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**LIVES OF GLAMOUR AND POVERTY:
THE ACTRESSES' MOVEMENT IN GERMANY, 1899-1919**

by

SABINE MACRIS KLEIN

**A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Theatre in
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy, The City University of New York**

2000

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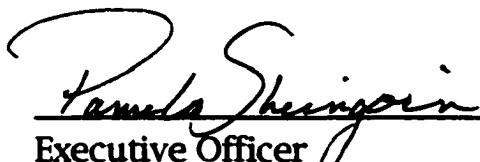
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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Theatre in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract**LIVES OF GLAMOUR AND POVERTY:
THE ACTRESSES' MOVEMENT IN GERMANY, 1899-1919****by****Sabine Macris Klein****Adviser: Professor Marvin Carlson**

In late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Germany, actresses' lives were frequently characterized by the phrase 'glamorous poverty.' Recognition of the economically desperate circumstances in which actresses were commonly found triggered a movement which attempted to reform their working situations. While examining the actresses' movement, this study at the same time provides a survey of acting as a profession for women in turn-of-the-century Germany.

The first area to draw the activism of actresses and their supporters among leaders of the actor's union, the managers' syndicate, the women's movement, and theatre critics was the system of costume provision. The issue spurred the creation of the Coordinating Office for Female Stage Personnel in 1899, the first organization of actresses with an activist goal: to alleviate financial

distress among working actresses. Over the course of the next fifteen years, in promoting their rights to marry freely, bear children without penalty, and control the use of their salaries, actresses emphasized their similarity to other skilled, professional working women. German actresses attempted not only to improve their legal and economic situations by pursuing reforms in these areas, but also to achieve a degree of bourgeois respectability. By 1914, with support from the actors' union and national women's groups, actresses' attempts to lobby the German Reichstag for national theatre industry regulations which would include important protections for women performers were on the verge of fruition. The outbreak of World War I essentially destroyed these efforts for legislative regulation, but many of the reform goals pursued by actress activists before the war were finally achieved with the establishment of a national standard contract in 1919. Between 1899 and 1919, actresses obtained stronger legal protections, financial compensation for their work closer to that of their male peers, improved social status, and greater access to political structures that governed their lives. Despite the mixed success of many of the activists' efforts, actresses were agents in the change of their own social standing and the quality of their work lives.

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Abbreviations

DBG	<i>Deutsche Bühnengenossenschaft</i>
DBV	Deutsche Bühnenverein
DNW	<i>Der neue Weg</i>
GDBA	Genossenschaft deutscher Bühnenangehörigen

Introduction

Among the best-known figures of German theatre history – Neuber, Gottsched, Lessing, Ekhof, Goethe, Schiller, Wagner, Saxe-Meiningen, Brahm, Reinhardt, Piscator, Brecht -- there are few women. Yet women played an integral role in German theatre for over three centuries. Acting was the most significant artistic outlet open to women for the majority of that time. However, perhaps because Germany, unlike other European nations, never produced an outstanding international star on the level of Bernhardt, Duse, Rachel, Ristori, or Modjeska, there are few German actresses, if any, who are remembered as having had a comparable impact. Yet because acting represented the most common and most visible contribution of women to the German stage for the majority of the past three centuries, the further study of the profession of acting for women is critical to a fuller recognition of the contribution of women to the history of German theatre.

In late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Germany, actresses' lives were frequently characterized by the phrase 'glamorous poverty' (*glänzendes Elend*). Sociologist Tony Kellen wrote in 1902 that "no vocation is surrounded by such outer glamour as that of the actress, but none offers so many

difficulties, disappointments and dangers as this one.”¹ According to social commentator P. Hans Ellger, writing in 1911,

Glamorous poverty -- that is what the stage offers presently to precisely those women artists who take their art seriously. Insufficient pay, oppressive dependency, and precariousness of existence, lack of regard for physical well-being and, at the same time, very high demands in productive output -- that is more often than one suspects the foundation upon which the life of the actress is built . . . The actresses' profession harbors a glamorous poverty and all its outer shine and glittering display cannot hide, to those who look behind the curtains, that the actress's social situation is generally a truly sad one.²

In 1913, actress activist Helene Riechers attested that “a woman at the smaller and smallest theatres is worse off than the poorest proletariat woman.”³ There were numerous anecdotes in the first decade of the twentieth century of actresses who might play the role of a great queen or society *grande dame* on the stage and, at

¹ Tony Kellen, *Die Not unserer Schauspielerinnen: Studien über die wirtschaftliche Lage und die moralische Stellung der Bühnenkünstlerinnen, zugleich ein Mahnwort und Wegweiser für junge Damen, die sich der Bühne widmen wollen* (Leipzig: Verlag von Otto Wigand, 1902), 1. All translations are my own.

² Hans Ellger, “Die soziale Lage der Schauspielerinnen,” in *Kirchlich-sozialer Kongreß: 6-8. Juni, 1911 in Nürnberg: Stenographisches Protokoll* (Berlin: Verlag der Vaterländischen Verlags- und Kunstanstalt, 1911), 68-70.

³ “Misstände im Schauspieler Beruf,” *DNW* 42 (1913): 1425.

the same time, would live in a state of poverty at home. The recognition of this 'glamorous poverty' in turn triggered a movement which attempted to reform the working situations of actresses.

At the end of the nineteenth century, a time when most professions remained closed to women, the theatre lured would-be actresses not only with a means of livelihood, but with the possibility of wealth, social mobility, celebrity, artistic fulfillment, and independence. Theatre provided a potential escape from the financial and social repression of an otherwise rigidly structured society. However, in most cases, the cultural freedom actresses might have enjoyed was curtailed by substantial economic, social, legal, and political limitations. Actress salaries were generally small, while expenses were high and contracts restrictive. Shut out from the upper echelons of the theatre hierarchy, women performers had very little power to affect the conditions under which they worked. Men generally held the positions of power in theatre. Actresses' working lives were governed by managers, directors, agents, playwrights, critics, judges in the arbitration court for theatre contracts, and union leaders -- positions that were almost completely closed to women in turn-of-the-century Germany.

Despite the virtual absence of women from

management positions in German theatre of the period, in the early twentieth century, actresses grew increasingly active in the determination of their working conditions through group organization. In 1899, a small group of German actresses organized for the first time to address the economic, legal, and social problems endured specifically by women in the theatre industry. Over the course of the next fifteen years, in promoting their rights to marry freely, bear children without penalty, and control the use of their salaries, actresses emphasized their similarity to other skilled, professional working women. German actresses attempted not only to improve their legal and economic situations by pursuing reforms in these areas, but also to achieve a degree of bourgeois respectability. Organization of what has been called “the actresses’ movement”⁴ expanded rapidly after a 1909 midnight meeting of Berlin actresses that was well attended and widely publicized. By 1914, with support from the actors’ union and national women’s groups, actresses’ attempts to lobby the German Reichstag for national theatre industry regulations which would include important protections for women performers were on the verge of fruition. The outbreak of World War I

⁴ Michaela Giesing, *Ibsen’s ‘Nora’ und die wahre Emanzipation der Frau: Zum Frauenbild im Wilhelminischen Theatre* (Frankfurt a.M.: Peter Lang, 1984), 266.

essentially destroyed these efforts for legislative regulation, but many of the reform goals pursued by actress activists before the war were finally achieved with the establishment of a national standard contract in 1919.

In its lack of access for women to positions of power in the workplace hierarchy, acting was not dissimilar to other vocations open to women in turn-of-the-century Germany. Yet in many other respects, actresses' careers were atypical. The differences between the work of actresses from the situations of other German women contributed to the cultural separateness of actresses from bourgeois society and fed the prejudices against them. Any kind of extradomestic activity on the part of women was viewed as unnatural in Imperial German culture, but prejudice was particularly strong against work of such public nature as that of the actress. Unlike the other limited number of vocations open to women, the work of actresses was completely separate from work typically connected with the domestic sphere.

In some ways the very public nature of performance work which fed prejudice against the actress also worked to her benefit. Because of her visibility, a women performer could exercise a wider measure of cultural influence than most of her contemporaries. Acting was one of the first careers which allowed German women to become financially successful and independent.

The profession was also one in which women had been participating in substantial numbers in Germany for over two hundred years.

For a number of reasons, the theatre was widely viewed by turn-of-the-century commentators as an ideal profession for women. It was argued, first of all, that acting was a “womanly art” which required talents that were considered primarily female. Theatre critic Heinrich Stümcke made the following observation (probably in 1905) about women’s aptitude for stage careers:

The peculiar nature of the female psyche and of the female character predestines her to the acting profession, in which she, like few others, finds the full expression of her personality. The feminine joy in ornament, in finery, and in attention to the body, the inclination to communicate one’s thoughts and then also to hide one’s true feelings behind a deceptive mask, to please with overflowing affection or keep one on tenterhooks with a cold rejection, to quickly draw a person close and then quickly push them away again, in short, to practice all the arts of dissembling and coquetry.⁵

Acting was a career for which women were believed to be suited by nature.

One of the greatest advantages of the acting profession was considered to be the fact that women did not have to compete

⁵ Heinrich Stümcke, *Die Frau als Schauspielerin* (Leipzig: Rothbarth, 1905), 113.

directly with men for their positions. Some critics went so far as to suggest that the theatre workplace was free of gender obstacles, that women's work was valued as highly as men's. In 1915, theatre critic Julius Bab contended that, "As an actress, woman has long been the equal of man." Heinrich Stümcke asserted that acting was "still the only vocation in which the woman has acquired full equality of rights with the man and stands equally ranked at the man's side."⁶ However, the concept of gender equality in turn-of-the-century German theatre is a myth that does not hold up under scrutiny. While it is true that competition between genders did not prevent women or men from being hired in the theatre, women performers were far from equal to their male colleagues in the way in which they were treated by employers. As this study will show, actresses suffered from serious gender discrimination in multiple areas of their working lives.

Perhaps the most challenging endeavor undertaken by actresses and their supporters during the course of the actresses'

⁶ Julius Bab, *Die Frau als Schauspielerin: Ein Essay* (Berlin: Oesterheld & Co: 1915), 24; Stümcke, *Die Frau als Schauspielerin*, 113; George Pauly, "Frauen in Rechtsschutzbureau," *DNW* 43 (1914): 137; Arnim Osterrieth, *DNW* 39 (1910): 265. The myth of women's equality in the theatre workplace was not only to be found in Germany; see Albert Auster, *Actresses and Suffragists: Women in the American Theatre, 1890-1920* (New York: Praeger, 1984), 6.

movement was the complicated task of trying to redefine actresses' social identity. The phrase "glamorous poverty" is an indicator of the ambiguity of actresses' status in turn-of-the-century Germany society. As a group, women performers were subject to a paradoxical mix of contempt and idolization. They stood outside traditional class categories of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, but, as a whole, shared some features of each of these groups. In the early years of the twentieth century, most actress activists attempted to assimilate themselves as much as possible with women of the middle class. They tried to minimize the perception of difference between women performers and the small, but growing, class of educated, bourgeois working women.

Between 1899, when actresses first organized to improve working conditions, and the acceptance of the new contract in 1919, the social standing of non-star actresses underwent a profound change, shifting from that of social outcast and semi-prostitute to professional working woman. The actresses' movement was as much about reshaping social identity as it was about economic or legal issues. In fact, the economic, political, legal, and social situations of actresses were closely linked. Addressing economic, political, and legal grievances contributed to improving actresses' social standing as, in turn, the improvement of actresses' social status helped them achieve

desired economic, political, and legal reforms.

Perceived differences in the area of sexual morality were a significant complicating factor in the efforts of the actresses' movement. This was a prejudice that specifically affected women performers and to which their male colleagues were not subject to nearly the same degree. The cultural impression of actresses as sexually different from bourgeois women colored everything they did to improve their social, legal, political, and economic standing.

Issues which actresses raised with regard to costume provision, paid maternity leave, their rights to marry and have children without the threat of losing their jobs became most controversial when they were connected to issues of sex and "free love." Many actress issues were eroticized and sensationalized. The socioeconomic positions of impoverished actresses were compared to those of prostitutes. This worked to a degree in actresses' favor in that it drew wide attention to the need for reform. At the same time, an actress's safeguarding of her public persona was a survival tactic vital to the continuance of her career. Individual actresses were vulnerable to public stigma if they spoke openly about controversial subjects related to difference in sexual behavior.

Actress activists' assertion of their respect for

bourgeois sexual norms was a key strategy in attempting to attain the movement's goals. It allowed individual actresses to speak out confidently about problems in the theatre workplace for women. Actresses worked hard to emphasize their professional rather than moral conduct in their arguments for reform, stressing their similarity rather than difference, their respectability rather than sensationalism.

