

Berlin state government adopts austerity budget

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In the face of large protests, the Berlin Senate (state government) last week passed the supplementary budget for 2025, thereby approving cuts of three billion euros. This will result in sharp social cuts and affect many sectors.

In the area of mobility, transport and the environment, €660 million [\$US688 million], or almost 20 percent of the total budget, is to be “saved.” Some €150 million euros will be cut from housing subsidies, €370 million from education and €309 million from science, health and care, some 8 percent of the original budget. The cultural sector will lose 12 percent of its previous budget, or €130 million. Only the police and the judiciary have been spared from the ax.

The Berlin state government responded to the enormous anger within the population and the various protests, particularly strong among artists and cultural workers, by announcing it would partially reverse the cuts in the cultural sector. However, this was only a numbers trick.

While cuts were withdrawn or reduced for several renowned theatres, the amount to be saved in the cultural sector remains the same. This means that the savings are merely being redeployed, at the expense of the independent art scene. For example, the subsidies for the development of workspaces for artists are now being reduced from the original €21 million to €3 million. The savings of €18 million are thus almost eight times as high as previously planned.

The savings target for the Friedrichstadt-Palast, Berlin’s largest theatre, has also been increased by €250,000 to €1.85 million. The funds earmarked for the renovation of the entrance area of the Berlin Museum of Technology have been cancelled altogether, instead of halved as previously planned.

Particularly severe cuts have been made in the higher education and science sectors. The announced cuts in the areas of science, health and care have increased steadily

in recent weeks: from €100 million to €280 million and now to €309 million. For the university contracts alone, the cuts have increased from €100 million to €142 million euros.

Berlin’s Senator (state minister) for Science, Health and Care, Ina Czyborra (Social Democratic Party, SPD), has already announced, “If these cuts are maintained at a critical level over the next few years, it could also mean a reduction in staff and courses of study.” In some circumstances, the number of university places could also be reduced.

In certain cases, this is already noticeable. At Berlin’s Technical University, the chair of the staff council, Stefanie Nickel, said that a hiring freeze would apply to the central administration of the TU from the beginning of the year. This is despite the fact that many positions are not being filled because the necessary personnel cannot be found under the current conditions.

In particular, mid-level academic staff, where most contracts are temporary, are affected by these cuts. Originally, the Senate passed a resolution that as of April 1, 2025, all employees with a doctorate had to be offered a permanent position after a temporary position. In view of the cuts, this decision to abolish the time limit is now to be repealed. This will further exacerbate the already precarious situation for thousands of academic staff with temporary contracts.

The cuts to the subsidy for the Studierendenwerk (Student Services) by €6.55 million, i.e., almost a third of the previous amount, will also have devastating effects for Berlin’s 170,000 students. The Studierendenwerk is responsible for advising on funding, cafeterias, cafés, dormitories, nurseries and counselling for mental health issues.

On its website, the Studierendenwerk has already announced the consequences of these cuts, including:

- An increase in the social insurance contribution

that students have to pay, from €63 per semester to at least €93, i.e., by 50 percent. As early as the coming summer semester, for which fees must be paid by mid-February, the social insurance contribution will be €85. Even now, many students have to think twice about every euro they spend.

- Several dining hall locations are being closed and dining hall prices are rising overall. The dining hall at Humboldt University's Faculty of Economics has already been closed. At least two bake shops will follow. Starting next year, the least expensive dining hall meal will become 20 percent more expensive. The price of desserts will rise by seven percent.

- Much-needed renovations of student dormitories are being postponed indefinitely, thus leaving them to decay, and the sustained provision of living space for students is seriously endangered. At the end of the year, the waiting list for a room in the Studierendenwerk's dormitories stood at 4,238, with a minimum waiting time of 1.5 years. The loss of even a single additional residence hall would have dramatic consequences for the students affected.

- Cultural and support services for students will be reduced. These include, for example, training courses that support students in academic writing or in coping with stress, and other measures designed to promote mental health.

For tens of thousands of students who are already living in precarious circumstances, these cuts will have drastic consequences. The fundamental rights of students to housing, nutrition and health are being directly curtailed.

In recent weeks, there have been mass protests against the planned cuts. Thousands of public employees, artists and cultural workers, nurses and students have demonstrated against the cuts. On the day of the vote in the Senate, 3,000 people, mostly students, gathered in front of the parliament building.

But the protests remained limited in scope to the extent that the organisers themselves support the austerity measures and the pro-war policies behind them. Most of the protests were organised by the Verdi trade union. Its failure to oppose cutbacks was already evident in the 2000s. In close cooperation with the then SPD-Left Party state government, it enforced every austerity dictate, wage reduction and privatisation against the workers.

The character of the protest organisers became particularly clear at the rally on the day of the vote itself. The co-organiser and first speaker at this rally was Humboldt University president Julia von Blumenthal. Far

from being an opponent of the cuts, she merely does not want them to happen on her watch.

In an interview with *Tagesspiegel*, she stated that she recognised “that the state of Berlin has to save money” and merely “criticises the way the cuts are being made.” In response to *Tagesspiegel*'s comment that “people in the cultural and social sectors will lose their jobs overnight,” she replied, “It's not a scandal when something is decided politically. It's just not good governance when you don't justify your decisions and these cuts.”

The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP) and its youth and student organisation, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE), are fighting to build a movement against the cuts and the pro-war policies that are directly linked to them. Such a movement must be independent of the trade unions, which all support the government's policies of massive rearmament and war. Rearmament and social cuts are only two sides of the same coin.

At its last meeting, Humboldt University student parliament decided, at the request of the IYSSE, to convene a student general assembly “to discuss and organise further action against cuts at universities and in Berlin,” and called on all students and teachers in Berlin and nationwide “to join forces with workers in other sectors and fight together against social cuts.”

This is of enormous importance now. The IYSSE will be intensively involved in the preparation of this general assembly in order to make it the starting point for the construction of a real movement against war and social cuts. We call on all students and workers to come to the general assembly and get involved in the preparations. The fight against cuts, war and fascism cannot be separated from each other but can only be waged through a class struggle.

We want to discuss this perspective with all those who are interested. Please spread this call and get in contact with us!



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