



Pasquale Tridico, president of the Italy's National Social Security Institute.

Roma - 23 mar 2023 (Prima Pagina News) The true personal and public story of one of the great Italian managers, who at the helm of INPS has demonstrated great innovative skills and great international prestige. It is no coincidence that everyone calls him "Professor".

Good morning Professor, everyone knows that the president of INPS is a Calabrian. May I ask you then what relationship you still have with Calabria, and what do you carry with you from your childhood? "When I travel around Italy and Calabria itself, I am often asked if I am of Calabrian origin. I like to say that I am not of Calabrian origin. I am Calabrese." - Do you still return to your home from time to time? "I go to Calabria often, and I retain extraordinary memories of my childhood and adolescence." - Have we missed him for a long time? "In Calabria I went through all the schools up to high school and I continue to keep very sweet memories of that land, the flavors, the affections and those friendships that are never forgotten. And then there is a present, made up of an admittedly less assiduous but constant presence, is my family, which is from Scala Coeli, a small town in the province of Cosenza, we are in the hills, 10 km from the Ionian Sea." - What real relationship do you still have with Scala Coeli? "To Scala Coeli I return to take refuge whenever I can, I do so during "forced" vacations, and of course I do so in August, rediscovering and seeing again childhood friends and lifelong affections." - In Scala Coeli they tell us that they see her every year with her whole family.... It is the future that propels us back to the land of our birth. It is true, I bring my children to Scala Coeli so that they know and create ties with the land of their father, and this adds an additional pleasure to returning to Calabria each time." - How do you see Calabria today from the height of your observatory? "Calabria is a land for which I hope for an awakening, a revival that is based on policies that can create employment and quality work, allowing a virtuous circuit of growth to be set in motion that solves the ancient problems of the South and allows the 'Calabrian character' to emerge to contribute to the progress of this region and therefore of the country." - Do you take all this for granted? "It is always trouble to lose hope, don't you think?" Great Italian Excellencies. One of the names shining brightest in the country's political firmament today is undoubtedly Pasquale Tridico, the "Calabrian" president of the National Social Security Institute from May 20, 2019, the day the President of the Republic signed his decree of appointment. From April 15, 2020, on the other hand, the date on which the Board of Directors took office and for a term of four years, the "Professor," as everyone at INPS calls him, presides over the board, of which he is also a member. Born in 1975, Pasquale Tridico is a native of Scala Coeli, Alto Jonio Cosentino, on September 21, thus the zodiac sign of "virgin." I should point out right away, I am not an expert on these things, but out of sheer curiosity I went this time to look up the "symbolic and qualitative value" that astrologers give to this zodiac sign, and I realize that sometimes zodiac signs can also tell perfectly well the character to which they are related and linked. In fact, the sign of Virgo –



