

# Leading DSA member Rebecca Garelli lies about WSWS coverage of 2018 Arizona teachers strike

David Moore  
7 June 2021

On May 24, Rebecca Garelli, a leading member of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) and educator in Arizona, accused the *World Socialist Web Site* of falsifying our coverage of the 2018 Arizona teachers strike. In a series of comments on a post in the Teachers Against Dying Facebook group, Garelli supported the recent banning of WSWS writer Evan Blake from the Badass Teachers Association (BATs) Facebook group, while claiming that the WSWS fabricated quotations from her and misrepresented her role in calling off the statewide strike involving over 50,000 educators and school staff.

In response to a growing radicalization of workers, including the formation of rank-and-file committees opposed to the Democrats and union bureaucracies, leaders of the DSA have recently initiated a campaign of physical threats and slanders against the Socialist Equality Party (SEP), to try to prevent workers from discussing WSWS articles and organizing themselves independently. Garelli sits on the Steering Committee of the DSA's Democratic Socialist Labor Commission, and her recent falsifications are connected to the DSA's broader attacks against the SEP.

Garelli is also the leading member of Arizona Educators United (AEU) and National Educators United (NEU), which were founded in 2018 as pressure groups on the unions, with the AEU playing the pivotal role of enforcing the sellout of the Arizona teachers strike by the Arizona Education Association (AEA). Three years later, Arizona educators remain woefully underpaid, were thrust into unsafe conditions during the pandemic, and now face new cuts from the state legislature, all of which have been facilitated by the AEA. Under these conditions, Garelli and the AEU seek to stifle opposition to the union bureaucracy.

Criticizing the WSWS practice of only partially identifying interviewed workers to protect them from workplace retaliation, Garelli wrote on the Teachers Against Dying thread, "I know that their articles are full of lies, I don't believe these quotes are actual quotes from actual people." After several teachers came forward in the thread identifying themselves as teachers accurately interviewed by the WSWS, a group administrator told Garelli, "I'm willing to hear your case. What are the specific falsehoods you're referring to and can you provide evidence that they are indeed falsehoods?"

Garelli posted a series of now deleted screenshots where she highlighted parts of a WSWS article from the 2018 strike, circling the text and writing "lie." In one of these screenshots, she alleged that the quotation of her and the AEU calling off the strike was a lie. In fact, on May 3, 2018, the day after the Arizona state legislature passed a

budget that met none of the demands of striking teachers, Garelli stated, "The K-12 budget was passed and signed, so that means our job is done, and we are going to return to our classes tomorrow." The video of Garelli making this comment along with other leaders of Arizona Educators United remains on the AEU Facebook page.

This was not a momentary slip of the tongue by Garelli, but a repeated political position espoused by her and other leaders of AEU, who served as the enforcers calling off the strike once the state's politicians put their foot down.

Regarding another article published last December that noted the teachers union leaders' support for the incoming Biden administration, Garelli objected to the statement, "Other signers include Arizona Educators United (AEU) Facebook group administrator Rebecca Garelli, who along with Noah Karvelis worked with the Arizona Education Association (AEA) and the Democrats to put down the rebellion of Arizona teachers in 2018."

A review of the contrasting record of Garelli and other AEU leaders to the WSWS shows exactly what drives her attempts to slander the WSWS reporting.

Following statewide strikes in West Virginia and Oklahoma in early 2018, the Arizona strike in April-May 2018 reached new heights of popular support and worker militancy. Each of these strikes erupted at a grassroots level in states where the unions did not have a stranglehold on teachers, and in turn, each was deliberately isolated and strangled by the American Federation of Teachers and National Education Association as quickly as possible.

In the 10 years since the 2008 financial crisis, during which time Democrats and Republicans alike massively cut public education funding across the US, Arizona politicians cut \$1.1 billion from education funding, creating deplorable conditions and massive teacher shortages. The legislature constantly pushed for private school vouchers and other methods of shifting money out of public education.

Arizona teachers organized outside of any union apparatus around militant demands including a 20 percent pay raise, raises for support staff, a permanent salary schedule and improvements to overall school funding. They met and coordinated through social media around the #RedforEd hashtag and on Facebook pages, including that of the AEU, whose support ballooned because they postured as being independent of the AEA.

Republican Governor Doug Ducey crafted a budget proposal with an insulting one percent raise for teachers and a mere \$100 million increase in school funding. After an AEU poll of teachers across the

state showed 78 percent support for a strike, they walked out against the wishes of the AEA. The initial march and rally of the six-day strike on April 26 involved upwards of 75,000 people, significantly more than the roughly 46,000 teachers in the state.