In this study, I describe the actresses' movement -- efforts of actresses and their allies to protest and alter discriminatory social, legal, economic, and political conditions between 1899 and 1919. I demonstrate that, despite the mixed success of many of the activists' efforts, actresses were agents in the change of their own social standing and the quality of their work lives. While examining the actresses' movement, this study at the same time provides a survey of acting as a profession for women in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Germany.

With this study, my intention is to contribute to the cultural history of German theatre in addressing it from a sociological standpoint, with some inspiration from materialist feminism. Although my work has been considerably influenced, particularly in my choice of subject, by the work of feminist writers, I have not adopted a specifically feminist methodology. I

consider my work feminist in that it seeks not only to broaden awareness of the role that women played in turn-of-the-century German theatre but to examine the institutionalization of gender discrimination in the theatre workplace, as well as the ways in which women performers were prevented access to power over their work lives. Further, I wish to show how actresses, with some degree of success, fought for greater control of their legal, economic, political, and social situations. By emphasizing the activism of actresses, I hope to counter notions of the lack of involvement or the passivity of women in the historical development of German theatre.

At the same time that I am interested in focusing on the activism of actresses as agents of change, I also want to be careful not to overemphasize the impact of actresses' involvement in bringing about the changes described, particularly in the early years of the movement. Although important organized activity was made in 1899, the large majority of actresses were hesitant, particularly before 1908, to get involved in political protest of any kind. The lion's share of early protest work was done on actresses' behalf by theatre managers, socialists, and bourgeois feminists. Leaders of the actors' union eventually added their voices as well. Very few actresses involved themselves in the spate of discussion of costume provision, pregnancy, and marriage between 1899 and

1903. Of those who did participate, most did so anonymously. The fact that actresses were so slow to take up their own cause, even when it was being promoted by a wide range of prominent supporters, is an indication of the depth of their political vulnerability at the time. Consideration of this vulnerability makes the later events of the actresses' movement all the more remarkable.

The historical examination of acting as a profession for women in nineteenth-century England provided in Tracy Davis' *Actresses as Working Women: Their Social Identity in Victorian Culture* (1991) has been seminal to this study. My investigation is similar to the Davis work in its interest in the socioeconomic position of women performers in a given era of theatre history as well as its focus on actresses as a class, without focusing exclusively on celebrities. Where this study differs from *Actresses as Working Women* is in its emphasis on the actions that actresses took to change the conditions under which they worked, in addition to the description of those conditions.

Two other studies written about the social and political situations of actresses around the same period provide models for this work: Albert Auster's *Actresses as Suffragists: Women in the American Theater, 1890-1920* (1984) and Julie Holledge's *Innocent Flowers: Women in the Edwardian Theatre* (1981). In

their examinations of actresses in England and the United States, Auster and Holledge both look at actresses' influence on society, particularly their political influence and their involvement with larger movements of women's suffrage and women's emancipation. My work shares an emphasis on the political activism of actresses, but necessarily diverges from these models since German actresses' public support for the work of the larger German women's movement was virtually nonexistent. The actresses' movement in Germany differentiated itself from contemporary activism by actresses in England and the United States in that it focused almost solely on efforts to improve their own working situations. My belief is that this is a reflection of the comparably weaker political position of the German actress.

In addition, I would like to acknowledge here the influence of Katrin Sieg's *Exiles, Eccentrics, Activists: Women in Contemporary German Theater* (1994). Although this work picks up where I leave off, at the beginning of the Weimar Republic, and focuses on the efforts of women playwrights and the dramatic texts they have written, Sieg's study provides another important feminist approach toward the political and social activism of women in German theatre history.

Previous Research

The little attention directed toward women in the German acting profession in existing scholarship has generally been oriented toward artistic rather than social aspects of their work. Two notable exceptions provide important background for this study regarding the concerns of actresses and their efforts to change the quality of their work lives. First, Gisela Schwanbeck's *Sozialprobleme der Schauspielerin im Ablauf dreier Jahrhunderte* (1957) sketches a sociological history of the actress' position in three centuries of German society. The chapter concerned with the emergence of actress activists in the first fifteen years of the twentieth century focuses on the issue of costume provision and the organization in 1909 of the Women's Committee within the actors' union, as well as legislative efforts to pass a National Theatre Law (*Reichstheatergesetz*). Michaela Giesing's more recent book, *Ibsens 'Nora' und die wahre Emanzipation der Frau* (1984) offers a more detailed examination of the sociological issues of importance to actresses of the period as reflected in essays by women in theatre union publications. While both studies address the conditions of the actress's profession in Germany as well as the activism of actresses attempting to change these conditions, the larger scope of each of the studies limits their attention to the actresses' movement. The surge of actress activism and the

accompanying shift in social and economic standing of actresses in the first two decades of the twentieth century represent an important stage in the development of women's position in German theatre, deserving deeper scrutiny.

Although a few other studies concerned with the state of the acting profession for women in Germany have been written, their usefulness in discussion of the actresses' movement is marginal because of limited overlap with the time span being covered here. The essays collected by editor Renate Möhrmann in *Die Schauspielerin: Zur Kulturgeschichte der weiblichen Bühnenkunst* (1992) and Hildegard Weinberger's doctoral dissertation *Die Frau als Schauspielerin im 19. Jahrhundert* (Vienna, 1948) provide further insight into the working history of German and German-language actresses.

Women in German theatre have received little attention in English-language scholarship. Katrin Sieg's *Exiles, Eccentrics, Activists: Women in Contemporary German Theater* (1994) and Sue-Ellen Case's anthology *The Divided home/land: Contemporary German Women's Plays* (1992) represent two of the rare exceptions. Actresses receive even less attention than women playwrights. This study is the first examination of German actresses as a group in English-language scholarship.

The sociological, economic, and legal standing of actors

in German society has garnered a significant body of scholarship. However, sociological studies of German actors such as Hans Georg Marek's *Der Schauspieler im Lichte der Soziologie: Der Schauspieler in seiner gesellschaftlichen und rechtlichen Stellung in Deutschland vom 8. Jahrhundert bis zur Gegenwart* (1956) and Dieter Weidenfeld's *Der Schauspieler in der Gesellschaft* (1959) do not address the specific concerns of women. In addition, both works are limited in their usefulness to this project by the time periods selected for study. Marek concentrates on actors' social situation before 1800, leaving only a few pages for the combined examination of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Weidenfeld limits his work to actors of West Germany in the post-World War II era. Among the few recent studies examining the economic status of the actor's profession in Germany, such as Peter Schmitt's *Schauspieler und Theaterbetrieb* (1990), little attention is given to the financial position of women performers. Schmitt's work investigates actors in seventeenth-, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century German theatre.

Beyond the sociological and economic studies of German actors, labor history has been pertinent to my work, particularly that concerning women. Brigitte Kerchner's *Beruf und Geschlecht: Frauenberufsverbände in Deutschland* (1992) looks at women workers' organizations of the period, including artist

groups. A history of the union of theatre personnel, the GDBA, is provided by Joachim Rübél in his dissertation, *Geschichte der Genossenschaft Deutscher Bühnen-Angehörigen* (1988). Rübél touches briefly on the work of the GDBA Women's Committee, the issue of costume provision, and the treatment of marriage and pregnancy in contracts. Studies such as Rübél's and Kirchner's have helped me in defining the shifting position of German actresses in contemporary working life and labor organizations.

Contemporary Sources

The published writings of actresses and others sympathetic with their situation provide the primary records of the events of the actresses' movement and are an important source of information regarding the circumstances under which actresses of the period worked. The principal value for this study of a number these writings lies in their intended function as a means of protest. However, to the extent that I have used these documents to shape an historical account of actresses' professional circumstances, I have tried to consider an author's possible biases in each case.

There is a wealth of contemporary writings from a wide range of sources addressing, at least in part, the subject of German actresses' work situations in the late nineteenth and early

twentieth centuries. The work of the authors cited below, as participants in the contemporary debate, provide indispensable insights into the causes of discontent as well as the arguments made for changing them.

Since the agency of actresses is my primary interest, I have focused on the writings and actions of actresses themselves to protest or improve working conditions wherever possible. However, I do also consider the writings of their contemporaries protesting either specifically on behalf of actresses or for stage performers as a whole for their part in bringing attention to the working problems of performers. Among the published sources, articles written by actresses that appeared in the journal of the GDBA, *Deutsche Bühnengenossenschaft* (retitled *Der Neue Weg* in 1909) have been especially informative, covering such topics as wages, costumes, pregnancy, marriage, housing, raising children, and women's involvement in the actors' union. Issues of these journals from the time period concerned are held at the theatre archives of the University of Cologne and the Deutsches Theatermuseum in Munich. Also important to the movement were articles appearing in journals published by contemporary bourgeois women's groups, such as *Die Frau* and *Frauenbewegung*.

Publication was a powerful tool for actresses, but their protest actions were not limited to writing. *Deutsche*

Bühnengenossenschaft, *Der Neue Weg*, and GDBA meeting protocols were also used as vehicles for the reporting of political activities such as the organization of actress meetings, the establishment of costume centers and self-help funds, and various petition efforts. In addition, the regularly published transcripts of the GDBA Women's Committee provided an important record of their part in organizing protest activities.

The actresses' movement was largely the combined work of members of various progressive social movements in Germany, particularly the labor and women's movements, along with actresses. Most of these actresses-turned-activists did not enjoy wide celebrity. The participation of star actresses was minimal, with Louise Dumont, Franziska Ellmenreich, Rosa Bertens, and Irene Triesch among the few exceptions. To emphasize the effect of these events on the lives of typical actresses, as well as to personalize the narrative, I have included the stories of individual women performers when possible.

With one exception, none of the many book-length studies about the working situations of women performers published during this era was written by an actress. Printed under the pseudonym Helene Scharfenstein, the controversial *Aus dem Tagebuch einer deutschen Schauspielerin* (1912) dramatically portrayed the sufferings of a provincial actress in

order to demonstrate the need for reforms.⁷ It is a further sign of actresses' vulnerability that for a long time they chose to rely on others to champion their cause while themselves remaining comparatively silent or publishing anonymously.

Descriptions of actresses' working lives can be found in a small number of books written around the turn of the century, such as Max Henze's *Der Dienstaufwand der Schauspielerin: Eine sozialrechtliche Untersuchung* (1904), Tony Kellen's *Die Not unsere Schauspielerinnen: Studien über die wirtschaftliche Lage und die moralische Stellung der Bühnenkünstlerinnen . . .* (1902), Julius Bab's *Die Frau als Schauspielerin: Ein Essay*, Heinrich Stümcke's *Die Frau als Schauspielerin*, and Paul Schlenther's *Der Frauenberuf im Theater* (1895).

A number of contemporary studies of the actresses' movement were written from sociological, legal, and economic viewpoints. Unique in its importance to this study is the work of contemporary feminist sociologist Charlotte Engel-Reimers. In her publication of the results of a survey of theatre performers in *Die deutschen Bühnen und ihre Angehörigen* (1911), Engel-Reimers demonstrates a sensitivity, then uncommon in a person of non-

⁷ Despite its title, Elsa Galafrés-Huberman's *Aus der Werkstatt der Schauspielerin* (1912) did not address the working conditions of actresses.

theatrical background, to the plight of working stage performers as well as to some of the specific concerns of actresses. This massive compendium of information regarding performers' salaries and expenses is unequalled among contemporary sources in its detail.

Economic reports from the period 1899-1919 provide important information. Of course, consideration of works such as Edwin Hoernle's *Hinter die Kulissen einer königliche Hofbühne: Ein Beitrag zur sozialen und wirtschaftlichen Lage der Bühnenkünstler* (1914) or A. von Ruthner's *Die Paschawirtschaft an den deutschen Hoftheatern* (1907) must be accompanied by an acknowledgement of their positions within the contemporary debate concerning the financial responsibilities of actors and managers. An extensive array of jurisprudential dissertations and books from the period explore the intricate legal points of performers' rights, and more specifically actresses' rights, as defined by current law and commonly used theatrical contracts.

The variety of the contemporary source material indicates how prominent the discussion of actresses' working conditions became in Germany. The sudden cessation of the public debate of actress issues in the late summer of 1914, in turn, shows how the war effectively dissolved the movement. A number of books were written about the effect of the war on the

theatre industry as a whole, but the issue of actresses' working conditions was virtually ignored after August, 1914.

Terms and Limits

The scope of this study was largely determined by the shape of the actresses' movement itself. To keep this study to a manageable size, I have limited the scope of my work to actresses performing in Germany rather than looking at German-language actresses as a whole. In many ways the theatre employment markets of Austria-Hungary, German-speaking Switzerland, and German-language stage companies in Russia, other eastern European lands, and the United States were linked to Germany's. German-language performers might travel from Berlin to Vienna, from St. Petersburg to Zurich, from Chicago to Prague. German-language performers were linked further by the fact that many actors who performed in these other countries belonged to the GDBA, and a number of theatre managers who were members of the DBV were based in Austria. However, the movement I examine was centered in Berlin and revolved predominantly around German actresses and attempts to bring about legislative, contractual, and cultural changes in Germany. Similar movements underway in Austria-Hungary, Denmark, and other neighboring countries were recognized, but operated separately.