in fact, experts explain to us - is devoted to conservation, being the last sign of the spring-summer cycle: "Thus, we are in the presence of people who are very expert in any field and in any task involving a certain technical skill. What's more, Virgo people have absolute confidence in mechanical means, which they know how to handle like no other sign, and at times, they operate a real hunt for error. Obsessed with aesthetic standards, they are very fond of rules, which they consider indispensable for the proper flow of things. They are therefore real witnesses to the sense of punctiliousness, of perfection, of absolute precision, of a method that no other sign," astrologers point out, "is up to the task of following, and which Virgos consider indispensable for things to go right for the whole community. True or false, this description collides perfectly well with our protagonist, who has made punctiliousness his favorite mantra, and who considers perfection of work the highest possible goal for helping his country grow. His whole life, reread today, in light of all that has come, afterwards seems almost like an appendix novel. In May of 2019, Panorama Weekly dedicated a special editorial for him, they sought him out to get a better explanation of the "citizenship income," but to the journalist Luca Telese, "The Professor" also tells his personal story, which is a story in some ways extraordinary but also very sad. "My father? He started talking after me. I am the son of an illiterate father who sang De Gregori and was a cow guard. Father - like my mother - could neither read nor write. He, moreover, did not speak; he was deaf-mute from birth, considered a retard. But in 1979 the welfare state entered my family's life for the first time. My older sister, 20 years older than me, with great sacrifices comes to Salerno for college and graduates. While studying, she discovers that my father's syndrome is treatable, and that the health insurance company could pass him - free of charge - a hearing aid. And he puts it on. This changes his life. He recovers his hearing and even speech, although, for the rest of his life, he will talk like a child. Another brother of mine, the second, goes to study in Turin. Where he discovers that there is possibility of "compulsory placement" - we did not know that! - for people like him. He convinces him to apply as a janitor in a Turin school. He submits it. Dad gets the job, in 1981, and we move to Turin." But his new social condition, as a migrant boy in Turin, will not be easy for Pasquale to overcome or endure. "In Calabria," he recalls to Luca Telese, "I was first in my class. In Ferriera instead, a hamlet of the municipality of Buttigliera Alta, in the metropolitan city of Turin, I became last. Because of the accent, perhaps, the dialectal inflections, I don't know: I became to all intents and purposes 'a terrone.' To integrate you also have to have luck... From the age of 15, for four months a year, I took working vacations in Germany. Alone, without adults, with another little cousin of mine, my age. One day in Brixen, the conductor takes our ID cards and says, 'You have to get off!', but as soon as we see a uniform going by car, peeking through the windows, we cross the railroad by crawling under the train between cars, go around the carriage, climbing back into the one he had already checked. They all saw, but fortunately no one reported us." An economist of the highest caliber, an international scholar of economic analysis, a point of reference for Keynesian economists in Europe, a great lover of history and sociology, an almost maniacal connoisseur of European labor markets, and an expert like no other on economic inequality, Pasquale Tridico has been a full professor of Economic Policy at Roma Tre University since 2019, after having been qualified as a full professor with top marks, it was 2013, and after



having been called as a full professor, as of December 5, 2018, by the Department of Economics of the same Roma Tre University. A recognized academic authority, therefore, of the entire economic system of the country, with a top-class cursus studiorum behind him. - Professor, can you describe your typical day as president of the INPS? INPS is an engine that is always on: we serve 42 million users among different categories (companies, workers, unemployed, disabled, minors, pensioners) and during the pandemic almost another 16 million were added in a very short time, basically serving the whole country with a huge effort from the institution. This makes my day busy from morning to evening in every minute of it, often 7 days a week." - An engine always running, the definition is suggestive.... "INPS is an engine that is always running because precisely it is a continuous running of the existing and innovations, looking for improvements, dealing with problems that arise and solutions that are requested, even emergency ones; there are accelerations on measures that the government wants to implement and we therefore have to, as INPS, find procedural, administrative, IT and control solutions, all for applications for benefits that affect millions or tens of millions of users each time." - How to say. A life on the road? "Certainly! It is a continuous living between problems that emerge, and solutions to be proposed and implemented. The institute's interlocutors are then countless: technical, union, professional, political, administrative. Therefore, my day is punctuated by numerous meetings both online and in-person, institutional and technical meetings, and readings of important and sensitive documents that impact the lives of millions of Italians. Obviously, this requires continuous attention but also sensitivity to people's problems." - How do you usually deal with this endless volume of human cases? "My approach has always been to be attentive to individual issues, empathetic to also try to understand who is behind a demand, behind a request for performance, and then be able to build it for concrete needs, process it quickly and with the right sensitivity." Intelligent, stubborn, determined, headstrong, visionary and innovative, at times philosopher and poet at the same time, at other times cold and faithful state manager as few still know how to be, Pasquale Tridico is all this and much more. In 2009 he became a researcher in Political Economy, was then confirmed in 2012, and became Associate Professor of Economic Policy in 2015, but at Roma Tre University "The Professor" had already been teaching full Labor Economics since 2009 and Economic Policy since 2014. But not only Roma Tre, between 2003 and 2010 he taught European Union Economics at La Sapienza also in Rome, an academic experience that soon turned him into one of the leading experts in EU labor law. His analyses end up punctually in major economic journals such as the Cambridge Journal of Economics, the Journal of Evolutionary Economics, the Review of International Political Economy, the Journal of Post-Keynesian Economics, the International Labor Review, and the International Review of Applied Economics. The man in short has a truly enviable résumé, but one that many probably do not know about as well as they should, and from which one grasps the full length of the determination and absolute mastery with which "The Professor" speaks today about economics and financial flows, something that over the years has made him a figure of great international appeal. - President Tridico, scrolling through your extensive resume, the studies you have done, the awards you have had, the university teaching on economics, social security, welfare, it comes to be observed: it was "natural" that you had been to call the Social Security Institute, an



