

Saturday, October 24, 2015

Your view

KIWI IS ALSO A K-WORD

I am very well served by the Buenos Aires Herald for both international and domestic news but I have to admit I cannot resist reading New Zealand newspapers on-line every day to keep my finger on the pulse in those remote isles of my birth.

On October 21 I read a New Zealand Herald article called "Trudeau and the World's Hottest Leaders" which sadly plumbed new lows in tabloid sensationalism (and the NZ Herald is not alone in this as the article has been published throughout the Western world).

For those readers unfamiliar with trailer-trash argot; "Hot" used in reference to a person means they rate highly in popular norms of sexual desirability.

The list of 10 heads of state ranked John F. Kennedy as the hottest, new Canadian prime minister Justin Trudeau 2nd, Argentine President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner 3rd and Barack Obama 4th and so on.

I'll not argue with the rankings on the list other than say beauty is in the eye of the beholder but the references to CFK, her subjectively assessed attractiveness aside, contained two glaring errors which prompted me to think in much broader terms about how CFK has overcome personal tragedy and again how she has played a huge part in overcoming Argentina's recent travails.

The NZ Herald article did correctly say CFK has an impeccable sense of style and a sassy wardrobe but bafflingly said she is divorced from her predecessor as president, Néstor Kirchner, when CFK is, to her eternal chagrin and public sorrow and as reported in the media worldwide, his widow.

In the history of Argentina there has never been a more loved-up presidential couple than the Kirchners except perhaps Juan Domingo Perón and Evita and like them the Kirchners' love story ended in tragedy.

Dylan Thomas wrote, "Though lovers be lost, love shall not; And death shall have no dominion" and he was right on the money as far as CFK is concerned.

It is five years almost to the day since Néstor's death and in that time CFK has ensured his memory lives on through countless street, hospital & cultural centre names, a grandiose mausoleum, not to mention the pervasive presence of Néstor's portrait in official buildings and at political rallies.

CFK's greatest homage to Néstor has been the way she has faithfully continued his economic and political philosophies which the NZ Herald in their second glaring error defined as "leftist," which is far too simple a label as (from what I know of them) CFK's philosophical tenets span the entire political spectrum.

Kirchnerism's underlying political philosophy clearly mirrors that of Juan Domingo and Evita and enshrines their three ideals of social justice, economic independence, and political sovereignty, none of which (notwithstanding the NZ Herald's attempt to pigeonhole CFK) are the exclusive preserve of the left.

On my first visit to Argentina in 1989 the country was famous for having the biggest middle class in Latin America (around 80 percent of the population fell into this category) and poverty was practically unknown.

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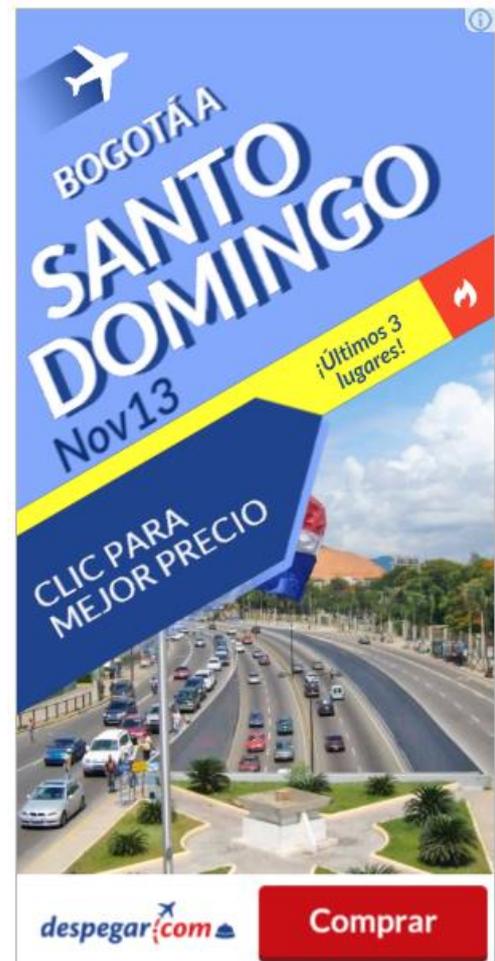
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Since then some of the changes I've witnessed in Argentina have been breathtakingly awful and while I do not presume to teach Herald readers their own history, I attribute recent difficulties to Carlos Menem's decade in power in the 1990s, which was an orgy of neo-liberal economics gone mad.

By hocking off state assets to his cronies, the binge of unsustainable overseas borrowing and a ludicrous fixed exchange rate Menem beggared Argentina and set in train a day of terrible reckoning when inevitably Argentina defaulted on its foreign debt in 2001.

Most Herald readers will remember as I do how the financial markets and government finances imploded, with tens of thousands of people reduced to living in the streets and millions to living in odious shantytowns.

By the time Néstor Kirchner assumed the presidency in 2003, the World Bank estimated 55 percent of Argentines were living below the poverty line.

Today, after four years of Néstor's and eight years of CFK's presidencies, Argentina has recovered from the dark days of 2001 and it's generally accepted, except perhaps by CFK herself, that only around 15-20 percent now live in poverty, which is still shameful but an astounding achievement by the Kirchners nonetheless.

Due to leave office on December 10, CFK is to return to her bulwark in Santa Cruz province where, one thing is for sure, she'll be missing Néstor but more importantly she herself will be missed by the millions of Argentines she and her late husband's policies lifted out of poverty.

Putting aside however "hot" or "leftist" CFK may be, as well as the still simmering controversies of her presidency, she's made, despite cruelly losing her beloved comrade-in-arms, the most significant contribution to the welfare of the poor in Argentina's history and she deserves every credit for that.

Thomas Manning
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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, aviation and political matters.

[Thomas Manning 'Your View' Article 24 October 2015 @ Buenos Aires Herald On-line](#)