I have also chosen to focus my attention on actresses, as opposed to women performers as a whole. I made this decision despite the fact that the actresses' movement itself involved, to varied degrees, other women performers. There was, of course, a certain amount of overlap in the situations of actresses and other women performers of the period. The working conditions of women performers in general were improved as a result of the actresses' movement, and at times women singers, dancers, and non-principal performers joined actresses in protesting working conditions and demanding reforms. In addition, most negotiations for contract changes and legislative regulation pursued by proponents of the actresses' movement affected actresses and singers in principal roles equally. However, although the working situations of women soloist singers, as well as choristers, dancers, and supernumeraries, did parallel those of actresses in many respects, conditions were varied enough that I feel they justify giving actresses separate attention. It was, for the most part, actresses who propelled the movement, actresses' working conditions that were most frequently discussed, and actresses who were most closely involved in reform efforts. At the same time that I have focused this work on actresses, this limitation of my subject is not a strict one. I will at times refer to the situations of other women performers, especially as they pertain to the

actresses' movement.

The study of the cultural position of actresses is a complicated task. It is, of course, risky to make generalizations about any sizeable class of persons, especially with a population as diverse as that of early twentieth-century German actresses. Among their ranks, both the poorest of the poor and the fabulously successful could be found. Beyond financial extremes, the social standing of individual performers was affected by differences in age, marital status, *Fach*, and the type of theatre at which one was employed (court, municipal, or private; large or small; provincial or metropolitan), as well as education and family background. None were bourgeois, but some actresses were closer to being considered middle-class than others. During this period, actress activists worked to narrow the gap between actresses and bourgeois women still further.

Despite actresses' varied circumstances, enough similarities existed to be able to establish significant shared characteristics in their working situations. At the same time, I have tried to bear in mind as I study actresses as a class, that those who organized and protested cannot necessarily be assumed to embody the norm. They are different from the rest of their group, if only in their outspokenness.

Differences of race and sexual orientation were rarely

discussed as issues related to actresses' class between 1899 and 1919, and therefore I have not addressed them. That is not to imply that these facets were not important factors in defining actresses' cultural standing, but that they are beyond the scope of this study.

This might be a good place to clarify that when I talk about an actress, I mean a female theatre actor of principal roles in spoken drama. I have deliberately chosen to use the female-specific term "actress" rather than the gender-neutral and, at times, male-specific, term "actor." I acknowledge that the word has its problems. The term is to a degree outdated and it can be argued that, as a diminutive form, it is demeaning to women. However, I have found it very useful for the sake of clarity to have a gender-specific term that refers to the subject of my study -- the female actor. Another advantage to using the term "actress" is that it offers a more precise translation for the German word "*Schauspielerin*." My tendency is to use "actress" and "actor" each as gender-specific terms and to use the term "performer" when referring to both genders (except, of course, when 'performer' is qualified by a gender-specific term, as in the case of 'woman performer').

I would also like to clarify that although, for the sake of simplicity, I refer to the organization of actors known as the

GDBA (Genossenschaft deutscher Bühnengehörigen or Society of German Theatre Personnel) as a union, they do not refer to themselves by the German term for union (*Gewerkschaft*). The organization became increasingly union-like in its work in the decades after its founding in 1871. The group joined the AfA (*Arbeitsgemeinschaft freier Angestelltenverbände*), the largest organization of worker groups in Germany, in 1917 and eventually was successful in representing theatre performers in contract negotiations with their employers.⁸ The GDBA primarily represented stage performers, but also had among its members conductors, musicians, prompters, scenic, wardrobe, and office personnel.

Organization

The study follows a loosely chronological organization in order to trace the development of the actresses' movement and the sequence of issues which most occupied the interests of actress activists between 1899 and 1919. Each chapter will address an issue or related group of issues that the actresses focused on at various stages of their protest movement.

⁸ Joachim Rübel, *Geschichte der Genossenschaft deutscher Bühnen-Angehörigen* (Hamburg: Bühnenschriften-Vertriebs, 1992), 171. Rübel's book contains a section in which he discusses the GDBA's transformation into a union.

In order to convey something of what the profession of acting was for women at the turn of the century, I begin the first chapter by outlining some features of the contemporary German theatre system. I go on to describe efforts made to address the workplace situations of German actresses in the early 1890s. Protests at this stage were undertaken by socialists, individual theatre managers, bourgeois women's groups and an opera singer named Anna Henneberg. In an effort to explain why actresses were silent before 1899, I also look at factors in their work and social environment that inhibited political activity.

The second chapter addresses the first of the important issues which drew actresses into political activism: the provision of costumes. It also describes the beginnings of actresses' organization efforts, starting with the establishment in 1899 of the Coordinating Office for Germany's Female Stage Personnel (Centralstelle für die weiblichen Bühnen-Angehörigen Deutschlands). The intentions of the Coordinating Office to address the issue of costumes was an important symbolic and practical effort to improve the economic and social well-being of German actresses. In 1901, actresses took practical steps to relieve the harsh working conditions suffered by the majority of women in the acting profession in turn-of-the-century Germany by establishing costume centers intended to ease the financial

pressures on actresses contractually obligated to supply their own wardrobe.

The third chapter examines the structural expansion of the actresses movement and the growing involvement of actresses in the GDBA and with bourgeois women's groups, focusing on the years between 1904 and 1910. The chapter includes discussion of the fight for passive suffrage for women GDBA members and the establishment of the Women's Committee within the GDBA in 1910. I also describe the early work of the Women's Committee, including its leadership in the establishment of actress self-help funds and ensuring women's input in the contract negotiations between the GDBA and the Deutsche Bühnen-Verein (DBV), the organization of German stage directors.

The years 1909 and 1910 were years of rapid expansion and growth for the actresses' movement. As the size and confidence of the movement grew, organized actresses began to expand their list of demands for workplace reforms beyond the sensationalized subject of costume provision, around which they had first rallied in 1899. Chapter four examines the expanded range of issues addressed by organized actresses between 1909 and 1914, including the contractual treatment of pregnancy and marriage, work hour limitations, child care, privacy of personal information, and paid days of leave during monthly menstruation.

The chapter also looks at differences in the strategies adopted to try to bring about reforms in various other areas of their work lives, with primary attention given to efforts to lobby for a National Theatre Law.

The fifth chapter evaluates the effects of World War I on German actresses and particularly on the actresses' movement. The war permanently shelved efforts to pass the National Theatre Law and the actresses' movement came to a virtual standstill. However, following the war, with the rise of the socialist government and widespread labor unrest in the country, the GDBA was in a strong position to negotiate a national standard contract with the DBV. The resulting agreement provided a number of important benefits for German actresses, including changes in the treatment of costumes, pregnancy, and marriage. The 1919 national standard contract helped to improve the legal, economic, and social positions of German actresses and heralded the increased acceptance of performers, particularly actresses, as working professionals of the industrial age.

Chapter One

Actresses in Turn-of-the-Century Germany

While the typical turn-of-the-century German actress was financially, legally, and politically weak, she had a measure of cultural influence beyond that usually experienced by German women of the day. This was, in part, a reflection of the cultural importance of theatre to Germany at the time. In 1915, contemporary critic Julius Bab described Germany as a nation that took its theatre more seriously than any other.⁹ Sociologist Charlotte Engel-Reimers asserted that Germans honored theatre, as a source of cultural betterment similar to the church, more than any other country. In turn, she claimed, Germany's actresses were viewed as priestesses of art and therefore honored more than actresses in other countries.¹⁰

This chapter begins with a sketch of the contemporary German theatre system in order to provide a better idea of what the acting profession was for women in turn-of-the-century Germany. I then discuss particular aspects of actresses' workplace

⁹ Bab, *Die Frau als Schauspielerin*, 44.

¹⁰ Charlotte Engel-Reimers, *Die deutsche Bühne und ihre Angehörigen: Eine Untersuchung über ihre wirtschaftliche Lage* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1911), 151.

and social situations that made participation in political activity difficult at the close of the nineteenth century. This discussion is followed by a review of the first efforts made in the 1890s by members of the women's rights and labor movements to bring about actress-related reforms.

The German Theatre System

According to John Willett, author of *The Theatre of the Weimar Republic*, "both geographically and quantitatively, Germany's was the leading European theatre during the Wilhelmine period."¹¹ The scope of German and German-language theatre was certainly extensive. The *Neuer Theater Almanach*, published annually by the GDBA, in 1898 listed 473 German-language theatres in operation that year (not including touring companies), at least 338 of which were located in Germany. Twenty-nine permanent houses and seven touring companies were listed in Berlin.¹² In an article published in *Der neue Weg* in 1913 (which did not cite its source), Germany was ranked fourth among European countries in terms of the quantity of its theatres. The following statistics were given for the number

¹¹ John Willett, *The Theatre of the Weimar Republic* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1988), 8.

¹² *Neuer Theater Almanach* 10 (1899): 227-570.

of its theatres. The following statistics were given for the number of theatres in each country:¹³

- | | | |
|-------------------|-------------------|-----------------------|
| 1) France -- 596 | 5) Spain -- 228 | 9) Holland -- 56 |
| 2) Italy -- 544 | 6) Austria -- 215 | 10) Switzerland -- 43 |
| 3) England -- 372 | 7) Russia -- 149 | 11) Sweden -- 37 |
| 4) Germany -- 364 | 8) Belgium -- 94 | 12) Norway -- 28 |

Germany's theatres were more evenly distributed throughout the country than in the cases of European neighbors such as France and England, countries which had longstanding cultural centers in their capital cities. While Berlin was unquestionably the center for theatre in turn-of-the-century Germany, its ascension to that position was comparatively recent. The collection of German states politically united under Wilhelm I and Otto von Bismarck as the Second German Reich in 1871 still retained much of their cultural independence thirty years later. Cities such as Mannheim, Hamburg, Munich, Weimar, Frankfurt am Main, Hanover, and Leipzig, to name a few, had rich theatre histories of their own which they maintained into the Wilhelmine era through the subsidization of court and civic theatres.

The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries

¹³ "Wieviel Theater gibt es in Europa?" *DNW* 42 (December 1913): 1665.

were times of expansion for the German theatre industry. Licensing rules had been loosened in 1869. Willett claimed that two thirds of the public theatres in the Weimar Republic were built during the Second Reich (1871-1918).¹⁴ The very abundance of theatres was thought in some ways to be problematic for performers. The GDBA complained that requirements for acquiring a license to operate a theatre were so minimal that a profusion of financially unstable companies had emerged which did not have the wherewithal to support adequate working conditions for their ensembles.

The geographic range of German-language theatre spanned not only Germany, Austria-Hungary, and part of Switzerland, but extended also to the German-language theatre houses in eastern Europe and Scandinavia, as well as in a number of cities in the United States such as New York, Milwaukee, and Cleveland. The reach of German touring companies was also extensive. For example, Gustav Lindemann (who eventually married the actress Louise Dumont) led his troupe through the Balkans, East Prussia, a number of Slavic countries, Russia, Poland, Finland, Sweden, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Austria, and

¹⁴ Willett, *Theatre of the Weimar Republic*, 9.

Italy.¹⁵

A substantial number of actresses were, of course, employed within the large network of German theatres. According to statistics assembled by Gustav Rickelt in *Schauspieler und Direktoren* (1910), German-language theatres employed 16,000 performers. He broke this number down into the following categories:¹⁶

5200 actors

4100 actresses

2000 male singers

1700 female singers

3000 chorus members

If we assume, as was the case with the number of theatres listed in the 1899 *Neuer Theatre Almanach*, that roughly 75% of the performers cited were located in Germany, then we can infer from Rickelt's figures that around 12,000 performers were employed in Germany around 1910, roughly 3,075 of whom were actresses and 3,900 actors. Just over 700 women performers were listed as

¹⁵ Otto Brües, *Louise Dumont: Umriss von Leben und Werk* (Emsdetten, Westf.: Lechte, 1956), 59.

¹⁶ Gustav Rickelt, *Schauspieler und Direktoren* (Berlin-Lichterfelde: P. Langenscheidt, 1910), 13. In 1902, Tony Kellen offers a somewhat lower estimate of 3,500 working German-language actresses. In *Die Not unserer Schaspielerinnen*, 10.

performing with Berlin theatres in the 1899 *Neuer Theater Almanach*. Approximately 300 of these were actresses.¹⁷

The economic prosperity spurred by Germany's industrial revolution kept audiences attending theatres in high numbers. It also fostered a trend for extravagance in settings and costume, as well as the development of complex new stage machinery and the use of technological advances such as electric light. Innovations in stage equipment included the use of revolving and sliding stages, as well as lifts.

