffany's**

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## Tony Quinn's plan for life: The pros and cons

Sunday Tribune investigation by Harry McGee and Richard Oakley

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## Ireland is 'defenceless' against foot and mouth epidemic

THE government was warned several months ago that the country was virtually defenceless against the spread of contagious animal diseases such as foot and mouth from abroad. *The Sunday Tribune* has learned.

Two independent reports outlined that lax inspection procedures, poor traceability, and fraud, could allow contaminated meat and animals to be brought into the country unnoticed by the authorities.

One of the reports also maintained that the introduction of such diseases could wipe out the Irish food industry. The report, which was submitted to the Department of Agriculture last September, stated that there were serious control deficiencies at Irish and EU level that made it impossible to trace where many animal products were coming from.

The document, which was commissioned by the IPA and IDSC, outlined that new animal diseases had found their way into Ireland since national quarantine controls were lifted in Ireland in 1998 because of the European free market.

It also identified the increase in trade between Ireland and other countries outside the EU as posing a serious risk, while poor compliance with regulations and smuggling were also seriously contributing to the risk.

One of the authors of the report, Dr John Kerry, an

Liam Reid

expert in food safety and animal health based at University College Cork, told *The Sunday Tribune* that the lax controls were a "time bomb waiting to happen".

"Unless there is complete food traceability from farm to fork, there is a huge risk that Ireland will lose its disease-free status," he said.

Another report, carried out by the EU watchdog, the Food and Veterinary Office, outlined serious deficiencies in Ireland's inspection system for animals and food arriving from outside the EU, which make it easier for disease to enter the country unnoticed.

The report, which was drawn up last May, followed an inspection by the Food and Veterinary Office of inspection facilities at various Irish ports and airports.

Inspectors found major deficiencies in the standards of hygiene, procedures, and recording of information. It has recommended closure of these posts unless they are upgraded and staffed with trained personnel.

Thousands of tonnes of meat from abroad is now imported from abroad, including countries which have foot and mouth.

*The Sunday Tribune* has also learned that much of the meat has only commercial certification, which means that it cannot be guaranteed as "dis-

ease free". One case of foot and mouth disease would mean Ireland would lose its disease-free status, and this would decimate the £26m food export industry.

Meanwhile, the Department of Agriculture has contingency plans to seal off the border completely and block the movement of people if foot and mouth disease spreads to Northern Ireland. There have been six confirmed cases of the disease in England and Scotland, and over 300 farms and establishments are also being investigated to see if the disease has spread.

A spokesman for the department said that there were various contingency plans and that "nothing is being ruled out" in the attempts to prevent the disease from spreading to Ireland. "We'll do whatever we have to do," he said.

The department has spearheaded a huge reaction to the foot and mouth threat since it was found in England last week.

Serious restrictions have been placed on food and animal imports from the north and hundreds of gardai are manning checkpoints along to border to enforce the temporary regulations.

Numerous agricultural meetings around the country have been voluntarily cancelled, while a ban on markets in border counties and hunting is also in place.

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## State body warns health guru over food products

Harry McGee and Richard Oakley

THE government's state regulatory body on drugs has warned lifestyle guru Tony Quinn about the over-the-counter selling of two of his food supplement products and is considering similar action in relation to a third.

The Irish Medicines Board (IMB) has told Quinn to make changes to two products in the past year which were making medicinal claims, or being sold as medicines, without its authorisation.

The IMB is examining another Quinn-labelled nutritional product, a life-extension mix, which is currently on sale in Tony Quinn health stores, on similar grounds. Legally, a medicinal product cannot be marketed without authorisation. If it is categorised as medicinal or makes medicinal claims, the manufacturer must apply for a product authorisation from the IMB and the board undertakes a stringent assessment to ensure it lives up to its claims.

A spokesman for Tony Quinn's organisation, Martin Forde, said that it has never sought authorisation because it has no wish to sell any products as medicines, but only as food supplements, which do not require a licence.

