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Mr. In-Between

Michael Kazin

A little more than thirty years ago, I received one of Irving Howe's famous little postcards. "Shouldn't you be writing for us?" was all he said—and all he needed to say. I had been reading the magazine since the late 1960s, arguing with as many of the pieces as I agreed with. But I still tore through every issue as soon as it arrived in the mail. To my mind, no publication on the American left was so intelligent, so well-written, and so endlessly provocative. I still think that's true today.

But after this issue, my name will appear next to Irving's on the masthead where the editors emeriti are listed. A dozen years after Michael Walzer asked me to join him as co-editor, I am leaving that task to the wise and talented Timothy Shenk and Natasha Lewis in partnership with the similarly adept Nick Serpe, Mark Levinson, Flynn Murray, and Lyra Walsh Fuchs. Working on *Dissent* has been both a great pleasure and a ceaseless responsibility. It is time to let others have all the fun and carry most of the burden.

For much of my tenure, I have felt like the character from "Call Me Mr. In-Between," a song from the early 1960s by Burl Ives (who had been a star of Popular Front culture, although those lyrics are not political). I have sought to keep our pages open equally to two groups of Dissentniks who view the revival of the left since the Great Recession in contrasting ways—a division that breaks down mostly along generational lines. Younger writers and editors are fervent activists in the new socialist movement; they give vigorous support to the candidates and policies it nurtures. They often scorn liberals as either hapless compromisers with the right or dedicated champions of the capitalist order. Socialism remains the desire of the older set too; but they worry about the perils of making demands and backing politicians too radical to defeat the Trumpian right; some also fret about the rise of intolerance toward opinions that don't fit those of the woke left. An example of these differences occurred in the fall of 2019 during a discussion of the Democratic primaries at a meeting of our editorial board. Nearly every member of the board over forty favored Elizabeth Warren; all but one younger member backed Bernie Sanders.

I welcome this debate, although I tend to agree on particulars with those closer to my age. Every consequential left in U.S. history has been open to a plurality of strategies and tactics, ideas and coalitions. Since its founding in 1954, *Dissent* has been a magazine for writers and readers