While German theatre was technologically innovative, playwriting practices were, in general, artistically conservative. Turn-of-the-century German theatre was, however, very productive in terms of its output of new drama. In the 1899/1900 season, according to the *Deutscher Bühnen-Spielplan*, 1,424 plays by 717 authors were performed. It was a theatre culture in which managers emphasized the novelty of their repertory, with many new plays being presented in very short runs before being replaced by another piece. Of the 1,424 plays produced in 1899/1900, 1,017 (71%) were given ten or fewer performances across the entire country. The number of plays given five or fewer performances was 807 (57%). The high overturn of the repertory was difficult for actresses not only in that they had to learn roles¹⁷ *Neuer Theater Almanach* 10 (1899): 242-271, 559-560.

very quickly, but that they were regularly having to come up with new sets of costumes for each play.

This high overturn in repertory allowed managers to try out a number of different plays in search of a hit. As a result of this system, the majority of new plays written were seen and discarded quickly, but a small number of previously obscure playwrights created works that skyrocketed them quickly to success. Meyer-Förster's *Alt Heidelberg* was given 1,258 performances in 1901/02, turning a previously little-played dramatist into the most frequently performed playwright of the season. Meyer-Förster's popularity soon diminished. By 1903/04, his plays were given a mere 571 performances while the previously unknown F. A. Beyerlein's *Zapferstrich*, with 1,494 performances made him the season's top performed playwright. There were a number of playwrights who were steadier favorites at the box office. The most frequently performed playwrights in the five years between the 1899/1900 and 1903/1904 seasons were as follows (accompanied by the number of performances for this period):¹⁸

¹⁸ *Deutscher Bühnen-Spielplan* (1899/1900-1903/04).

- | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1) Kadelburg (6,540) | 6) Shakespeare (3,362) |
| 2) Blumenthal (6,106) | 7) Meyer-Förster (3,124) |
| 3) Schiller (5,114) | 8) Moser (3,037) |
| 4) Sudermann (5,508) | 9) Ernst (2,697) |
| 5) Fr. Schönthan (4,951) | 10) Hauptmann (2,663) |

A number of contemporary playwrights frequently wrote in partnership with one other, among them Kadelburg, Blumenthal, and Schönthan.

Most theatres presenting drama in Germany at the turn of the century fell into three categories: court theatres, municipal or civic theatres, and private theatres. Plays were also performed at summer theatres, resort theatres, municipal-partnership (or *Städtebund*) theatres, *Rauchtheaters*, theatres with private memberships (like the Freie Volksbühne), literary clubs, and by touring troupes. Court and municipal theatres were typically on the most solid financial footing because of the government subsidies they received. The amount of subsidy provided by a city could vary widely. In 1903 Mannheim was reportedly the most generous German city, giving 471,670 Marks, or 3.34 Marks per resident for the support of theatre and music. Cities such as Stuttgart, giving subsidies of 958 Marks, or .01 Marks per resident, lay at the other end of the spectrum. The city of Berlin provided no financial subsidy for theatre in 1903,

according to this report.¹⁹

Cities frequently leased their theatres to private managers, so while they might be paying subsidies, they would at the same time have little direct control over the theatre's day-to-day operation. According to GDBA historian Max Hochdorf, city governments were primarily interested in policing and taxing theatres.²⁰ Contemporary observers of the theatre interested in bringing about reforms of any kind, including reforms of actress-related issues, increasingly complained about the process of leasing municipal theatres. The system was criticized for allowing managers a free reign to pursue profits and not requiring them to consider the cultural interests of the city or the social welfare of performers. The manner of leasing theatres was also attacked for privileging lessee applicants with the financial stamina to present lavish productions without regard for their artistic talent. Proponents of costume provision for actresses suggested that cities provide costume and set collections for leasing managers so that they could be selected for their artistic merit rather than

¹⁹ "Allerlei: Kunstsinn-Statistik," *DBG* 35 (1906): 148-149.

²⁰ Max Hochdorf, *Die deutsche Bühnengenossenschaft: 50 Jahre Geschichte* (Potsdam: Gustav Kiepenheuer, 1921), 184.

their financial solvency.²¹ Increasingly reformers called for more direct involvement of local governments in the management of their theatres, hoping that this would help them achieve their goals.

As places of employment, German theatres varied in prestige according to their size, their location, their financial strength, and their artistic reputation. Salaries and the length of the work season differed substantially. In his *Schauspieler und Direktoren*, Gustav Rickelt asserted that the forty most prestigious German-language theatres – court, municipal, and private theatres in Berlin, Vienna, Munich, Dresden, Stuttgart, Cologne, Hanover, Hamburg, Wiesbaden, Leipzig, Frankfurt a. M., Weimar, Schwerin, Karlsruhe, Kassel, Koburg, and Dessau, among other cities – employed around 1,450 performers in their ensembles year-round. These companies paid annual salaries ranging from 2,000 to 20,000 Marks (not including star salaries). A second group of theatres – Breslau, Bremen, Freiburg, Dortmund, Königsberg, Magdeburg, and Düsseldorf – offered similarly high salaries, but only for eight-month seasons, employing roughly

²¹ “Zur Kostümfrage,” *DBG* 32 (1903): 354; Stümcke, *Die Frau als Schauspielerin*, 69, 83; g. “Ein Vorschlag zur Lösung der Kostümfrage,” *DBG* 32 (1903): 21-22.

1,000 performers.²²

Nearly two thirds (219) of the 350 German-language winter-season theatres counted by Rickelt had seasons lasting seven months or less. Typically the smaller and more provincial theatres had the shortest seasons. Rickelt estimated that 3,000 German-language performers had secure livings, earning salaries of 3,000 Marks or above. He claimed that at least half of German-language performers earned less than 1,000 Marks/season.²³

Performers working at a theatre with a typical season of six to eight months had to try to make their incomes stretch to cover summer months or find employment at summer theatres. In 1909, an analysis of summer unemployment for German-language theatre personnel published in *Der neue Weg* found that performers with a 1909/10 engagement worked, on average, 79% of the year, including work at summer theatres.²⁴ This figure does not account for the performers left unemployed year-round. Rickelt estimated the annual number of German-language

²² Rickelt, *Schauspieler und Direktoren*, 13-15.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ "Beschäftigungslosigkeit im Theaterbetriebe," *DNW* 38 (1909): 281-282.

performers who remained unemployed at 1500.²⁵ Another report in 1910 estimated that 800 actresses and 1,000 actors in Berlin alone were unemployed.²⁶

According to sociologist Tony Kellen, two thirds of German performers worked in small or mid-sized provincial theatres.²⁷ After analyzing 3,000 theatre job listings published in the "Theater-Courier" over a seven month period in 1909/10, Hermann Conrad ascertained that 65% of the positions being offered were with theatres located in cities with populations of less than 6,000.²⁸ Working in provincial houses meant not only a typically smaller salary and shorter paid work year, but usually required performers to incur high travel expenses, particularly if they found summer employment in a different region from their winter work. For actresses, the constantly changing repertory of smaller houses necessitated higher expenses and labor input than faced by their colleagues at larger theatres in order to keep up

²⁵ Rickelt, *Schauspieler und Direktoren*, 15.

²⁶ Ellger, "Die soziale Lage der Schauspielerin," 61.

²⁷ Kellen, *Die Not unsere Schauspielerinnen*, 85.

²⁸ Hermann Conrad, "Soziale Studien aus dem Theater-Courier," *DNW* 39 (1910): 829.

with the costume demands of their roles. The worst conditions were usually found among travelling troupes (*Wandertruppen*).

The threat of losing one's job during the *Probemonat*, or rehearsal period, was a serious problem for performers. Contracts typically allowed managers to rehearse actors for some weeks before the start of the season without pay. During that time a manager was permitted to fire the actor for artistic inability. One practice which was regularly cited in the union journal was the use of the threat of firing during this rehearsal period to lower the performer's salary. Performers were particularly vulnerable to this treatment because it occurred at the start of the season, after they might have already spent a substantial amount of money to travel to the theatre and at a time when finding a new position would be difficult. Some managers were accused of hiring multiple performers for the same position, then waiting for them to underbid each other in salary demands and firing all but the lowest bidder. For instance, in September of 1906, manager Max Garrison, operating the Lortzing-Theater (formerly the Belle-Alliance Theater) in Berlin, was reported to have fired twenty-four performers during the theatre's rehearsal period.²⁹ Losing

²⁹ "Massenkündigung," *DBG* 35 (1906): 349; Willi Lichtenberg, "Anfänger," *DNW* 38 (1909): 372-373; a. w. "Gekündigt: II" *DNW* 39 (1910): 7-10.

one's job at the start of the season could have serious ramifications. It could cost a performer not only a year's work, but an entire career. It might also threaten his/her GDBA pension. Actresses were more vulnerable to losing their jobs than their male colleagues because they had fewer employment alternatives.

Actresses and actors alike often suffered from difficult working conditions. Of course, these conditions could vary substantially with the degree of professional success, but performers of non-star status generally faced a number of serious problems in the workplace. Salaries tended to be low, and expenses, including such things as costumes, travel, and agents' fees, could be very high.

There were many problems associated with a career in the theatre beyond the financial that made acting an uncomfortable profession, particularly for women. The overpopulation of the industry, the intense competitiveness, the nomadic lifestyle, the instability of one's employment, housing discrimination, loss of reputation, a demanding work schedule, and a dependence on youth and beauty were just some of its negative features.

Actresses' Vulnerability

The actresses' movement was closely linked to other major social movements of its day, particularly the women's and labor movements, and its development between 1899 and 1919 paralleled these in important ways. For many years, however, actresses allowed representatives from these other movements to speak out on their behalf and they hesitated a long time before protesting openly themselves. This fact can be better understood after looking at the extent of actresses' political vulnerability.

In general, turn-of-the-century German actresses were legally, socially, economically, and politically weaker than actors. Their lower salaries, higher expenses, and the greater work demands on their time and energy (when including costume preparation) were serious impediments to activism. According to Tony Kellen in his *Die Not unsere Schauspielerinnen* (1902), an actress engaged at a small German theatre would normally earn 90-150 Marks/month for a season of about six months, 150-300 Marks/month at a mid-sized stage with a 7-8 month season, about 200-600 Marks/month at a big theatre with a full year's contract, while the leading players at the largest municipal and court theaters earned between 1,000 and 1,700 Marks/month along with paid holidays. Not surprisingly, beginners' salaries were the lowest. Kellen reported beginners' salaries starting at 50-60

Marks/month. These could rise to 100-180 Marks/month at a mid-sized theatre, or 250 Marks/month at a larger house.³⁰ The practice of hiring beginning actresses for their first season on a volunteer/apprentice basis appears to have been fairly common. The fact that this seems to have been a problem more for women than men indicates that the overpopulation of actresses in the profession was greater than that of actors.

One source of specific salary figures is feminist sociologist Charlotte Engel-Riemers' *Die deutsche Bühne*, in which she compiled the responses to a 1907/08 survey of GDBA members. According to my own calculations, the average reported salary for actors was 1,938 Marks/year (relying on 461 survey responses), while actresses' average reported salary was 1,732 Marks/year (using 134 responses). The critical difference, however, between the financial circumstances of actresses and actors was in their expenses. Because of their additional costume obligations, actresses' expenses were far higher than actors'. Average post-expense income reported by actresses in the GDBA survey was 760 Marks/year, while actors' earned an average post-expense income of 1,894 Marks/year.³¹ As a basis of

³⁰ Kellen, *Die Not unserer Schauspielerinnen*, 82-83.

³¹ Engel-Reimers, *Die deutsche Bühne*, 510-534. Further discussion of actresses' expenses is offered in the second chapter.

comparison, women teachers in Frankfurt in 1896 were reportedly paid 1,600 Marks/year in their first two years of work. Their annual salaries could be raised thereafter until they reached a maximum of 2,600 Marks.³²

Actresses' financial weakness was compounded by social prohibitions and a lack of effective legal protection. Acting contracts were commonly identical to one another, but no standard contract was enforced by any organization at the turn of the century. The actors' union had not yet had any input into the content of theatre contracts and those typically used heavily favored the employer. The author of the anonymously written tract *Moderne Sklaven: Sechs Kapitel Schauspielerelend* (1907) observed that of the thirty-five paragraphs appearing in the typical contract, thirty-three were in reference to the actors' obligations and two were related to his rights. Actresses faced additional restrictions not made on actors in the areas of marriage, pregnancy, and costume. Beyond the contract, actresses and actors were bound by a theatre manager's "house rules" and subject to fines established within these.

