

## **An anti-inflation 'tricolour trolley' with many unknowns**

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In Italy, the launch of the 'anti-inflation quarterly' campaign, which aims to control (even set) the price of a series of consumer products (mostly food) sold through the major retail chains, for the current quarter, has just taken place. The products included in the campaign are identified by the 'tricolour trolley' logo, which we should find on display on shop shelves from 1 October to 31 December. Theoretically, because as of today there are still very few points of sale organised and, for the most part, they will start with the promotion from next week.

Announced with resounding clamour, the campaign starts with many unknowns: which products, which packages, which points of sale? The fight against inflation, conducted so far in a somewhat contrived manner and without much conviction by all participants, conjures up ironic images, but it is a pity that there is little to laugh about and that the aspects related to nutrition are the most delicate and with the most prolonged effects.

Nutrition, a primary factor in preventing diseases of the digestive system, cardiovascular and, in general, nutritional imbalances, is often unbalanced in the lower middle classes due to economic difficulties. For the low-income population, the cost of food expenditure accounts for well over 20% of income, which is the average incidence in Italy and which, in turn, represents the highest level of incidence in the European Union.

The food sector is the most sensitive to price rises because of the impact it has: people buy cheap food at the expense of quality and compensate for their frustration with satiating food rich in sugar and fat. The result is an increase in the incidence of diseases from an early age. There would be ways to obtain good quality products at low prices, but one would have to transform supply chains into short consumption cycles and reduce the consumption of fertilisers and manure among farmers, which are distributed with the use of oil-fuelled mechanical means. But here too the necessary transformation is not being tackled, aiming at a price control that disregards the parallel control and development of quality. Hence, campaigns and bonuses are launched for the poorer classes, to be used indiscriminately.

To separate the price control campaign with a parallel development of quality control (both in the product and in the diet) seems to us a serious mistake and a missed opportunity, because improving the quality the diet and lifestyle of the lower middle classes, is an investment in security necessary for an effective health plan.

This objective is in fact misguided: the greatest price control should be on vegetables and fruit, which are very deficient in the diet (OEC/HES findings) and the consumption of sweets should be discouraged; but in the anti-inflation campaign it is not clear what nutritional control will be exercised.

Certain institutional advertisements do not help either. For example, the hammering public campaign on 'pasta, the happiness supplement' by the volleyball champions is very puzzling. Because, if it is necessary for athletes to have a quantity of carbohydrates (provided by pasta) that are transformed into energy for performance more slowly and efficiently than sugar, this prevalence in different social strata, occupations and ages is dangerous.

True, today's consumption of meat has doubled, that of cheese, milk and sweets has increased dramatically, while that of potatoes, cereals and pulses has halved; but it is not by launching generic campaigns against the trend that a balanced diet will be restored.

One of the damages ascertained by the wheat campaign of fascist memory was precisely the increased presence of pasta in the Italian diet, an obvious cheap substitute for other more noble and more expensive components. This made the population more exposed to the aggressions of pathogens that did not fail to arrive in the next phase.

Rather than a 'happiness supplement', a sharp increase in pasta consumption seems to me to be a 'happiness surrogate', because it satiates cheaply and thus makes one happier. But it is the short-lived and ephemeral joy of the poor, as manifested by the dancing family of Felice Sciosciammocca (played by Totò) in the famous spaghetti scene in the film 'Misericordia e nobiltà'.

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