

THE POLITICAL CYCLE

Words by Claire Read

It doesn't take much to get Marine Le Pen riled up. Immigration, globalisation, privatisation: any one is more than enough to bring the blood of France's National Front *doyenne* to boiling point.

Despite this, it comes as a surprise to find the Tour de France on Marine's long list of pet peeves. How could a bike race so tied to the fabric and culture of her beloved nation anger Ms Le Pen? An event which showcases the diverse beauty of the French Republic, from mountains to sunflower fields to Northern *pavé*? A sporting spectacle which is basically a three week nationwide party?

Well, turns out she feels the whole affair is just not quite French enough. Last November, as Tour boss Christian Prudhomme announced the 2017 race route, Le Pen and 19 of her National Front chums issued a press release denouncing his choices. They were horrified the race would be starting in Germany and heading to Belgium and Luxembourg before hitting the hexagon.

“TOUR DE FRANCE OR TOUR OF THE EUROPEAN UNION?”

Tour de France



Photo Credit Pete Kavanagh

“Year after year, the Tour de France finds itself debased in this way,” they raged, in a message entitled “Tour de France or Tour of the European Union?”

Given the first time the Tour started outside France was in 1954 – Amsterdam, since you ask – their anger seems a little late.

The press release was marginally more timely in criticising the choice of a Chilean tippale as the Tour's official wine for 2016. An “unspeakable insult” to France's winemakers, apparently. To be fair, they may have a point on that one.

Tour de Trump



Photo Credit Donald West

Le Pen isn't the only current political leader with ties to professional cycling. In 1989, a certain US real estate mogul decided to pump some funds into an American bike race. “I think this is an event which can be tremendous in the future,” Donald Trump told US network NBC at the time.

“I think that with a little maturity, a little time, with a little effort, and with NBC's help, we'll make this the equivalent of the Tour de France,” he continued. “I can't say we're going to make it more, although in theory you can also say that we have many more people, so you in theory could make it more. But I would like to make this the equivalent of the Tour de France.”

1989 Tour de Trump: Donald Trump - NBC



Presumably you're now familiar with the American bike race which rivals the Tour de France? No, of course you're not, because it didn't happen. Trump pulled his sponsorship after two years and, while the event would continue for a few more editions in the guise of the Tour DuPont, the US still lacks a race to rival the original Tour. Now we get to sit and watch Trump make un-keepable promises on the world stage. Let's hope he gets bored and ditches that mission after two years as well.

Theresa May, on the other hand, is preparing for an important international cycle race to come to the country over which she presides.

Last October, the UCI confirmed Yorkshire would host the 2019 world road championships, following a government promise to invest £24m in the endeavour. May had previously spoken of how Yorkshire's beauty had been “shown off to the world” through the 2014 *Grand Départ* and the Tour de Yorkshire.

She is also preparing to welcome a new president in the country which lies just a short hop over the English channel away. In late April, France will go to the ballot box – with some opinion polls showing Marine Le Pen in the lead. Top tip, Theresa. If Marine does win, probably best not mention the cycling when you meet her. It gets her a wee bit riled up, you see.

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