immense ship on which there is almost half of Italians... "My scholarly path is certainly very consistent with the labor issues of social security and welfare. I am a professor of labor economics, now on leave, at the University of RomaTre and my studies have always been in the groove of that subject. In my research and in my books I have also tried to find economic policy solutions to improve the conditions and quality of work, to increase employment, to include minimum income possibilities within the labor market, to combat precarity. These are the same issues that I then actually worked on between 2018 and 2019 in the brief experience as an advisor in the Ministry of Labor, a period when we worked on policies like the citizenship income, the dignity decree, the minimum wage, the riders decree, that is, to give economic policy content, improving the quality of the labor market and employability. After this experience, the during the Conte I government, I was appointed president of INPS because of my experience and my previous published studies in Italy and abroad." - An important budget don't you think? "I have been at the helm of an extraordinary institute for the economic and social life of the country for almost four years, a large and widespread public institute that is capable of changing lives from a social point of view, supporting incomes, reducing inequality, combating poverty and providing income in the later stage of life with the pension system, distributing resources fairly and creating a flow between the present and the future of people, of the whole country. In short, all issues on which, in my research and study, I had worked a lot." During his Ph.D. in Political Economy, young Pasquale Tridico won a European Union "Marie Curie" research fellowship at the University of Sussex and Warsaw University, then completed his Ph.D. at Roma Tre University. But during his three years as a postdoctoral fellow, Pasquale Tridico conducts research at several European universities, Trinity College of Dublin, Newcastle University, Lancaster University and Warsaw School of Economics, enough to grow and accredit him abroad as the number one researcher in the field. From 2013 to 2016, he also holds the EU Jean Monnet Chair in Economic Growth and Welfare Systems, a position that was renewed for 2016-2019. And since September 2018, he has obtained funding from the EU to open a Jean Monnet Center for Research Excellence called Labor Welfare and Social Rights, of which he is director. Sorry if that's not enough. Coordinator of the master's degree program "Labor Market, Industrial Relations and Welfare Systems," he was also director of the master's program Human Development and Food Security, and winner of the prestigious Fulbright grant in 2010-11, having also done research in the United States at New York University and the University of California in Los Angeles (UCLA). And as if all this were not enough, over the past decade he finds time and opportunity for periods of study and teaching at numerous other European universities, thereby building a vast network of supranational scientific collaborations. - Professor, you are a Southerner and an economic scholar with an inevitable sociological side. From your point of view and from the vantage point of INPS, what main differences and needs do you see between the North and the South of the country? "The issue of the differences between the North and the South of the country is a big issue, which has an impact and especially an economic rather than anthropological or sociological origin. The Southern issue, in my opinion, is the big problem of the country: in the South we have the lowest employment rates of young people and women, but also the lowest total employment rates, the lowest level of services compared to the North, infrastructure that is deficient, child