The leadership of AEU, somewhat bewildered by the mass response, coordinated with the unions to disorient and disarm the mass movement. Instead of preparing teachers for the intransigent opposition of the state legislature, which was carrying out the bipartisan state and federal policy of defunding public education, Garelli insisted that teachers could not take the initiative.

In a video post to the AEU Facebook page on April 29, Garelli stated, “Every day, it’s going to be reactionary [sic]. They’re going to do something—or not do something, which means we’re going to do something... There is no play book for this; there is no ‘extended plan’ in our minds.”

AEU leaders were considering calling off the strike that weekend, but a poll of site liaisons showed 93 percent supported continuing the strike. A few days later, the AEU leaders threw in the towel without even polling teachers.

On Monday, April 30, Randi Weingarten, the president of the American Federation of Teachers and gravedigger of numerous teacher strikes, flew into Phoenix to help shut things down. In response to a question from the WWSWS about teachers supporting a nationwide strike, Weingarten explicitly rejected any joint struggle, claiming that Arizona teachers were fighting for different things than teachers in New York or other parts of the country. Expressing the unions’ subordination to the Democratic Party, she stated, “We want to make sure these walk-outs become walk-ins to the voting booth in November.”

Against the AEU’s policy of passivity and the unions’ efforts to quickly shut down the strike, the WWSWS called for rank-and-file teachers to take matters into their own hands. In an article published May 1, we wrote, “It is clear that both big-business parties and the unions have an ‘extended plan,’ and that is to crush the resistance of teachers. This must be opposed. Teachers should take the conduct of the struggle out of the hands of the unions and the AEU and elect rank-and-file committees to reach out to every section of the working class and to teachers across the US to fight for a nationwide strike to defend public education. Such a movement must be completely independent of both big-business parties and insist that the social rights of the working class, including for high quality public education, take priority over the profit interests of the corporations and super-wealthy.”

Later that day, in response to the legislature proposing a budget that only gave an additional \$400 million in funding and meeting none of the other demands of strikers, AEU leaders issued a video statement on Facebook calling off the strike. The AEU Facebook page erupted with teachers criticizing the decision made behind their backs and AEU moderators responded by deleting critical comments.

The complete capitulation of the AEU leaders was expressed by Noah Karvelis, who said, “The reality is that they have decided what they are going to do. The legislature in a partisan effort has decided they are going to pass this budget. So right now what we need to do is continue to fight, we have to fight, but the fight at the legislature right now they’ve ultimately decided. We need to continue our presence there, we need to maintain voicing our concerns over this budget, but they have decided. That’s the reality of this situation right now.” When the legislature put its foot down, Karvelis, Garelli and the rest of the AEU leaders meekly rolled over.

The AEU leadership quickly transitioned from striking against the governor’s budget to claiming they were striking to ensure the budget was passed. Facing delays on the budget’s passing, on May 2 AEU leader Dylan Wegela and Garelli posted another video from the capital in which Wegela stated, “We are not going to come back [to schools] until the budget is passed.”

Repeated refrains from AEU leaders about “continuing to fight” as they shut down the strike rang hollow. They sought to divert teachers’ anger and desperation into the #InvestinEd project to get a proposition raising taxes to fund public schools on the November ballot. After teachers collected over 270,000 signatures for the measure, the state supreme court struck it from the 2018 ballot over frivolous wording complaints.

#InvestinEd got their proposal on the ballot two years later for the 2020 election where it narrowly passed. Before it has gone into effect, the state legislature is now proposing a budget that includes a massive \$1.9 billion tax cut for the rich and would effectively overturn the ballot measure. By insisting that teachers had to call off the strike because the legislature was intransigent, Garelli and the rest of the AEU leadership told the legislature they had a free hand to attack education.

Their betrayal was further cemented during the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, when Arizona reopened its schools with the support of the AEA and the capitulation of the AEU. In January, as head of the NEU Garelli was the lead organizer behind a stunt protest held by “Demand Safe Schools,” an umbrella group of pseudo-left teachers unions and organizations. Held at the peak of the winter surge of the pandemic in the US, the event sought to pressure the incoming Biden administration by issuing tweets with the slogan #BidenBeBold and imploring the Democrats to reopen schools “safely.”

The horrible conditions that compelled Arizona educators to strike in 2018 have only deepened amid the pandemic. The task now is to organize and unite educators, school workers and parents independently of both big business parties and the unions, as well as their pseudo-left allies like the AEU.

We call on educators across the state to organize an Arizona Educators Rank-and-File Committee, as part of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC). This global network of committees is democratically run by workers themselves and oriented towards mobilizing the entire working class in defense of workers’ safety and social rights, including the universal right to free, high-quality public education.



To contact the WWSWS and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wwsws.org/contact](https://wwsws.org/contact)**