Paul Benneworth: Talk of a Northern Powerhouse belies the way the Tories tore up our successful policies

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Paul Benneworth travels home from the Netherlands to size up the election campaign so far - and finds a sickening lack of objectivity

I arrived back in Newcastle in the midst of the General Election campaign launch. I’d followed the build-up in Holland via social media, and for all its benefits, you’re naturally connected with like-minded folk, for me typically wordy, worthy academic types.

I’ve deliberately steered clear of the cesspit of frothing maniacs in the internet’s dark underbelly who have no truck with facts and at best a loose connection with reality. But when I got back, I was immediately confronted with many wild claims in the election campaign.
This time, social media are subjecting these claims to open, direct scrutiny. Lies and half-truths are quickly being called out, and there’s no excuse for believing or repeating manifest lies.

This should be a golden age for electoral democracy, with contenders being forced to discipline themselves and make an honest case, accept their failings and propose reasonable plans.

It is to the great credit of the unashamedly pro-Conservative Times that they have chosen to nail the Coalition lie that it was Labour overspending that created the deficit.

They were decent enough to admit that the global crisis caused our deficit, even if they refused to acknowledge Gordon Brown’s widely (outside the UK) accepted role in stopping a crisis becoming a global collapse.

But no sooner had my stomach settled from the stormy ferry crossing than another sickness took hold in the pit of my stomach. Sections of what I assumed to be the respectable media had given up any pretence at objectivity and were openly campaigning for the Tories.

Private Eye reported at least two national tabloids printed their coverage of the leaders’ debate before it actually took place! And that left them in the uncomfortable position of saying something patently untrue, that Miliband was torn to pieces and had lost the election in one fell swoop.

More objective headlines drew attention to Nicola Sturgeon’s comfortable performance coupled with an apparent meltdown by Nigel Farage blowing his whistle of being overwhelmed by imaginary HIV-positive benefits tourists.

But for newspapers whose owners rely on Tory reverse Robin Hood policies, this reality was a poor second to their desperate desire for a second term of damaging cuts heaping more pain on society’s rapidly-swelling ranks of the poor.

It reflects today’s Britain’s reality: a super-elite who have grown fat on austerity with tax cuts, then a lucky minority of South Eastern home-owners who saw house prices rise as supply fell, and the rest of us all scraping by.

Here in the North East, national political debate barely acknowledges our existence. National calls for continuing austerity deny a reality that here in the region, unnecessary austerity put us on starvation rations: a little more public cash would leverage a massive amount of private growth.

When I was leaving on Wednesday, it was great to see life returning to the Tyne as an industrial river, even if a shadow of its 1960s heyday. It would take an extremely feverish mind to link our region’s fragile recovery with the Coalition’s pathological economic vandalism.

Our economy continues to benefit from the Blair-Brown years’ successful policies and investments.

The Chancellor’s two-faced talk of a Northern Powerhouse belies the way the Tories tore up our successful economic policies and replaced them with hot air and cuts.

I hope northern electors see beyond the hype, propaganda and downright lies currently peddled, and realise which is the only party likely to offer anything for the North East in the next Parliament. I certainly will do, as I proudly place my cross in the box, send the ballot paper back to Cobalt and hopefully send this unloved Coalition packing.

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