

Your View

Saturday, August 29, 2015

A WHALE OF A WALRUS

Have Herald readers noticed that two new and rival alternate Argentine National Anthems have recently emerged?

The first is a short and punchy operatic aria called “Blue Sin Techo” which choirs of swarthy basso profundos and plumpish sopranos are lustily and incessantly singing in Florida Street all day, every day.

It’s a simple song. “Cambio, Cambio, Cambio” are its principal lyrics, followed with a resounding chorus of “Dólares, Euros, Reales.” The song’s constant repetition is a beguiling cadence that echoes down Florida from the Plaza San Martin all the way to Avenida Corrientes.

Television and newspapers are obsessed with “Blue Sin Techo” and they endlessly chart its popularity and discuss the merits of turning your pesos into dollars before the apparently impending financial Armageddon or Heaven forbid, another Corralito.

I needed 150,000 australs to buy a cup of coffee when I first came to Argentina so I can understand why “Cambio, Cambio, Cambio” is such a beguiling siren call and why people will pay a 60 percent premium on the official exchange rate, even if they have to go into Cuevas and run the gauntlet of AFIP inspectors conducting their ultimately futile operativos to do it.

On the other hand, the government is doing its level best to stamp out “Blue Sin Techo” in favour of their own, far wordier, alternate anthem which is more of a tuneless funeral dirge called, with apologies to Lewis Carroll: “The Walrus and the Presidenta.”

The Walrus and the Presidenta
Were walking hand in hand;
They wept like anything to see
Huge quantities of Dólares Blue throughout the land:
“If these could only be swept away,”
the Presidenta said, “Our propaganda wouldn’t be so bland!”

“If Axel Kicillof and Alejandro Vanoli keep
Sweeping hard until October,
Do you suppose,” the Walrus said,
“They could sweep those Dólares into Banco Central by then?”
“I have no idea,” said the Presidenta, going very red,
And she shed a bitter tear as she truly knew not when.

“O Dólares, come and walk with us!”
The Walrus did beseech.
“A pleasant amble, a pleasant talk,
Around the Plaza de Mayo and later:
We’ll stroll over to Banco Central, it’s only a short walk,
And we’ll give a hand to each that falter.”

An older care-worn Dólar looked at him,
But never a word he said:
Benjamin Franklin winked his eye,
And shook his heavy head —
Meaning to say he did not choose
To leave his cosy Cueva, a prospect filled with dread.

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But four young Dólares Para Ahorrar hurried up,
All eager for a treat:
Their edges were smooth, not a wrinkle to be seen,
Their shoes were clean and neat —
And this was odd, because, you know,
Dólares don't have any feet.

Four other crisp Dólares followed them,
And yet another four;
And thick and fast they came at last,
And more and more and more —
All hopping out of their Cuevas,
Laughing and skipping with a joyful roar.

The Walrus and the Presidenta
Walked on a kilometre or so,
And rested on the steps of Banco Central
Conveniently low:
And all the Dólares they'd enticed to come stood
And waited in a row.

"The time has not yet come," the Walrus said,
"To talk of the wisdom of many things:
Of Precios Cuidados- and Fondos Buitres- and Papel Prensa-
Of Fútbol Para Todos- and reigning Queens and dead Kings.
But rather now, why the market for Dólares is boiling hot,
And whether pigs have wings."

"But wait a bit," the Dólares cried,
"Before we have our chat;
For some of us are out of breath,
We've all grown quite fat!"
"No hurry, we've got until October!" said the Presidenta.
They thanked her very much for that.

"Dólar-sniffing dogs," the Walrus said,
"Is what we chiefly need:
AFIP Inspectors and export taxes besides
Are very good indeed.
Now if you're ready, Dólares dear,
We can begin to feed."

"But not on us!" the Dólares cried,
Turning profoundly, deeply blue.
"After such kindness, that would be
A dismal thing to do!"
"We've been telling you for 12 years the outlook is fine," the Walrus said.
"Surely you admire the view?"

"It was so kind of you to come!
And you are all so very nice!"
The Presidenta said and then;
"The INDEC inflation rate should not be questioned at any price:
And by the way, mi querido Morsa, your moustache is far too thick,
Are you sure it's not full of lice?"

"It seems a shame," the Walrus said,
"To play them such a trick,
After we've brought them out so far,
And made them trot so quick!"
The Presidenta said nothing except
"The margin spread makes me sick!"

"I weep for you my darling little Dólares," the Walrus said:
"I deeply sympathize."
With sobs and tears he sorted the Dólares
Into piles according to their size,
Holding his pocket-handkerchief
Before his streaming eyes.

“O Dólares,” said the Presidenta,
“You’ve had a pleasant run!
Shall we be trotting home again?”
But answer came there none.
And this was scarcely odd, because
They’d clamped down on every one.”

Somehow I think “Blue Sin Techo” will prevail in the end as its lyrics are much simpler and far more easily understood, not to mention far more in accordance with public opinion.

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NOTE:

The writer Thomas Manning is a New Zealand businessman active in Argentina for over 25 years, a founding member, former Vice President and long-standing director of the Latin America New Zealand Business Council and a regular Buenos Aires Herald correspondent on South Pacific trade and aviation matters.

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