

Drastic austerity measures planned for German universities

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While the NATO powers escalate the war in Ukraine, the German ruling elite is launching a frontal attack on students to finance its policy of war and rearmament. Strict austerity is being demanded of universities in Berlin, Baden-Württemberg and other German states.

In the German capital, the Senate Department for Science and Health intends to cut costs far more than previously admitted. Instead of the €100 million [\$US106 million] previously announced, €280 million are now to be cut, nearly 10 percent of the budget. The cutbacks in education are part of comprehensive spending cuts proposed by the Berlin Senate, the city-state's ruling body.

Berlin's Finance Senator Stefan Evers, from the right-wing Christian Democratic Union (CDU), explained that €100 million of the €280 million are to be saved in state contracts with the universities. Questioned on where the money would come from, Evers explained universities could live on their reserves for 2025, but that after that it would be necessary to discuss "whether the university contracts can be put on a new and different foundation." It is clear what this means: the new austerity budget for universities is to be codified into law.

When the budget cuts were first announced, Lars Oeverdieck, chancellor of the Berlin Technical University, explained that the 100 million euros could not be taken from current university contracts and money allocated for urgent renovation and construction projects could not be touched. "We hope that everyone is aware of the importance of science for Berlin," he said.

Science funding, however, is on the chopping block. The universities face €8 million in cuts. The applied sciences universities will receive €1.5 million and the art colleges €650,000 less, respectively. The "University Construction" investment agreement is to be cut by almost half to €2 million. At €8.5 million, the flagship Charité medical facility is losing almost half of the money earmarked for new equipment.

The future of necessary renovations and construction projects is unclear, including the renovation of the dilapidated Humboldt University main building. The new building project for the Heart Center on the Charité campus must be financed through loans and will thus, in the future, be even more securely under the thumb of the banks.

The cuts will have particularly drastic consequences for the Studierendenwerks (Student Union), which advises students on government loans, runs the dining centers and cafes as well as student housing, day care and mental health counseling. Its budget is to be reduced by a third, or €7.5 million. This is a direct attack on students' fundamental rights to housing and nutrition.

This "will not be without consequences; students will feel the effects," said Jana Judisch, spokesperson for the Studierendenwerk, when asked by the daily *Tagesspiegel*. Among other things, she assumes that the social contribution that students pay as part of their semester fees will have to be increased by at least €30. Which fees will be increased is still undetermined, but one thing is clear: "There will be price increases and cuts to services and investments." It is already certain, for example, that at least two dining center bakeries will be closed.

Various institutes, foundations and other initiatives are also facing millions of euros in cuts. The Einstein Foundation, which promotes research in Berlin, will receive €4 million less. Funding for the Quality and Innovation Initiative at Universities, which provides programs to improve teaching, will be cut from €5.5 million to just €1 million. The Weizenbaum Institute, which researches the consequences of digitalization on society, will receive a €1.5 million cut while the Berlin Quantum Alliance, which aimed to make Berlin a "hotspot for the research and development of quantum technology," will have its €6.09 million in funding cut completely.

Humboldt University (HU) President Julia von Blumenthal has indicated she supports the austerity measures, desiring only to implement them "efficiently." "As universities, we naturally recognize that the State of Berlin has to make cuts," Blumenthal said in an interview with the *Tagesspiegel*. She is already working with various committees to find potential savings or, as she puts it, "sensible synergies." Since the start of the year, she has also been "talking to all departments about how we can use our resources efficiently and in a forward-looking way and where savings can be made."

This is a declaration of war on students. The Berlin Senate can rely on HU management as it tries to push through the cuts

as quietly as possible. Blumenthal's predecessor, Sabine Kunst, implemented job cuts at HU despite student resistance—already in collaboration with Blumenthal, who was Dean of the Faculty of Cultural, Social and Educational Sciences from 2014 to 2018.

The CDU-Green Party coalition government in the state of Baden-Württemberg has also imposed crushing austerity measures on universities, specifically the Higher Education Funding Agreement (HoFV III) for the years 2026 to 2030. For 2026 alone, the state government intends to save €91 million in university spending.

This is to be achieved through halting any real increases in funding. From 2027 onward the budget is to be increased by 3.5 percent, a figure that is far below the inflation rate in recent years. As 3.1 percent of the money is already needed for the pay rise in salaries at the universities alone, the universities will only have 0.4 percent available for other costs such as renovations.

Contractual regulations previously existed that prohibited a reduction in university funding during a legislative period. However, the state government intends to abolish that rule.

According to the Green Finance Minister in Baden-Württemberg, Danyal Bayaz, the Ministry of Economic Affairs will have to implement a “tough” spending cut, the so-called “global minimal expenditure,” which will affect universities and colleges.

This austerity policy will have a major impact on universities and colleges, which have been underfunded for years. The University of Stuttgart, for example, would have to make annual cuts of around €10 million. This means cancelling courses, not filling open professorships or slashing services for students.

In the State of Hesse, the state government is already cutting €34 million from the sciences in this year's supplementary budget. Further cuts are expected for next year.

The German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), which awards scholarships for foreign students, doctoral candidates and researchers, will not be spared. The DAAD will face a gap of €13 million, which translates to the cancellation of scholarships and field research.

On November 15, the first protest against the austerity policy in higher education took place in Stuttgart, called by student representatives and the University of Stuttgart. “Throughout Baden-Württemberg, colleges and universities are losing part of their funding basis,” they warned in their appeal and demanded an “annual increase in the state subsidy by 6 percent,” a “transformation budget for the further development of colleges/universities” and “affordable train fares for all students.” They also wanted to campaign for the “reduction of the renovation backlog” and “better working conditions for employees.”

Around 900 students from all over Baden-Württemberg took part in the protest. At the demonstration, a team from the

International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) and the Socialist Equality Party (SGP) distributed a leaflet against the cuts and war policies of all bourgeois parties and discussed with students the austerity measures and Germany's massive military build-up.

Amelie from Nürtingen spoke out strongly against the cuts. “It's a great pity that young people are no longer being properly trained and that necessary materials are missing,” she said. She rejected the idea of money being cut from education to spend on the military.

Protest organizers, supported by the service trade union Verdi, immediately requested that members of the IYSSE not distribute leaflets and even called the police, who forbade the IYSSE from handing them out.

This hostile attitude is obviously politically motivated. The organizers do not want the issue of social cuts to be linked to war funding. They do not want students to discuss a socialist perspective.

From the point of view of the ruling class, cost cutting is necessary to finance the massive rearmament of the Bundeswehr (German armed forces) and military support for Ukraine in the war against Russia. The defense budget is set to rise to €53.25 billion next year. A further €22 billion will come from a €100 billion “special fund” created at the start of the war in Ukraine. By 2028 the defense budget is to increase by a full €30 billion to €80 billion.

Students, workers and young people must resolutely oppose these cuts. The billions now being cut from education, culture and social budgets are going toward armament and war.

In this situation, however, it is useless to appeal to the federal and state governments and ask them to stop the orgy of austerity. In order to defend education and science against these attacks, it is necessary for students and lecturers to join forces with workers in offices and factories and prepare strikes and protests against social cuts, mass redundancies and war.

The austerity measures are an expression of the deep crisis of the capitalist system, in which all social gains, including education and research, are subject to the logic of profit. Therefore, opposition at universities must be based on a socialist programme against capitalism. The Socialist Equality Party is running on this programme in Germany's upcoming snap federal election. The IYSSE support the SGP's election campaign and call on all students to sign here to support the SGP's participation in the elections and become active with us.



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