In the case of the first product, a liver supplement, the IMB warned that the Tony Quinn group was making medicinal claims in its literature for the product. It asked the group to either change the product's contents or stop making medicinal claims for it.

Continued on Page 2

## Ahern to be forced to explain O'Keefe affair

Stephen Collins and Martin Wall

Taoiseach about an agreement under which O'Keefe claims he would have been transferred to another department.

It is understood that O'Keefe's lawyers want to ask the Taoiseach to explain how the controversy surrounding the former food minister developed from a situation in December when he believed that it could be dealt with by means of a re-shuffle, to a position last week-end when he considered it to be a sacking offence.

They also want to question the Taoiseach about the nature of the contacts, if any, between his department and the POC about the O'Keefe affair in advance of the decision by the POC to launch a formal investigation into the matter.

The former Minister for Food decided to resign the day after that decision was announced. O'Keefe will be represented at the POC hearings by former attorney general John Rodgers and solicitor Donal Spring, brother of the former Labour Party leader Dick Spring.

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## Trimble calls for probe into IRA/garda 'collusion'

AS the North's pro-agreement politicians make preparations for next week's Public Offices Commission to explain his role in the Ned O'Keefe affair which has already caused him acute embarrassment.

Lawyers representing the former food minister will request that Ahern should give evidence at the hearings into the alleged conflict of interest that cost O'Keefe his job.

O'Keefe's lawyers have also asked the Public Offices Commission (POC) to hold its hearings in public, but to date they have not been given a decision on the matter. They are anxious to question the

Ed Moloney Northern Director

also ask the British government to set up an inquiry into Bloody Friday in July 1972, one of the worst IRA atrocities of the Troubles in which nine people were killed.

Meanwhile, momentum appears to be building up behind the SDLP idea of a round table conference of pro-agreement parties to be held probably at Hillsborough Castle towards the end of next week.

The idea, which apparently came from the SDLP minister Mark Durkan, was aired by SDLP leader John Hume last week. In the absence of any other idea to rescue the stalled negotiations, it has been supported by the participants with varying degrees of enthusiasm.

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## Family fortunes at 5pm

If you notice an extra surge in the rush hour traffic at 5pm on Thursday, it is because hundreds of civil servants are expected to flood onto the streets on the dot of five in the spirit of a special 'go-home-on-time-day'.

Not just another day in the office calendar, 1 March, or Family Friendly Workplace Day is to be celebrated with hundreds of public servants emerging blinking in the unaccustomed daylight.

The more cynical among us who thought that most civil

Catherine Cleary

servants operate a year-round 'go-home-on-time' policy will be surprised to learn that for just one day, the men and women who run the country are to be handed their coats and hats on time.

It is not known how many of the workers will turn the event into a 'go-to-the-pub-on-time-day'. But according to their political masters, leaving on time will be just the icing on the cake of a family-friendly working regime

already in place.

Answering questions from Fine Gael TD Frances Fitzgerald about how they were going to mark the day, each department listed the 'family-friendly' policies such as maternity, adoptive, parental and compassionate leave. Flexible working hours, job-sharing, study and exam leave will be added to with more flexible work-sharing arrangements, the policy makers said.

The website, www.familyfriendly.ie, is to be launched by the Taoiseach on 1 March.



Mary Harney: home early

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Win £2,500 home cinema in our competition.  
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**NILFISK**

Because cleaning sucks, the new Nilfisk King has more suction than ever.

All had the remarkable new Nilfisk King. The most powerful domestic cleaner we've ever designed in our 100 year history.

It'll suck up even the most stubborn dust, mites, germs and microscopic allergens. Delivering them to new, even higher quality HEPA filters. Our revolutionary dust-apt internal cell ensures they stay locked up in the King's rugged, knock-proof body until you change the self-sealing bag. And Nilfisk guarantee the King will keep on cleaning better for longer. With a 5 year warranty unmatched by any competitor.

So, with prices starting at just £189, don't you think that it's about time you demanded Nilfisk - or nothing?

The website, www.familyfriendly.ie, is to be launched by the Taoiseach on 1 March.