Berlin state election: Christian Democratic Union nominates right-wing hardliner as new lead candidate

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Ten weeks before the Berlin state election on September 20, the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) has replaced its lead candidate. Mayor Kai Wegner withdrew his candidacy on July 11. His place is taken by Finance Senator (state minister) Stefan Evers, whom the state executive unanimously appointed as lead candidate and to whom it also transferred the state party chairmanship on an acting basis.

The change has little to do with Wegner's repeated false statements during the multi-day power outage in Berlin in January. Polls put the CDU at around 17 percent—for the first time behind the Left Party. With Evers, the party is now banking on a lead candidate whose political programme and views are in essence indistinguishable from those of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD).

As Finance Senator since April 2023, Evers has been the principal architect and enforcer of the CDU/Social Democratic Party (SPD) Senate's rigorous austerity course. In virtually every area—with the exception of domestic security—the axe has been taken to budgets. Schools that were already dilapidated receive less funding, as do health facilities and other social services.

The cultural sector was hit particularly hard: from the 2025 budget the CDU and SPD cut around 130 million euros—nearly 12 percent of the originally planned allocation. Theatres, music venues and the independent arts scene, whose reputation extends far beyond Berlin, protested vigorously. But the cuts stood. The 2026/2027 two-year budget continues the devastation into the coming year.

Evers described the situation of the state of Berlin and the districts as an "alarm signal" and combined this with an "appeal to the federal level." What was needed, Evers demanded, was a reform of the welfare state—by which he means a further intensification of the social cutbacks initiated by the federal government.

While the federal government under Chancellor Merz mobilises hundreds of billions of euros for rearmament and the militarisation of society, the costs of this policy of war and crisis are to be loaded onto the shoulders of workers, pensioners, the sick and those working in the arts.

Evers is the executor of this redistribution of wealth from those at the bottom to those at the top in Berlin. While he criticises the allegedly high state expenditure on rent subsidies and seeks to cut them, he obliges the limitless greed of the real estate corporations and investors—as with his push to build on Tempelhof Field against the declared will of the population and without a new referendum.

Barely appointed as lead candidate, Evers openly advocated forced labour for welfare recipients in an interview with the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ). When asked about greater cleanliness in the city, he proposed compelling recipients of *Bürgergeld* (welfare support) to carry out cleaning work. Those who receive state benefits and are able to work, Evers argued, should "give something back" to the community—specifically by helping to keep Berlin clean. How he intends to compel those affected he left open.

In the same breath, Evers wants to cut free school meals and rails against every social gain. It is the language of a politics that disciplines and harasses the poorest sections of the population while leaving the fortunes at the top untouched.

The second pillar of Evers' campaign is hysterical agitation against "the left." In the FAZ interview he warned against the "antisemitic" Left Party, which with "expropriations" seeks to destroy the "social market economy." On *radioeins* he declared pointedly that he wanted nothing to do with "extremists."

Evers knows perfectly well, of course, that the Left Party poses no threat to the corporations and banks. The Left Party and its predecessor, the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS), participated in Berlin's state government for 16 years, cutting tens of thousands of public sector jobs, reducing wages, undermining collectively agreed pay

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standards and selling off 150,000 council flats to financial investors. They were substantially responsible for the social misery that Berlin suffers from today.

After the referendum calling for Berlin's largest private landlord Deutsche Wohnen to be expropriated was adopted by a large majority, the SPD-Left Party-Green Senate simply refused to implement it.

The Left Party's lead candidate is Elif Eralp, who—under the pretext of combating antisemitism—refuses to voice any criticism of the Israeli regime. She was one of the fiercest critics of the Lower Saxony Left Party's Middle East resolution because it condemned the genocide in Gaza by Israel.

Tellingly, Evers applies the term "extremists" exclusively to the SPD/Left Party and Greens, but not to the far-right AfD. This is no lapse. Evers is in fact notorious for his right-wing rhetoric, which strongly resembles that of the AfD.

In a 2017 Facebook post, as the CDU Berlin state general secretary, he called on the Interior Senator to "smoke out" a house in Rigaer Strasse occupied by left-wing autonomists (Autonome), which he described as a "nest of left-wing fascists." His use of the term "*ausräuchern*" (smoke out) was deliberate—a word the Nazis routinely applied to their political opponents. Only after sustained and massive criticism did Evers belatedly add the phrase "by all means available under the rule of law." He had previously disparaged the SPD-Left Party-Green Senate as a left-wing "Baubrigade," literally "construction brigade," another term with heavy Nazi connotations. He also described the appointment of urban sociologist Andrej Holm as "an imposition on all Berliners."

Such language is no slip of the tongue but a method. The demonisation of left-wing and social opposition serves to prepare the ground for possible collaboration with the AfD.

Incumbent Mayor Wegner had latterly been regarded within the Berlin CDU as weak and too moderate. After the last election victory, he conducted three exploratory talks each with the SPD and the Greens with the aim of forming a "Berlin coalition" with himself as mayor. He categorically rejected any collaboration with the AfD.

In this context, Evers' statements that he "will do everything to prevent a Left-Green state executive in Berlin" must be understood. This includes the possibility of collaboration with the AfD. A discussion about working with and forming coalitions with the far right has long been under way within the CDU.

Even if the Berlin CDU leadership mouths official phrases about a supposed "firewall" preventing collaboration with the AfD, this has already crumbled below state level. In the district assemblies the CDU repeatedly votes with the AfD—in Tempelhof-Schöneberg it was only with the AfD's help that it secured a majority for its own motion in March 2026; in Neukölln the two voted jointly against a refugee hostel.

The party leadership indignantly repudiates any "collaboration," but in reality, both parties have long since drawn closer on substance. The demonstrative demarcation from the right serves above all to sell the CDU's own rightward course as "centrist"—while Evers adopts the demands of the far right on law-and-order, social cuts and agitation against migrants and the "left" as his own programme.

On questions of immigration policy and domestic security, the CDU and AfD are in complete agreement. Evers' Finance Department blocked the extension of the "reception regulation for Afghan, Syrian and Iraqi refugees with relatives in Berlin"—a family reunification programme that has effectively been on ice since January 1, 2025. And despite the alleged "fiscal constraints," the police and security authorities are to continue to be expanded in both personnel and materiel.

Evers' candidacy demonstrates once again that the establishment parties are responding to the growing crisis with an ever-sharper turn to the right. The Left Party in Berlin offers no counter to this either. On the contrary, it is part of the catastrophic policy of rearmament, war and social attacks.

It is therefore important to support the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP) election campaign for the Berlin state legislature and to make it the starting point for building a new socialist workers' party.

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