care services that are further behind than in the North, as well as hospital infrastructure." - Coming from you, this all has a certain effect, don't you think? "You see, there are a number of issues that, if resolved, in addition to increasing service levels would also bring an increase in employment and development levels in the South. Of course, in the South we also suffer from a much lower level of investment and attraction than in the North, caused not only by the gaps I mentioned in infrastructure but also by the more widespread and entrenched organized crime." - How do you get out of it? "The big priority of every government and the whole country should be this. If we can solve the Southern issue and its lower employment and development rates than the North, we would have another country, which statistically would have much better growth figures than we have now." - Is this problem only all political? "Such a challenge can only be met with a strong publicprivate partnership, which has on the public side the foundation of infrastructure creation and on the private side the commitment and courage to invest in areas that are today more distant than the epicenters of European world capitalism, which in any case could find in the South much higher benefits and returns, with very attractive prospects and growth rates affecting all Mediterranean regions." I haven't told you yet that since 2012 "The Professor" has also been the Secretary General of the Academic Association EAEPE (European Association for Evolutionary Political Economy), one of the most prestigious in Europe, and he is among the organizers, every year, of one of the most important annual economics conferences in Europe, the EAEPE Conference. But not to be missed at all, he also coordinates at Roma Tre an annual School dedicated to doctoral students from all over Europe. And today "The Professor" boasts an exclusive baggage of more than 100 publications, in Italian and English, including scholarly articles, books, editorships, essays and chapters of all kinds, and his latest monograph is entitled *Inequality in Financial Capitalism* published by Routledge in 2017. Reading the history of the INPS, which came into being as a workers' welfare and social security fund two years before the end of the 1800s-the year of Bava Beccaris' cannonade against people protesting demanding bread-and then over the course of the 1900s gradually absorbed other welfare institutions, one gets the impression of an empire that has been annexing various provinces from time to time: the Inpdai, the Ipost, the Enpas, the Enpals, the Inpdap, and most recently, just a few months ago, the Journalists' Welfare Institute. Will this trend continue? Are there any institutions yet to be merged? "The INPS has a very long history: this year we are celebrating exactly the 125th anniversary of the Institute, which was founded in 1898 as a pension fund for workers, especially for disability. After that, the history of the Institute and its evolution up to the present day not only led it to absorb various occupational pension institutions such as Inpdap, Ipost, Enpals and others such as, most recently, the journalists welfare fund, Inpgi. But it has also evolved "across the board" on the assistance front. Suffice it to say that in 2021, more than 1/3 of the Institute's budget was absorbed by welfare benefits, amounting to more than 150 billion euros, while 2/3 remain anchored precisely in the "core business," which is welfare. In any case, this continuous evolution, with several "absorptions" of entities and new functions, has resulted in the institute reorganizing and making management more efficient, achieving great economies of scale with cost reductions and service improvements through technological innovation. Precisely during the past four years, new and strong investments in innovation have been sustained, even getting a



number of projects under the NRP missions off the ground. Since 2019, we have relaunched articulated strategic innovation programs and, with capabilities that we also developed during the difficult pandemic phase, the institute's presence in the country as a national welfare agency has been consolidated. So, not just welfare but assistance in all the different stages of people's lives and articulations of the labor market, thanks also to the introduction of universal tools that we have today: from supports to combat poverty such as the minimum income (citizenship income or pension, social pension) to the single allowance, from family support benefits to disability, which are alongside the "historical" benefits of pensions, unemployment, and the redundancy fund." - A question of curiosity between the serious and the facetious: now that you talk with the journalists, in the sense of the social security agency, what considerations do you get to make? "The structural problems of the Inpgi fund had been known for a long time, we knew even on a theoretical level that single-category pension funds have a difficult sustainability. Our compulsory general insurance mutual system, which is that of INPS, is based exactly on the fact that there are so many jobs, so many different professions, and there is mutuality among all categories of workers. Therefore, even the evolution of the same occupational categories, or the disappearance of some professions or the emergence of new ones, comes to be compensated within a large solidarity fund as wide as possible. Our system has a solidarity structure and is, in this sense, at the same time sustainable precisely because it precisely rests on a larger pool of contributions, managing to make "transfers" between different professional categories and to ensure that intergenerational balance necessary within an everchanging economy. This balance was in danger of not being realized within the Inpgi, which was suffering from a deficit mainly related on the fact that fewer professionals than in the past enter the world of journalism and less paid, whose contributions support the payment of the pensions of past journalists, which had higher amounts than those of today's retirees. Such an imbalance obviously could not guarantee the sustainability of the professional pension fund." - What is the state of health of the INPS today? Every now and then some voices of alarm are raised about the sustainability of the accounts. "One must start from a fundamental point: the sustainability of a social security institution rests on labor and the labor market. The larger the number of workers, the firmer its sustainability. So today, when we talk about sustainability, we have to talk about labor. We have to do everything to bring out the black and increase employment, especially in the South, especially of young people and women, increase employment in general anyway. This is the real challenge, even more so in our pay-as-you-go model, so the more we can increase employment rates, the more sustainable today's and tomorrow's pensions become. Today, our ratio is 1.4 workers to retirees (1 retiree for every 1.4 workers); in the future, if the demographic trend continues, the ratio will drop in 2050 to 1 to 1. Clearly, this is not a good thing, and we must do everything to reverse this demographic trend and make this ratio increase, or at least not make it decrease." - As president of INPS and as an economist and welfare scholar, do you think there is more or less welfare in Italy than there was years ago? "Italian welfare has certainly expanded, especially in recent years and after the 2008-2013 financial crisis. Family benefits have increased, we have introduced for the first time, instruments to support and combat poverty, first with Rei and then with the citizenship income. The latter was a great income support and anti-poverty social policy that