In her introduction to the midnight actress meeting on March 1, 1910, prominent feminist Minna Cauer referred to

³² G. Stein. "Zwei Lehrerinnenbudgets," *Die Frauenbewegung* 2 (1896): 229.

women performers as “of all women, those most lacking in rights.”³³ On the other hand, actresses appeared hesitant to exercise what rights they did have. Legal experts of the day predicted that managers’ contracts requiring an actress to provide her own costumes, for example, would not stand a test in the courts on the grounds that the contracts demanded unreasonable expenditures of the actress and therefore went against “good moral custom.”³⁴ Yet, actresses generally did not seek the court’s mediation. Although a legal challenge to her contract might very well have been successful, the court would not have protected her from being fired and black-listed. A trial might also have caused embarrassment for an actress by opening her personal life to the scrutiny of the public.³⁵

³³ “Die sozialen Probleme im Leben der Schauspielerin,” *DNW* 39 (1910): 264.

³⁴ Bruno Marwitz, *Der Bühnenengagementsvertrag: Ein Handbuch für Juristen und Laien, Unter Berücksichtigung und Rechtsprechung des Bühnenschiedsgerichts* (Berlin: R. L. Prager, 1902), 86; Kellen, *Die Not unserer Schauspielerinnen*, 129; Stümcke, *Die Frau als Schauspielerin*, 80.

³⁵ During one trial in 1904 in which an actress sued her employer for unpaid salary of 32 Marks, her employer raised the subject the actress’s relationship with a man and her possible future marriage which, in turn, reportedly “provoked the merriment of the spectators to a high degree.” N. M. T., “Das ‘Theater ohne Männer’ in der ‘Monachia’” *DBG* 33 (1904): 300.

An actress's positive public image was vital to her career success. The only way to escape the theatre proletariat and join the prosperous ranks of established performers was through the affection of audiences. At this time, the discussion of the intimate backstage realities of theatre employment was widely considered improper. The fear of being labelled a feminist deterred activism among actresses.³⁶ One anonymous actress, writing in 1910, felt that discussion of actresses' problems would not be tolerated.³⁷ An actress was loathe to risk tarnishing her persona in the minds of audiences or damage her chances of being hired by managers. Actresses were therefore slow to challenge the existing theatre system in any way.

In addition to their public persona, actresses had to guard their professional image with managers and agents. Actors or actresses who got a reputation for being "uncooperative" could have difficulty securing their next position. Those performers already employed under a long-term contract were also vulnerable to being *kaltgestellt*, or shelved, by a provoked

³⁶ P. Lorenz, "Die Prostitution in der Kunst: Zwei Worte zur Theaterfrage," *Die neue Zeit* 11 (1892/93): 376; [Georg Richard Kruse], "Die Umfrage an die weiblichen Bühnen-Mitglieder," *DBG* 31 (12 December 1902): 511.

³⁷ a. w. "Gekündigt: II," 10.

manager. In these cases, a performer would be cast in fewer and less suitable roles, handicapping her ability to maintain popularity among audiences.³⁸ Actresses had little recourse against such methods.

The ineffectiveness of relying on the courts for legal protection, combined with substantial overpopulation of women in theatre and the social prejudices which inhibited changes in profession or active involvement in unions and women's organizations, all exacerbated to the financial vulnerability of actresses in turn-of-the-century Germany. This vulnerability, in turn, made active pursuit of workplace reforms largely impractical.

Early Voices of Protest

Efforts to improve the working lives of actresses in Germany began as scattered outcries. In the eighteenth century such notable actress-managers as Caroline Neuber and Frau Magister Velten struggled to counter deep-seated social prejudice against women in the theatre. In the late eighteenth century, as management of Germany's theatres went from the hands of actor-

³⁸ Anna Henneberg, "Volksoper als Kulturaufgabe, und die Stellung der Frau am Theater," first installment, *Frauenbewegung* 3 (15 May 1897): 104; Lorenz, "Prostitution in der Kunst," 380.

and actress-managers of wandering troupes to the appointed directorships of municipal and court theatres and to businessmen leasing private theatres, women lost virtually all access to leadership positions within the theatre hierarchy. Actresses and actors became employees. Actresses' working lives were dictated by men in positions of power – managers, agents, directors, critics, and union leaders.

Over the course of the nineteenth century, actresses rarely complained publicly of the hardships of their profession. The autobiographies of mid-century actress Anna Löhn-Siegel are rare exceptions.³⁹ Protests on behalf of German actresses first intensified in the 1890s, centered around concrete labor issues of salaries, expenses, and contract rights. A number of these protestors focused particular attention on the onerousness of actresses' costuming expenses.

Socialists turned their attention to actresses' rights in 1890. That year, the Marxist journalist who would be appointed head of the Freie Volksbühne in 1891, Franz Mehring, brought the predicament of actress Elsa Schabelsky to the public's attention in what became known as *der Fall Lindau*. Mehring protested on

³⁹ Further examples can be found in Gisela Schwanbeck, *Sozialprobleme der Schauspielerin im Ablauf dreier Jahrhunderte*, vol. 18 of *Theater und Drama* (Berlin-Dahlem: Colloquium Verlag, 1957), 62-75.

Schabelsky's behalf against the attempts of her former lover, the influential theatre critic Paul Lindau, to force her to leave Berlin by having her boycotted from the city's theatres. As a result of Lindau's antipathy, Ludwig Barnay had broken his three-year contract with Schabelsky and no other Berlin theatre would hire her.⁴⁰ The case fostered discussion of actresses' working conditions in the socialist newspaper *Die neue Zeit*, in which it was contended that the financial distress of actresses was driving many into prostitution to subsidize their income.⁴¹ Despite the reported distance between actors and the socialist movement, two more articles in *Die neue Zeit* about actors' labor conditions followed in 1892. One of these, "Die Prostitution in der Kunst: Zwei Worte zum Theaterfrage," by P. Lorenz, focused on the financial difficulties of actresses, with particular attention given to costume

⁴⁰ Franz Mehring, *Der Fall Lindau* (Berlin: Kurt Brachvogel, 1890), 3.

⁴¹ K. K., "Das Proletariat der Bühne: Bemerkungen zum 'Fall Lindau'," *Die Neue Zeit* 9 (1890/91): 46. According to the author of this article, Mehring was forced to resign his position as the result of his involvement in the case, and the continued existence of the newspaper that first printed the story, the *Berliner Volkszeitung*, was threatened under pressure from Lindau's supporters, 50.

expenses.⁴²

Published in 1893, the book *Die Vampyre der Schauspielerinnen: Blicke hinter die Kulissen* published under the pseudonym Herbert Roland devoted a section to the problem of actresses' costuming expenses.⁴³ Soon afterward, prominent theatre directors and managers, such as Paul Schlenther, Adolph L'Arronge, and Max Burckhard, helped to direct attention to the financial difficulties of actresses. In Schlenther's *Der Frauenberuf im Theater* (1895) (published as part of the series *Der Existenzkampf der Frau im modernen Leben*), L'Arronge's *Deutsches Theater und deutsche Schauspielkunst* (1896), and Burckhard's *Das Recht der Schauspieler* (1896), the authors described actresses' financial hardships, including low salaries, high expenses, and intense competitiveness. Each condemned strongly the convention of having actresses pay for their own

⁴² The author of this article may have been Paul Lorenz, a chorus singer at the Dresden Court Theater in 1892. Paul Lorenz was also listed as a playwright in *Neuer Theater Almanach 3* (1892): 56.

⁴³ Herbert Roland may have been a pseudonym for Robert Hertwig, a German dramatist active in the 1890s and 1900s.

wardrobe as the major cause of their poverty and prostitution.⁴⁴

The pronouncements of these widely respected theatre professionals not only spread awareness of actress poverty, but lent significance to the issue and encouraged wider discussion of the problems related to it.

Actresses and the Women's Movement

The spreading of public awareness of actress poverty undertaken by socialists and prominent individual theatre personalities was an important contribution toward the eventual improvement of actresses' working conditions. Members of the women's movement took the next important step by initiating the first organized action on the actresses' behalf to change the situation in response to the appeal of a woman performer. Berlin opera singer Anna Henneberg (under the pseudonym A. Hardenberg) wrote a full-length article for *Die Frau* in December of 1896, "Die Stellung der Frau beim Theater: Ein Appell an die deutschen Frauenvereine." In it she requested that women's

⁴⁴ Paul Schlenker, *Der Frauenberuf im Theater*, vol. 2 of *Der Existenzkampf der Frau im Modernen Leben. Seine Ziele und Aussichten* (Berlin: Richard Taendler, 1895), 43-44; Adolph L'Arronge, *Deutsches Theater und deutsche Schauspielkunst* (Berlin: Concordia Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1896), 125-127; Max Burckhard, *Das Recht der Schauspieler* (Stuttgart: J. G. Cotta, 1896), 50-51.

organizations help secure fairer working conditions for women performers. The Housewives' Association (Hausfrauenverein) of Berlin, under Henneberg's urging, appears to have sent a petition to the GDBA requesting policy changes in regard to costumes, agents fees and pension rules for women performers. The request was refused, but with the suggestion that a petition for these changes be sent to the DBV.⁴⁵ On April 6, 1897, Henneberg presented her arguments a second time at a meeting sponsored by the Berlin branch of the Women's Welfare Society (Verein Frauenwohl) to which leaders of the GDBA and the DBV, as well as theatre critics, were invited, but did not attend. Henneberg began with an extensive description of how women performers' expenses commonly outstripped their incomes and followed with an appeal for assistance. She asked that a similar petition be sent to both the GDBA and the DBV and she called for the establishment of a summer home where women performers could turn for low-priced room and board during their yearly period of

⁴⁵ Vorstand des Vereins Frauenwohl Berlin, et al., "An den deutschen Bühnenverein, zu Händen des Herrn Dr. Bürkhardt, Wien, k. u. k. Hoftheater," *Frauenbewegung* 3 (15 May 1897): 105.

unemployment.⁴⁶ The lecture was made the subject of the Discussion Club meeting led by Minna Cauer the following week, and the Women's Welfare Society formed a committee to organize the requested petition. The suggestion of a summer home was disregarded, but in early May, the Women's Welfare Society submitted a petition signed by fifteen German women's groups to the DBV with five suggestions for the improvement of the working conditions of actresses: 1) that every theatre manager be required to establish a collection of historic women's costumes; 2) that payment of agents' fees be shared by the management and the performer; 3) that the GDBA pension fund rules be changed to allow women opera singers to enter the program until age 25, instead of age 20; 4) that women performers who discontinued their careers upon marriage receive at least one third of their contributions to the pension fund returned to them; and 5) that the age at which women performers be allowed to begin collecting their pension be set at age fifty, instead of age sixty. Although the first two, more far-reaching requests addressed to managers of the DBV were ignored, after the request for changes in pension

⁴⁶ "Verein Frauenwohl, Berlin," *Frauenbewegung* 3 (1 April 1897): 78; Henriette Goldschmidt, "Verein Frauenwohl, Berlin," *Frauenbewegung* 3 (15 April 1897): 86; Anna Henneberg, "Volksoper als Kulturausgabe, und die Stellung der Frau am Theater," second installment, *Frauenbewegung* 3 (1 June 1897): 117.

program rules were sent to the GDBA in November of 1897 by the Women's Welfare Society, some changes along the lines of those requested in the petition were eventually adopted by the GDBA Pension Committee.⁴⁷ The results are significant as the first, if limited, victory among efforts to improve actresses' working conditions.

By the turn of the century, the German women's movement had gained considerable momentum, but it was hampered by a split into two distinct factions, one bourgeois, the other working-class and socialist. They were contemporarily referred to as the *Frauenbewegung* (women's or ladies' movement) and the *Arbeiterinnenbewegung* (women workers' movement) by their participants. The larger public, however, recognized little or no difference between these groups, which were, in turn, made up of subfactions with varied goals and tactics.⁴⁸

The bourgeois feminist movement was driven by

⁴⁷ Vorstand des Vereins Frauenwohl Berlin, et al. "An den deutschen Bühnenverein," 105; Kellen, *Die Not unsere Schauspielerinnen*, 142-143; "Aus der Frauenbewegung," *Frauenbewegung* 4 (1 January 1898): 7.

