

Berlin state government cuts spending by €3 billion and announces further austerity

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On Monday, the Berlin Senate, a coalition between the Christian Democrats (CDU) and Social Democrats (SPD), announced specific reductions in next year's budget. The cuts total over €3 billion (\$3.146 billion) and affect almost all areas.

Some €660 million (\$692 million) is to be slashed in the mobility, transport and environment sector alone, which accounts for almost 20 percent of the total budget.

The €29 (\$30.40) ticket giving a month's access to Berlin's public transport system, which has only been available since July, is being withdrawn. The ticket was an affordable alternative to the overpriced regular tickets and was therefore in high demand. In October, there were 210,000 subscribers to the monthly ticket, and the trend was rising.

With outrageous cynicism, the Senator (state minister) for Economic Affairs and former Mayor Franziska Giffey (SPD) justified the move by saying she had to weigh the ticket against the free school ticket for over 300,000 children, free school meals and daycare.

The price of the "social ticket" for public transport, which people on extremely low incomes can claim, will be more than doubled. Instead of the previous €9, it will cost €19 in the future. Giffey called the increase "a very, very small amount."

SPD Berlin Co-Chair Nicola Böcker-Giannini commented that Berliners could now "plan securely," adding with undisguised cynicism, "It was important to us that the 'social city' be preserved."

Funding for all environmental projects, which was never more than a drop in the ocean, is also falling victim to the cuts. This includes, for example, the purchase of electric buses for Berlin's transit system BVG and the promotion of a public bike rental system.

Also to be cut is funding for traffic safety and the expansion of tram lines. Funds for the protection of water safety are also being slashed.

In the education budget, €370 million (\$388 million) has been cut. €14 million will be cut from the urgently needed expansion of daycare centers, almost €100 million will be slashed due to the cancellation of the planned construction of two new primary schools, and Studierendenwerk (Student Support Services) will see its funding cut by around one-third.

In the cultural sector, 12 percent of the total budget has been slashed. Renowned theaters, such as the Deutsche Oper, the Volksbühne, the Komische Oper and others, will be forced to cut back their programs. The Berliner Ensemble will cut at least five productions over the next two seasons, as Artistic Director Oliver Reese has already announced. Even funding for the world-renowned Berlinale film festival has been cut by half.

Protests against the brutal cuts are already underway. A protest concert titled "Berlin ist Kultur" ("Berlin is Culture") took place last Tuesday. The Berliner Ensemble, the Deutsche Oper, the Rundfunkchor (Radio Choir) and the Grips-Theater among others took part.

The list goes on and on. Funding for youth work, swimming pools, homeless services and much more is being drastically reduced or eliminated completely. Housing subsidies are being cut by around €150 million in a city that is suffering from skyrocketing rents and a housing shortage like no other in Germany.

In the area of domestic affairs and security, the cuts affect disaster relief and the fire brigade. However, the police and the judiciary have been left completely untouched. Benjamin Jendro, spokesperson for the police union in Berlin, was satisfied, declaring, "It

seems as if the CDU and SPD have listened to us and left the lawnmower in the garage for 2025.” At the beginning of the legislative period, the CDU-SPD Senate had declared that a top priority was beefing up domestic security.

Mayor Kai Wegner (CDU) and his Senate not only defend the radical cuts against all criticism, they praise the austerity as a model for other states and the federal government. SPD Berlin state parliamentary leader Raed Saleh commented on the cuts that had been decided, saying it was the job of politicians to ensure peace and stability. “We have all just experienced at the federal level how it doesn’t work, where a whole coalition has failed on the budget.”

While the State Poverty Conference and other initiatives have called for protests against the austerity measures, the policy of cuts is supported by all parties represented in the Berlin House of Representatives. The Liberal Democrats (FDP) and far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) have praised the cuts and called for further measures, such as an “administrative reform,” i.e., job cuts in public services and savings in the area of immigration and the granting of asylum.

Timid criticisms on the part of the Greens and the Left Party are intended to conceal the fact that they too have made massive cuts every time they have been in the Senate for the last 25 years. Daniel Wesener, former finance senator under Giffey, in a state government that included the SPD, the Left Party and the Greens, had even boasted to the *Berliner Zeitung* that his policy was directed against the population. “You won’t see a finance senator bearing flower garlands,” the Green politician declared.

The criticisms from the public services trade union Verdi are also nothing more than hot air, used to divert the widespread resentment against the Senate. After the planned cuts were announced, Verdi declared “its solidarity with other actors in civil society in protest against the planned austerity measures by the Berlin Senate.”

Verdi Regional Director Andrea Kühnemann said, “We will not allow ourselves to be blackmailed by supposed practical constraints that were created by the same parties that are now presenting the cuts as having no alternative. ... If the CDU and SPD want to go back to the Sarrazin years, when this city was being starved of funds,” they would have to expect resistance.

The “Sarrazin years” and the years since have shown that resistance does not come from the trade unions. Together with the SPD and other governing parties, the trade unions have helped to enforce every austerity diktat. At the Charité and Vivantes state-owned hospitals, the BVG public transport system, the municipal cleaning services and other public enterprises, they work closely with the Senate and management to push through wage cuts and privatisation against the workers.

In announcing the cuts, the Senate made it clear this was only the beginning of even more extensive austerity measures. Finance Senator Stefan Evers (CDU) said further savings would be made in the two-year budget for 2026 and 2027. “It must be clear to everyone: there will be no more [money],” said Evers.



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