completed Italian welfare from the point of view of universalism. The pandemic also proved and demonstrated the need for public intervention through welfare, with protection as universal and cross-cutting as possible, going beyond the traditional "categories" of workers supported by the Institute. From 2020 onward, through some reforms, other INPS benefits have been introduced, for example, a social shock absorber for those in the separate management of VAT, called Iscro, or the unemployment support tool for entertainment workers (Alas), and then the single allowance, which, first in a temporary form in 2021 then in a definitive form in 2022, is a support that covers all children of citizens, not only those of parents with employment but now also of the selfemployed, unemployed, and incapacitated, that is, those who were not covered before. Basically, compared to the household allowances, it has increased the pool of beneficiaries by about 5 million people. Today, almost 10 million children receive the check, so it is a truly universal benefit that seeks to support the birth rate. In that sense, our welfare has expanded." - What are the indispensable characteristics of an efficient welfare state? "I answer telegraphically: give benefits to those who are entitled to them, do it with simplified procedures and then with a very tight time frame." - An inevitable question: can you tell us your thoughts on citizenship income? "The citizenship income is a measure that is compliant and consistent with the demands of the European Union. It is from September 2022 that the European Commission recommended that member states introduce a minimum income to combat poverty, so the citizenship income is consistent with this approach. It is also incontrovertible how it has been an extraordinary income support and anti-poverty tool, especially during a very serious period such as the pandemic. Covid had a negative impact on incomes, on poverty, on increasing inequality, and the citizenship income in this sense was a formidable support tool that not only prevented one million people from sinking into abject destitution, as multiple organizations and institutes now confirm, but also to have supported (along with emergency income) up to 5.2 million people during the peak of the pandemic." - A question about controls is inevitable in a country of the clever and the art of getting by. How are controls on benefit abuse and fraud or contribution evasion going? With current technologies, which make controls more penetrating, have the results improved? "Let's start with a consideration, which takes its cue from the work of a great American economist named Robert Putnam, who did a study on the impact that "social capital," understood as civic sense, has on the performance of economies and on the efficiency then of bureaucracy and controls. Putnam says that the situation in Italy is very different between some regions that have a very low civic sense, a very low social capital, and others that have a higher one, with a consequent impact both on economic performance and investment, and on the trust that administrations have towards citizens and, on the trust that citizens have towards the state. Ideally, if we had complete trust, administrations would not need to do audits. An example I often give to my students is a comparison of the entrance to the Vienna and Rome subways: in the former, there are not even gates or turnstiles to go through by stamping a ticket; in the Rome subway, the bureaucratic filters are stronger. In Vienna, the simplification of the relationship with the institution is higher than in Rome." - On what does this depend? "But this depends on us, it depends on our civic sense, on trust. If everyone paid their fare, there would be no need for controls. Having said that, the Institute that I chair, in 2019 created for the first time an