⁴⁸ Jean H. Quataert, *Reluctant Feminists: In German Social Democracy, 1885-1917* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1979), 60-79.

middle-class women, many of them employed in white collar jobs as teachers, clerks, or skilled workers. Having started in the 1830s and 1840s with the promotion of better children's schools, the middle-class women's movement turned its energies toward equal opportunities for women in higher education and professions such as medicine, law, and teaching. Following the establishment of the National German Women's Association (1865) in Leipzig and the Association for the Promotion of the Gainful Employment of Women (1866) in Berlin, the number of bourgeois women's groups multiplied quickly, addressing women's education and job training, charitable and socio-economic causes, temperance, suffrage, and legal protection for women.⁴⁹

Socialist feminists, under the radical leadership of Clara Zetkin, focused on raising the consciousness of the women proletariat, preparing them to take part in an anticipated social revolution. Their work was divided between the promotion of legislative social reform of factory work for women and the enlisting of women in trade unions and in socialist women's organizations and educational clubs. The *Arbeiterinnenbewegung*

⁴⁹ Charlotte Muenzer, "Die Frauenorganisationen in Deutschland," *Frauen-Zukunft* 1 (1910): 636-639, 711-714. According to Muenzer, the Allgemeine Deutscher Frauenverein included working-class women among its members from its beginnings, but the Association for the promotion of the Gainful Employment of Women did not allow working-class members until 1877.

was at its most active stage between 1900 and the start of the first World War.

Both movements had sizeable memberships and underwent tremendous growth between 1899 and 1919. At the turn of the century, according to Gordon A. Craig, 850 women's rights groups were already operating in Germany with combined membership of near 1,000,000.⁵⁰ The Alliance of German Women's Associations (Bund deutscher Frauenvereine), the umbrella organization for bourgeois women's groups, had roughly 70,000 women members in 1901. This rose to 250,000 by 1914 and to 833,900 by 1919. Although it began decades after the bourgeois women's movement, the proletarian women's movement had gained considerable force by the turn of the century. By 1901, the number of women in trade unions and socialist women's organizations was between 25,000 and 30,000. By 1914, women membership in trade unions and the socialist party climbed to 320,000. In 1919, it reached 525,000. Circulation figures of the socialist feminist publication, *Die Gleichheit*, grew

⁵⁰ Gordon A. Craig, *Germany, 1866-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 207-213.

from around 4,000 in 1900 to 112,000 in 1913.⁵¹

The class division of the women's movement partly explains actresses' long social dissociation, since they belonged to neither the middle nor the working class. In the 1890s, socialists helped to spread awareness among the German public of the extent of actress poverty to be found in the "theatre proletariat," but I have discovered no links between actresses and socialist women's groups. It was from bourgeois women's organizations that actresses received repeated assistance.

The connection between German actresses and the women's movement at the turn of the century was limited. Bourgeois women's groups were important in giving early attention to the issue of actresses' working conditions and taking the first organized action on actresses' behalf, but their interest came in a short burst of enthusiasm. Anna Henneberg's were the only full-length articles to appear in the women's movement journals *Die Frau* and *Frauenbewegung* addressing the financial hardships of actresses between 1896 and 1904.

Actresses seem to have made little effort to participate in the women's movement at the turn of the century. In her 1911

⁵¹ Renate Wurms, "Kein einzig' Volk von Schwestern," in: *Geschichte der deutschen Frauenbewegung*, ed. Florence Hervé (Cologne: PapyRossa Verlag, 1995). Some of these figures do not account for double membership.

book, *Die deutsche Bühne*, Charlotte Engel-Riemers claimed that “No other class of employees has been so completely passed over by the modern emancipation movement as that of the actress.”⁵² Franziska Ellmenreich, a leading actress at the Deutsches Theater in Hamburg, was referred to in a 1902 article in *Die Frau* as one of only actresses to regularly attend the meetings and lectures of Hamburg’s women’s groups.⁵³ One anonymous actress wrote to the editor of the GDBA’s journal, *Deutsche Bühnengenossenschaft*, in December of 1902 that actresses were reluctant to join even the actors’ union for fear of being labelled feminists since that label was an obstacle to securing work. Henneberg implied in her 1897 lecture that the participation of actresses in women’s groups was generally unwelcome and that these organizations should work to change that.⁵⁴ Ellmenreich, Henneberg, and the Dresden Court Theatre actress Anna Lohn-Siegel appear to have been exceptions among women performers in their involvement with the women’s

⁵² Engel-Reimers, “Die deutsche Bühne,” 147.

⁵³ M. Beßmerkny, “Franziska Ellmenreich,” *Die Frau* 10 (December 1902): 166.

⁵⁴ Henneberg, “Volksoper/Stellung der Frau,” second installment, *Frauenbewegung* 3 (1 June 1897): 117; A. Hardenberg [Anna Henneberg], “Die Stellung der Frau beim Theater: Ein Appell an die deutschen Frauenvereine,” *Frauenbewegung* 4 (December 1896): 174.

movement.⁵⁵

Despite their loose ties, women's organizations doubtless influenced actresses in many ways. Not only did some women's groups take action on the actresses' behalf with the 1897 petition and offer support for their predicament in their journals, but women's associations provided an important forum in which actresses could voice concerns and find inspiration and support. The few actresses involved with women's groups found in them an outlet for their frustrations, as in the case of one anonymous actress whose letter to the Women's Welfare Society protested harsh working conditions for actresses at provincial theatres. The letter was not published in *Frauenbewegung*, but it was apparently forwarded to the editors of the actors' union journal and appeared in *Deutsche Bühnengenossenschaft* in January, 1903. The numerous women's vocational societies then emerging across Germany also offered actresses models of organization. In addition, the women's movement provided a platform by which to communicate with the larger public. At the International Women's Conferences held in 1896 (Berlin), 1899 (London), and 1904

⁵⁵ Frida Katt, "Vom internationalen Frauen-Kongreß in Berlin," *Deutsche Bühnengenossenschaft* 33 (24 June 1904): 233; Anna Löhn-Siegel, *Vom Oldenburger Hoftheater zum Dresdener: Letzte Theaterbuchblätter* (1885; reprint, with afterword by Wilhelm Hilgendorff, Oldenburg: Manfred Paape, 1980), 276-277.

(Berlin), German actresses were among the speakers and the lecture subjects.

By 1899, the subject of actress poverty reached the German parliament. That year, socialist August Bebel addressed the unfairness of performers' contracts, with particular emphasis on their hard effects on actresses: "When one sees such contracts, one can no longer doubt that the majority of women in our theatres are forced to provide for their necessary subsistence outside of their profession, since because of the demands of the theatre, they are not in a position to do so from their salary."⁵⁶ Recognition of the extent of actress poverty in Germany and the contribution of costuming expenses to this poverty was widespread by 1899, thanks largely to the efforts of socialists, women's rights organizations, theatre directors and managers such as Schlenther, L'Arronge, and Burckhard, and the agitation of Anna Henneberg.

⁵⁶ Quoted in "Die Theateragenturen und ihr Geschäftsbetrieb," *DBG* 28 (28 April 1899): 194.

Chapter Two

The Costume Provision Debate, 1899-1904

In late 1902, a German actress working at a small provincial theatre wrote anonymously to the Women's Welfare Society, a women's rights organization in Berlin, to complain about the wretchedness of her working situation. The letter was forwarded to the actors' union and the following excerpt was published in January, 1903, in the organization's weekly journal, *Deutsche Bühnengenossenschaft*:

I want to offer an illustration of the kind of situation in which the actress working at smaller theatres typically finds herself and how she, in contrast to her male colleagues, who are better paid and receive their costumes provided for them, suffers under the unfair costume paragraphs [of the typical contract].

A classical play is to be performed, I play the role of a queen for which I need three outfits. I own two dresses with trains, but to make them appear similar to the Spanish costume I need Spanish sleeves for each and embroidered front panels for the skirts and waists. At the cheapest price, the cost of the satin, lining, thread, trimming, spangles, and pearls comes to about 26,60 M, along with 2,50 M for labor on the sleeves, because I would not be able to finish it all on my own. During the day, rehearsals for three separate plays are scheduled and so I have only nights to work on both collars and the panel. I work until two, one time until four, and one time until six-thirty in the morning. I have ice-cold hands and feet, and for my refreshment

during this strenuous time there is only coffee with milk and dry bread. So, just to prepare clothing which is to some degree suitable to the character for this one performance, I have to sacrifice almost 30 M, a considerable portion of my monthly income and, at the same time, work myself sick, while my colleague, at worst, might have to procure a pair of shoes.

I ask myself repeatedly, how it is possible that such an appalling and flagrant injustice can continue year after year, and find no other answer than that it is assumed that we will sell ourselves.

One should not demand from us costumes which we cannot afford to pay for from our salaries; we should have them provided for us, as they are for the men, and not be condemned from the start to a life of bitterest poverty with the prospect only of being, in a few years, worn-out or turned to a life of shame.⁵⁷

Situations such as this were not uncommon among German actresses of the period.

Costume provision was an issue that struck at the heart of the economic, social, and legal problems of actresses in turn-of-the-century Germany. How actresses' costumes were provided and financed became a subject of considerable debate in the years 1899-1904 among leaders of the actors' union, the managers' syndicate, the women's movement, and theatre critics. The issue spurred the creation of the Coordinating Office for Germany's Female Stage Personnel (Centralstelle für die

⁵⁷ Letter to Women's Welfare Society printed as "Die Umfrage an die weiblichen Bühnengehörigen," *DBG* 32 (9 January 1903): 10.

weiblichen Bühnengehörigen Deutschlands, which I will refer to as the Coordinating Office) in 1899, the first organization of actresses with an activist goal: to alleviate financial distress among working women performers. As a charitable organization which made donated clothing available for purchase at low cost, this group made an important attempt, if one also limited in its range of effectiveness, to mitigate the hardship suffered by actresses under contractual obligation to costume themselves from their own salaries.

Actresses' activism in demanding change in costuming practice continued to be restricted by their financial vulnerability. Their involvement was modest when compared to the work of women's rights groups, individual theatre managers and critics, leaders of the actors' union, socialist activists, and newspaper journalists. These other groups participated more actively and openly in the promotion of costume provision for actresses during this period than the actresses themselves. Beyond the charitable work of the Coordinating Office, actresses took little action in regard to costuming at this time.

Because few actresses participated actively or openly in the efforts to protest and change the costume provision system during these five years, the sources that remain to document their interpretation of the system's effect on their lives and the degree

of their interest in seeing it changed are limited to a small number of mostly anonymous journal articles. Managers were also largely silent in defending the system, with articles by Joachim zu Putlitz and Oskar Lange being rare exceptions. In describing the effect of the costuming system on the lives of actresses and the efforts made to change the system between 1899 and 1904, I have relied largely on articles printed in the GDBA's weekly journal *Deutsche Bühnengenossenschaft* and books written by contemporary managers, sociologists, GDBA activists, and critics. With the exception of Putlitz and Lange, all of the authors were highly critical of the system as it existed. They shared a concern for actresses' working conditions and pointed to the expense of self-costuming as the most immediately pressing of actresses' problems.

I intend to show the severity of the financial burden which costuming afforded actresses; to describe and compare the effectiveness of the efforts made, between 1899 and 1904, by the GDBA, women's groups, and the actresses themselves to find a solution to this problem; and to show that, although the actresses took limited part in open protests, their work in establishing the Coordinating Office was the most effective means of easing the costume burden exercised during this period.

I. The Costume Situation in 1899

The usual contract clause regarding costumes read as follows: "Male ensemble members will be provided with the historical costumes necessary for performances according to the disposition of the theatre management. Female members are to provide everything at their own expense, except for men's costumes, and are obligated to comply precisely with all instructions of the theatre management in regard to costuming, coiffure, make-up, etc."⁵⁸ In contrast, sixteen of Germany's thirty court theatres, among them the most prestigious and financially well-subsidized German theatres, supplied costumes for historic plays to both actors and actresses, including shoes, stockings, and undergarments. A small number of private and municipal theatres also supplied actresses with historic costumes. The first of these was the Schiller Theater in Berlin, having started in 1893. The Stadttheater in Frankfurt am Main was providing women's historic costumes by 1896, the Deutsches Theater in Hamburg by

⁵⁸ Kellen, *Die Not unserer Schauspielerinnen*, 92; "Zur Kostümfrage," *DBG* 32 (16 October 1903): 353.

1902, and the Deutsches Theater in Berlin by 1903.⁵⁹ With the exception of those employed at these few theatres, actresses were responsible for providing historic costumes that met the managements' expectations or face monetary fines. Actors, on the other hand, had usually only to contribute a pair of shoes, stockings, or a wig to their historic ensemble. Historic costumes, often made from expensive fabrics with extensive trimming, required a substantial initial investment, but were frequently adapted and reused.

Both actresses and actors at all German theatres were responsible for providing modern costumes. The Metropol Theater, a Berlin theatre specializing in lavish *Ausstattungsstücke*, was the only exception to this tradition mentioned in *Deutsche Bühnengenossenschaft* between 1899-1904.⁶⁰ Supplying her modern wardrobe was the most burdensome of the actress's

⁵⁹ g, "Ein Vorschlag zur Lösung der Kostümfrage," *DBG* 32 (16 January 1903): 22; Agnes Werner, "Zur Kostümfrage," *DBG* 32 (1903): 408; GDBA, *Delegierten-Versammlung der Genossenschaft deutscher Bühnen-Angehöriger zu Berlin am 8. Dezember 1904*, transcript (December 1904): 16; Hardenberg [Henneberg], "Die Stellung der Frau," (December 1896): 175; [Kruse], "Umfrage," (12 December 1902): 511; Max Pohl, "Zur Kostümfrage," *DBG* 32 (23 October 1903): 362.

