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As budget cutting gets underway in the UK, much of the opposition to deficit reduction relies on pleas for fairness. All burdens are supposed to be heavier as incomes are higher. It's one of those mathematical games beloved of social planners - take £10,000 from here, move it there and, presto, fairness! If that were actually true, the UK should be one of the fairest societies on earth after 13 years of Gordon Brown's incessant shell games of this kind. Of course, that's not how it's turned out but this concept of fairness - pushing money downwards - is now pretty much embedded as a self-evident truth in the political discourse.

But how does this 'fairness' look to the huge middle class - the backbone of the nation, the silent majority? As a rough indication about whom we're talking, let's consider households with family incomes ranging from, say, £25,000 to £100,000.

These are the folks who work hard all year, likely two-earners, juggling careers and childcare from the crack of dawn until late in the evening. They pay no end of taxes - income tax, interest-income tax, VAT, fuel duty, booze and other excises taxes, council tax, congestion charges, TV licence, road tax, aviation tax and on and on and on. And make no mistake, they do pay with little opportunity for clever accountants to help avoid tax. In many cases, they continue to pay the same tax even though they choose private education for their children or private healthcare. Is that fair?

They get snookered out of their retirement savings 13 years ago by Mr Brown's raid on dividends paid to pension funds and then again a decade later when an admirable 'pension simplification' scheme is soon afterwards made very complicated with stricter terms and conditions. Is that fair?

They see some 8 million working-age people, choosing not work, many because a life on benefits is a better deal. Over 2 million of these are a rising tide on sick leave, despite record amounts poured into the NHS and many other indicators of health showing steady improvement. Is that fair?

They see an education establishment that has completely lost the plot - rising numbers of children unversed in the three R's, ignorant of their nation's history, unfamiliar with any foreign language and unable to play competitive sports for fear of discouraging the unathletic. Is that fair?

So the next time some talking head babbles on about fairness, ask the question: fair to whom? This country's future depends entirely on the middle classes - the real working class of our time. They need every encouragement to keep the show on the road.

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