Anti-Fraud Directorate, precisely to intercept possible irregular behavior both on the part of users, on benefits, and on the part of companies, on contributions, with positive effects right away not only on ex post controls but also by blocking ex-ante benefits precisely because of these second-level controls. On the contribution collection front, we are also able to solicit companies in a "soft" way through some modern techniques called nudging, or "gentle nudging" (according to the economic theory of Nobel Prize winner Thales) that is, stimulating correct behavior, which we now also use in our systems to improve contribution regularity performance." - Citizen Relations. The INPS has a very sophisticated portal, but the first impression of those who approach it is that of a dense forest. Do you plan to improve it? "Already today through our web portal, but also through the network of our offices and patronages, the citizen today can "reach out" to almost 500 benefits managed by INPS: from the smallest, such as the study vacations for children and youth that we finance, to the most important and massive ones, such as pensions, unemployment, citizenship income the single check, a series of emergency bonuses. All these things the citizen can ask for and get through a virtual electronic counter which is our website and which has a huge reach." - I know you are already working on a new portal ... "In a few days, a new portal, which is also part of the PNRR projects, will be released in a much more simplified, dynamic, user-friendly version that also suggests to the user the benefits to which he or she is entitled through a screening of information on the profile of the person accessing. Information that is already in the databases of the institute or other related administrations and that we can process without having to ask for it again or have the user resubmit it." - Pure innovation, I think? "This is the new INPS, an INPS that leverages the advantages of technological innovation and makes proactivity and simplification the tracks of its relationship with citizens. Obviously, without eliminating the traditional channels of contact with the public through territorial offices, counters, call centers, patronati (Unions) and cafes, with their valuable advisory and relationship activities." - Beyond the site, can we talk about a real innovation strategy? With what effects on user communications? "In 2022, the INPS Board of Directors approved the "Guidelines on proactivity as an innovative way of offering services of the Institute." During 2023, 20 million Italians will receive an email or communication from INPS that puts those guidelines into practice. We have changed the paradigm: the approach is no longer to wait for citizen demand but to have a proactive attitude. Often the rights of families, workers and pensioners remain unexpressed, the benefits to which they are entitled are not requested: today they can only be obtained after applying. This will no longer be the case." - How do you mean, President? "Increasingly, it will be INPS that will tell citizens which benefits they can access: all they have to do is to agree to receive all the information in the new MyInps platform, and from there personalized notifications will start from time to time. For example: upon the birth of a child, parents will receive information about the bonuses to which they will be entitled, from the baby bonus to the daycare bonus. The single check in 2023 is paid automatically without a new application, to those who are eligible and had received it last year. You are notified directly of the reversibility, so you only have to accept the application. In 2022, the digital pensioner advisor started: thanks to this new service, applications for pension supplements increased by 136%. And on and on it goes." - Am I wrong, or do I detect in this a sense of pride and belonging? "The truth is that a major digital



transformation is taking place in the public administration, and INPS is at the forefront of this process. There is a lot of work that has been going on with various administrations putting information together. And we as INPS are also data collectors. Just think of the National Registry: now 96 percent of municipalities have transferred their registry to the single database. A lot of progress has been made in the last 4 years, also thanks to interoperability. Of course, one must always deal with privacy protections, and data must not only be collected but also updated-that is the big challenge. But only with interoperability between databases in PA is proactivity and simplification for the user possible. We need to create what elsewhere they call e-government, a PA with integrated and interoperable data. One that asks the citizen for the data only once, and can give answers in real time. This is the real revolution in public administration, and in INPS we are interpreting it, already managing to achieve important results." - INPS has a library of about 50,000 volumes. Is it open to the public? To students who want to do research, what do you feel like telling them? "INPS has a large library in the headquarters of the Directorate General in Via Ciro il Grande in Rome, which is open to the public. These days we are moving our training and research hub to a beautiful location in the Garbatella district of Rome, which we have recently recovered and made functional. Here will operate the new reality of the Welfare Academy, which was created thanks to a regulation introduced in 2022. In general, we are investing more and more in training, and the more we innovate, the more we need training. Also, most importantly, we have opened our doors to many young people who want to learn and study our institutional subjects." In a nutshell, this is the fable of the National President of the INPS, Professor Pasquale Tridico, to whom everything can be said today except that he has not studied enough, that he does not have the numbers to do much more when he grows up, or worse, that he does not know the economic dynamics of the country. Indeed, in this, Professor Pasquale Tridico remains, in absolute terms, the truly great moral guarantee for millions of Italians. A fundamental piece of our country's history.

di Pino Nano Giovedì 23 Marzo 2023