Marvin Rogoff

In 1952, I was working as an organizer for Local 38 of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union, ILGWU, which represented custom tailors and alterations workers in New York City. The ILGWU had an extensive educational program for its members, including art classes. I always had an interest in sculpting, so in addition to organizing and carrying 12 credits at NYU, I enrolled in the union's sculpting class. It was taught by a wonderful sculptor, Arturo Sofo, who had a studio at 134 MacDougal St in Greenwich Village. Classes were once a week.

A few months after I started, the union's new assistant education director visited our class. He was about my age, tall, with a thick head of black hair and a hearty laugh. His name was Marvin Rogoff. We became friends. He was from Brooklyn, a Brooklyn College graduate, had been a welfare worker, and was a member of the Young People's Socialist League (YPSL). The YPSL connection led to an ILGWU connection, which led to the job with the union in workers education.

After a couple years, Marvin felt he had enough of workers education and wanted to do real trade union work: organizing. I admired his commitment, but having worked for almost three years as an organizer with little success, I thought he was crazy to give up his job in the education department. But off Marvin went to Harrisburg Pennsylvania, to organize unorganized garment workers. This was the first of a great many self-destructive acts which were to come, in the name of principle.

Marvin was happily married to Ethel, whom everyone called Eddie, and they had a son, Joseph, whom everyone called Joey. Marvin made a life for himself in Harrisburg, and Marvin and I maintained sporadic contact after I left the ILGWU in 1956,and went to work for the Jewish Labor Committee. Marvin was a committed trade unionist. And in 1960, he and a group of ILGWU organizers and business agents decided to form a union of ILGWU staff. It was clear to anyone who knew the union's President, David Dubinsky, that he would not allow it.