⁶⁰ [Georg Richard Kruse], "Gefährliche Verträge," *DBG* 32 (18 December 1903): 450; Oskar Lange, "Zur Kostümfrage," *DBG* 32 (29 December 1903): 459.

financial responsibilities. Modern costumes had to be updated constantly, to be kept in vogue. According to contemporary reports, women audience members monitored the fashionableness of local actresses closely. Female audiences expected actresses to act as fashion models from their positions on the stage, to stay constantly on the cutting edge of fashion. Managers were eager to see that the expectations of these regular ticket-buyers were satisfied. A number of writers from this period in Germany denounced what they saw as the devolution of theatre into a fashion show.⁶¹ They criticized women theatregoers for judging actresses' performances more by their dress than their skill.

The cost of the actresses' modern costumes was substantially greater than the actors'. Over the course of the nineteenth century, men's costumes in German theatre had become increasingly formulaic. Actors' wardrobe expenses were generally kept moderate by the primary rule of men's costuming:

⁶¹ Herbert Roland [Robert Hertwig?], *Die Vampyre der Schauspielerinnen: Blicke hinter die Kulissen* (Chemnitz: C. A. Hager, 1893), 16; Stümcke, *Die Frau als Schauspielerin*, 70-72; Engel-Reimers, *Die deutsche Bühne*, 505; Lorenz, "Prostitution in der Kunst," 376-377; B.N.N., "Die Toilettenfrage moderner Bühnen-Künstlerinnen," *DBG* 32 (3 April 1903): 139.

“Nicht auffallen!” (Don’t be noticed!)⁶² In most cases, the actor’s costume requirement could be satisfied with a few modern suits. These did not need to be of the latest fashion and could be worn repeatedly for different roles as long as the suit was not distinctive enough to be recalled. In the case of a memorable suit, the actor would have to wait until the following season to wear it again. An actress could not wear the same costume for more than one production at a given theatre without substantial alteration.

This costuming system not only presented actresses with considerable financial expense but demanded sizeable investments of time, energy, and worry. The actress faced a continuous process of altering, remaking, and replacing costumes to maintain an adequate wardrobe. Economizing was difficult and laborious. Using inexpensive fabrics or cheap imitation jewelry to cut costs was made more difficult with the advent of electric light in theatres starting in the 1880s.⁶³ Costume alteration required dressmaking skill and substantial expenditures of money and time. In her study of performers’ working conditions, *Die deutsche*

⁶² Max von Boehn, *Das Bühnenkostüm* (Berlin: Cassirer, 1921), 430; “Zur Kostümfrage,” (16 October 1903): 353; L’Arronge, *Deutsches Theater*, 125; Engel-Reimers, *Die deutsche Bühne*, 507.

⁶³ Engel-Reimers, *Die deutsche Bühne*, 499-500. By 1891, the use of electric light was required in Prussian theatres. Willett, *Theatre of the Weimar Republic*, 24.

Bühne und ihre Angehörigen, sociologist Charlotte Engel-Reimers quoted a letter in which a heroine and *Salondame* in Göttingen writes, "I spend night after night learning and sewing."⁶⁴ The time an actress spent remaking costumes detracted from her time for role study, household obligations, leisure, and rest.

Actresses employed at smaller or provincial theatres were hit hardest by the self-costuming requirements. Even in larger cities, provincial theatres relied on a constantly changing repertory to attract ticket-buyers continually from a limited audience base, often bringing out a new play each week with perhaps two or three rehearsals per play. The pace of change was especially grueling for the actresses, for whom each new role meant a new set of costumes. Not only were the monthly salaries smaller among provincial houses, but the seasons were shorter, leaving provincial actresses with longer off-season periods in which they were not paid.

Actresses employed by the smaller, less wealthy court theatres also faced hardship resulting from costume requirements. However, the burden of costume expenses on their small salaries was eased by the custom of court women donating their discarded

⁶⁴ Engel-Reimers, *Die deutsche Bühne*, 508.

clothing for use on the stage.⁶⁵ Actresses in wandering troupes were less affected by costuming expenses than provincial actresses. Although the performers in these troupes typically faced the worst conditions -- pitiful salaries, bad facilities, exhausting travel and performance schedules -- their repertory was generally small and unchanging. The same costumes could be reworn for as long as they would hold together.

The cost of costumes, particularly modern costumes, was magnified by a fad for extravagant dress in German theatre that gathered momentum toward the end of the nineteenth century. For actresses this meant the use of more and more expensive fabrics, sophisticated embroidery, furs, jewels, fashionable designers, and multiple costume changes. Several sources for the trend of extravagance were blamed by its critics. The popularity of contemporary French salon plays and their German imitations were held accountable by many, and indeed actresses in the *Salondame Fach*, or line of business, were most affected by this trend. Elegant costumes were essential in establishing the ambience of wealth and high society amid which these plays were set. Situations requiring multiple costume

⁶⁵ Max Hochdorf, *Die Deutsche Bühnengenossenschaft: Fünfzig Jahre Geschichte* (Potsdam: Gustav Kiepenheuer Verlag, 1921), 145-169.

changes were worked into the plays. Lavish costume became an inherent part of the play's content, helping to define the character of the high-society coquette or the millionaire's wife. Critics claimed that costumes were so vital to the popular French "novelties" that they could determine a production's success or failure.⁶⁶ The fad for "French toilette" was the largest part of the financial burden for actresses in the younger lines of business (heroines, lovers, salon ladies, naives, soubrettes). Leading actors in salon plays, the lovers and *bon vivants*, were also expected to dress in high fashion and therefore had greater costs than other men performers. The costume demands made of actresses in lines of business for older women were not as great.

Blame was not only directed at the repertory, but at premiere theatres, such as Berlin's Königliches Schauspielhaus, for selecting too many of these salon plays for their repertory and furnishing them with opulent productions, setting standards by which other theatres and their actresses were measured. The extravagance of female stars, such as Sarah Bernhardt and Adele Sandrock, and those wishing to emulate them, were also held responsible. The fortunes spent on their wardrobe and jewels, the number of outfits, the names of their designers were reported in

⁶⁶ Engel-Reimers, *Die deutsche Bühne*, 506; Stümcke, *Die Frau als Schauspielerin*, 71.

the newspapers and became associated with the state of stardom. Aspiring actresses attempted to follow suit, trying to buy the aura of celebrity. Even for the most generously paid, the financial burden of meeting these expectations was exorbitant.

Competition among actresses was certainly a factor in fostering the trend of extravagant stage dress. Rivalry in the overpopulated line of work was intense and managers thrived from it. Actresses sought to outshine each other in costuming by adding more changes or more lavish outfits to their performance. They competed with each other in "*Glanz, Chik, und Kostbarkeit*" -- glamour, elegance, and expense.⁶⁷ Costume was a tool with which actresses could draw the attention of audiences, directors, and critics.

The expense of costuming could alter the shape of an actresses' career. The extent of a beginning actress's wardrobe collection was an important factor in the hiring decisions of managers and agents.⁶⁸ Financial limitations that prevented an actress from taking on roles with more expensive costume requirements could stifle her career. The consideration of potential costume expenses was an important element in an

⁶⁷ B. N. N., "Toilettenfrage," 139.

⁶⁸ Kellen, *Die Not unserer Schauspielerinnen*, 94; Lorenz, "Prostitution in der Kunst," 377-378.

actress's selection of a *Fach*, both at the beginning of her career or at a point when she had outgrown her current *Fach*. Moving into the *Salondame Fach* involved particularly large expenditures for costumes.

Actresses and theatre managers alike were constantly competing for audience preference. A production's costumes, often critiqued alongside the performances in newspaper reviews, were an important draw for ticket-buyers. An actress who skimped on her wardrobe risked the disapproval of audiences, critics, and her employer. Meeting a manager's costume expectations was vital to keeping one's job. Managers were regularly accused of giving preference to elegantly costumed actresses, often above more talented, less fashionable competitors. Critics asserted that in some cases, it was wardrobe alone that kept an actress employed.⁶⁹

The custom of self-costuming provided managers with a means to effectively depress actresses' working salaries. Despite the considerable expenses borne by most actresses, harsh competition in an overcrowded job market usually allowed

⁶⁹ [Georg Richard Kruse], paraphrasing letter from actress Maxi Sontoneff, "Die Umfrage an die weiblichen Bühnenmitglieder," *DBG* 31 (29 December 1902): 534; Stümcke, *Die Frau als Schauspielerin*, 71; Kellen, *Die Not unserer Schauspielerinnen*, 94-95; Engel-Reimers, *Die deutsche Bühne*, 505-507.

managers to keep wages low. Heavy competition drove actresses to outbid each other in costume extravagance and underbid each other in salary demands.⁷⁰

Costume Expenses

Of the stage performer's many business-related expenses -- wardrobe, agents' fees, travel and moving costs, management fines, union dues, and pension fund contributions -- wardrobe was by far the most expensive. Wardrobe costs included the purchase of costumes, hats, gloves, ties, stockings, underclothes, shoes, make-up, wigs, beards, and jewelry, as well as laundering, storage, and transportation. Assessing the level of costume expenses for actresses as a group is complicated by the varying financial success of individual performers. However, examining specific expense figures is helpful in identifying the degree to which costume expenses were a financial burden for actresses. A number of contemporary writers offered some estimates of the level of costume expenses an actress might face.

The initial investment necessary to start a woman's acting career was hundreds if not thousands of Marks at a point in her career when she was earning little or nothing. According to

⁷⁰ Kellen, *Die Not unserer Schauspielerinnen*, 94-95; Stümcke, *Die Frau als Schauspielerin*, 74.

director Alban von Hahn in his pamphlet *Die Bühnenkünstlerin* (1899), an actress required for her first engagement the following minimum wardrobe: “3 street outfits, 3 salon outfits, 1 peasant costume, 1 costume from the early nineteenth century, 1 rococo costume, 1 costume from the seventeenth century, 1 old-German (Gretchen) costume, 1 classical costume,” as well as “suitable headwear, coats, shawls, collars, and shoes (patent leather, if at all possible).”⁷¹ Sociologist Tony Kellen refers to a case made public in 1890, in which a talented actress starting at a well-known Berlin theatre was paid a beginner’s salary of 100 Marks/month and had costume expenses of 1,000 Marks/month.⁷² In a survey conducted by the GDBA in 1907/08 of its members, one actress was employed in the *Fach* of leading heroine and lover for a yearly income of 1,098 Marks; she responded to a question about her professional expenses by citing the figure, “In the first year several thousand, then less.” A soubrette with a salary of 2,000 Marks/year claimed to have yearly expenses of “ca. 500 M now,

⁷¹ Alban von Hahn, *Die Bühnenkünstlerin* (Leipzig: E. Kempe, 1899), 29.

⁷² Kellen, *Die Not unserer Schauspielerinnen*, 98. Kellen does not identify his source. He may have been referring to an 1890 article in *Die neue Zeit* which described the situation of an actress with 100 Marks/month salary and 1,000 Marks/month expenses as not unusual. K. K. “Das Proletariat der Bühne: Bemerkungen zum Fall Lindau,” *Die neue Zeit* 9 (1890/91): 46.

after the big expenditures of the first years.”⁷³ Kellen followed Hahn’s lead in his estimation of the minimal cost for a modest beginning wardrobe at 600-800 Marks. Engel-Reimers estimated a minimal investment of 1,000 Marks. Berlin singer Anna Henneberg estimated at least 3,000 Marks.⁷⁴ The required wardrobe varied with the prestige of the theatre and the types of roles played, as well as each author’s conception of what constituted a minimal wardrobe. However, the less adequate an actress’s wardrobe was considered to be, the more difficulty she had in achieving success early in her career.

The initial investment for actors appears to have been significantly lower. A *Heldenvater* (heroic father) responding to the 1907 GDBA survey, reported a salary of 1,300 Marks and expenses of 150 Marks per year, with “the first-time purchase of shoes, stockings, etc. of around 500 Marks not included.” An opera tenor explained having spent 800 Marks from his 1,200 Mark salary, “because I am a beginner and must purchase everything new.” In 1897, Henneberg estimated an initial investment of 300

⁷³ Engel-Reimers, *Die deutsche Bühne*, 526-528.

⁷⁴ Kellen, *Die Not unserer Schauspielerinnen*, 93; Hahn, *Die Bühnenkünstlerin*, 30; Engel-Reimers, *Die deutsche Bühne*, 162; Henneberg, “Volksoper/Stellung der Frau,” 116.

