

Celebrity economists

The sages of the pampas**Like the tango, the fame of Argentine economists is tinged with sadness**

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A tabloid celebrity with an actress

ECONOMICS is not a profession for the publicity-hungry—except in Argentina. Consider Tomás Bulat, who holds three degrees in the subject, hosts a weekly television show about it and has written two best-selling books on it. He boasts over 179,000 followers on Twitter. In comparison, Ricardo Darín, arguably Argentina’s most famous actor, has only 41,000; Andrés Calamaro, a well-known rock star, has 34,000. At a recent lunch in the seaside city of Mar del Plata, your correspondent was intrigued to see waiters and diners fawn over Mr Bulat. A neighbouring table invited him to share their calamari and a particularly bold waitress hugged him and took his photograph to show her friends.

Other economists are equally feted. **Martín Lousteau, a former economy minister and current congressman, has 162,000 Twitter followers and is frequently hounded for autographs.** Martín Redrado, a former head of the central bank who now runs a consultancy, has 127,000 Twitter followers. **Both have dated a series of stars and appear almost as frequently in tabloids as in the financial press.** A few years ago, Mr Lousteau married Carla Peterson, one

of Argentina's top actresses (the couple is pictured).

Victoria Giarrizzo of the University of Buenos Aires attributes this wealth of celebrity economists to the volatility of Argentina's economy. "The Argentine economy is like a sickness. People have to stay constantly informed to manage their personal finances. As bearers of answers in times of chaos, economists have amassed a unique amount of power."

In July Argentina defaulted for the second time in thirteen years. Inflation of about 40% a year is gutting people's purchasing power. Yet controls established in 2011 mean they have scant access to hard currency. According to CERX, a consultancy, Argentines feel that they are at their worst off in ten years. Ms Giarrizzo muses: "Having economists appearing frequently on television and in the newspapers is not a good sign. That means things aren't going so well."

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