Marks for men performers.⁷⁵ The initial investment for wardrobe was high for men, but not nearly as high as for women.

On top of an actress's cost of establishing a beginning wardrobe was the cost of maintaining it. New costumes were necessary to keep up with fashion, to replace worn out items, or to give a fresh impression in a new role. Contemporary commentators offer few estimates of these regular seasonal costume expense levels, probably because they fluctuated widely with the status of the actress's career and the extravagance of a particular season's productions.

Tony Kellen estimated the cost of having a simple dress made at about 70-80 Marks. Anna Henneberg estimated the cost of single lavish costume, such as an actress would require for the final act of *Maria Stuart*, at 700 Marks. According to Kellen, the investment of 3,000-4,000 Marks for a new role was not unusual at larger theatres.⁷⁶

Responsibility for one's own costuming also involved a number of accompanying expenses. Actresses obligated to costume themselves were subjected to heavy fines when their

⁷⁵ Engel-Reimers, *Die deutsche Bühne*, 519.

⁷⁶ Kellen, *Die Not unserer Schauspielerinnen*, 93-94; Henneberg, "Volksoper/Stellung der Frau," 104.

wardrobe or hair did not meet with managerial approval.⁷⁷

Costumes got dirty quickly and had to be laundered often, at an estimated cost of 5-8 Marks/month. The weight and volume of an actresses' costume collection resulted in higher expenses for storage and transportation. Actresses kept their wardrobes at home and therefore required extra space in their apartments for accomodation of their collections. Larger apartments, of course, were accompanied by higher rents. Costumes for a given day's rehearsal and performances would be packed in a hamper and transported daily to and from the theatre for a fee of about 3 Marks/month.⁷⁸ When starting employment at a new theatre, actresses had to pay high transportation and cartage costs for their wardrobes. Engel-Reimers reported an actress having spent 47.50 Marks for travel to four new engagements between summer of 1908 and winter of 1909. The actress spent 51 Marks to transport her costumes during the same period. An actress,

writing in 1909, estimated the typical weight of cargo transported

⁷⁷ An example of an actress being fined half of her monthly salary is reported in [Kruse], "Umfrage," (12 December 1902): 511. Fines range from 1-40 Marks among actors' responses in Engel-Reimers, *Die deutsche Bühne*, 559; Julie Lucas claimed actresses faced heavier fines than actors in "Ungerechtigkeiten gegen die Frauen am Theater," *DNW* 38 (1909) 379.

⁷⁸ Roland, *Vampyre der Schauspielerinnen*, 17; Henneberg, "Volksoper/Stellung der Frau," 104.

by actors at 1-2 *Zentner*, while actresses transported 10-12 *Zentner*.⁷⁹ Furthermore, women performers were responsible for paying for their dressers and hairstylists. It was not unusual for managers at both private and publicly-subsidized theatres to deduct fees for these assistants, about 2 Marks/month, directly from actresses' salaries, while, at the same time, providing these services for the actors free of charge. Expected gratuities for the prompter, stage-manager, and other back-stage personnel cost an actress about 3 Marks/month.⁸⁰ Make-up and accessories which required frequent replacement, such as ribbons and gloves, cost around 6 Marks/month. In addition to meeting a certain standard on stage, the public expected actresses to present a fashionable, elegant impression in their off-stage dress, which also added to their expenses.⁸¹

The business expense deductions allowed under the

⁷⁹ Engel-Reimers, *Die deutsche Bühne*, 535; Lucas, "Ungerechtigkeiten," 379. A *Zentner*, or hundredweight, equals 100 pounds.

⁸⁰ "Die Gleichberechtigung der weiblichen und männlichen Mitglieder," *DBG* 34 (1905): 416. Larger companies provided hairdressers for actresses, while actresses at smaller theatres helped each other with their hair according to Engel-Reimers, *Die deutsche Bühne*, 560. Hardenberg, "Stellung der Frau", 176-177.

⁸¹ Engel-Reimers, *Die deutsche Bühne*, 499; Ellger, "Die soziale Lage," 69.

Prussian tax code offer a rough idea of performer's expenses. In 1902, an anonymous contributor to *Deutsche Bühnengenossenschaft* protested that the deduction of up to one third of both actors' and actresses' salaries for performance-related expenses then allowed was too low. The writer asserted that actors typically spent more than a third and actresses more than half of their income in business-related expenses. In contrast with the sentiments of this writer, in 1904, the Prussian state lowered the permitted tax deduction to one fourth of an actor's salary. However, in acknowledgement of their higher expense levels, actresses were allowed to continue to deduct one third of their salary.⁸²

The most systematic assessment of salaries and expenses for actors and actresses, along with other working conditions, was the GDBA survey conducted in 1907/08, the results of which were published and evaluated by Charlotte Engel-Reimers in *Die deutschen Bühnen und ihre Angehörigen* (1911). There are a number of problems with using these figures to estimate actresses' costume expenses in 1899, besides the fact that the survey was conducted eight years later. First of all, the survey pool was limited to members of the actors' union. In

⁸² "Zur gefälligen Beachtung," *DBG* 31 (3 January 1902): 1; "Sprechsaal," *DBG* 33 (19 August 1904): 298.

addition, the respondents were asked for estimates of their total yearly expenses. It can be inferred that a large part of these expenses were for costumes, but costume expense levels were not directly addressed in the survey. Despite these problems, the study represents the most complete investigation of expense and salary figures available within the timeframe of this inquiry, and I feel that examination of the results, bearing in mind their limitations with regard to the costume expense levels of actresses in 1899, is informative.

In the following table, I have listed the numerical averages of the reported salary and expense levels for each *Fach* category. These are followed by calculations for average salary less average expenses and a figure representing the percentage of the part of the average salary that was used for business-related expenses. The salaries reported among respondents to the question of professional expenses ranged from 54 Marks to 10,000 Marks/year for actresses and from 220 to 9,000 Marks/year for actors. Using a numerical average risks oversimplifying the diversity in the degrees of career success and consequent financial positions of the performers, yet this simple average figure allows easier comparison of the salary and expense figures of men and women performers and members of different

lines of business.⁸³ The first of the two figures listed under the 'Number of Responses' category represents the number of responses with regard to salary and the second figure the number of responses with regard to expenses.

⁸³ The figures in the following table were calculated from results presented in Engel-Reimers, *Die deutsche Bühne*, 510-534. The original survey was returned by 2,023 GDBA members employed by 250 German-language theatres and touring groups operating in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, and Russia. I have included only the responses of those performers who reported their salaries and expenses in German Marks.

GDBA Women Performers' Salaries and Expenses

<u>Fach</u>	<u>Number of Responses</u>	<u>Average Annual Salary</u>	<u>Average Annual Expenses</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>Salary less Expenses</u>
Heroines; salon ladies; lovers	66/55	1,997 Mk	1,236 Mk	62%	761 Mk
Naives; comedic soubrettes	37/29	1,317 Mk	743 Mk	56%	574 Mk
Chaperones, old women, mothers	31/29	1,663 Mk	702 Mk	42%	961 Mk
All three women <i>Fach</i> groups	134/113	1,732 Mk	972 Mk	56%	760 Mk

GDBA Men Performers' Salaries and Expenses

<u>Fach</u>	<u>Number of Responses</u>	<u>Average Annual Salary</u>	<u>Average Annual Expenses</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>Salary less Expenses</u>
Heroes; lovers; bon vivants	171/157	2,051 Mk	532 Mk	26%	1,519 Mk
Fathers	56/51	2,149 Mk	459 Mk	21%	1,690 Mk
Comedians	81/77	2,181 Mk	530 Mk	24%	1,651 Mk
Character actors	65/56	2,083 Mk	613 Mk	29%	1,470 Mk
Utility actors	88/83	1,253 Mk	278 Mk	22%	975 Mk
All five men's <i>Fach</i> groups	461/424	1,938 Mk	484 Mk	25%	1,894 Mk

These figures confirm that women performers were in a far weaker economic position than the men, faced with both lower salaries and higher expenses. The actresses in the heroine/lover/salon lady and the naive/soubrette lines of business appear to have suffered most heavily under the magnitude of their expenses, with averages of 62% and 56% of their earnings respectively applied to business costs.

As I have already mentioned, the reported salaries of actresses in this pool ranged from 54 Marks to 10,000 Marks/year. Looking more closely at the distribution of the expense-to-salary ratios of actresses, there are some interesting differences between women's lines of business. The majority of the actresses in the older women's *Fach* reported expenses that represented between 10% and 60% of their income. The bulk of the estimated expenses of actresses in the heroine/lover/salon lady and naive/soubrette *Fachs* lay in the 20-70% range. However, the most significant difference between the older and younger groups is the large percentage of younger actresses who estimated their yearly expenses as equal to or greater than their annual salary – 28% in the heroine/lover/salon *Fach*, 22% in the

naive/soubrette *Fach*, and only 3% in the older woman's *Fach*.⁸⁴

The problem of having one's expenses exceed one's income was not restricted to those with the lowest salaries. Two of the actresses who reported having expenses equal to or greater than their income were earning 5,400 and 3,100 Marks/year. The tremendous range of expense levels reported, especially among the younger actresses, indicates a substantial diversity of financial situations experienced among actresses as a group, but shows that the majority of the actresses in the survey pool endured financial hardship.

Taken together, the sources cited above indicate that actresses' business-related expenses at the turn of the century, of which costumes made up the largest part, typically represented about half of an actress's income, if not more, and that a significant number of actresses faced expenses greater than their entire income. These expenses hit younger actresses particularly hard. I can only surmise that non-union actresses were even

⁸⁴ The responses of these seventeen actresses who claimed expenses equal to or in excess of their annual salary -- ten in the heroine/lover/salon lady *Fach*, six in the naive/soubrette *Fach*, and one in the older woman *Fach* -- could not be included in the numerical averages of expense levels represented in the above table because of their mathematical imprecision. To this extent, the expense levels represented in the mathematical average above understate the expense levels described by the responding actresses.

worse off.

Alternative Sources of Income

Actresses typically facing business-related expenses of more than half of their income often found it necessary or advantageous to subsidize their earnings. Those who had no supplement to their income often turned to borrowing to postpone their financial problems. Others went without food or heat to minimize expenditures. Gustav Rickelt tells of an actress who, while she was engaged to perform leading roles at a large, well-respected *Stadttheater*, often had to eat at a public soup-kitchen because her costume expenditures forced her to cut living expenses.⁸⁵

In the 1907/08 survey responses reviewed by Engel-Reimers, 100 of the 239 actresses who responded reported that

⁸⁵ Gustav Rickelt, *Schauspieler und Direktoren: Sozialwirtschaftliches aus deutschen Theatern*. (Berlin-Lichterfelde: P. Langenscheidt, 1910), 74; Roland, *Vampyre der Schauspielerinnen*, 18.

they relied on some additional source of income.⁸⁶

Actresses Reporting Additional Income in 1907/08 GDBA Survey

<u>Fach</u>	<u>Number Reporting Additional Income</u>	<u>Total Number of Respondents</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Heroines; lovers; salon ladies	42	114	37%
Naives; comedic soubrettes	49	65	75%
Chaperones; old women; mothers	9	60	15%

Most respondents did not specify the source of their financial support. Eleven actresses reported assistance from parents or relatives, five from husbands. Six actresses gave dramatic instruction. One gave piano lessons. One actress claimed to have private wealth, another collected a pension. The degree of support varied substantially, from being able to eat meals with relatives to 500 Marks/month in income subsidy. Thirty-five of

⁸⁶ Engel-Reimers, *Die deutsche Bühne*, 611-613. In the following table, I did not separate those who earned their income in Marks from those earning salaries in Krone, Francs or Gulden. Two of the positive responses from the heroine/lover/salon lady *Fach* and two from the naive/soubrette *Fach* were from actresses paid in currency other than Marks. However, I do not know the number of actresses from the entire pool of respondents to this question that were paid in Marks.

the actresses surveyed claimed to be financially supporting another person, usually mothers, siblings, or children.⁸⁷ When asked whether they had any savings, only fourteen actresses indicated that they had any, and this was usually just enough to get by in the off-season.⁸⁸ Many actresses turned to borrowing to get through lean financial times. Henneberg claimed that “it is almost impossible under existing circumstances [for women performers] to get by without debts.”⁸⁹

Although it was claimed by none of the survey respondents, many actresses relied on selling sex as an additional source of income. In German society of the time, actresses were largely assumed to be sexually knowledgeable women, and theatres relied on the sexual appeal of women performers to draw male audiences. It was widely assumed that an actress would rely on the generosity of a wealthy “friend” to help her pay for costumes and other expenses. Socialist author P. Lorenz claimed that after a few years, actresses generally recognize prostitution as “the most comfortable, so as not to say the only, way to success

⁸⁷ Ibid., 614-625.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 637.

⁸⁹ Hardenberg [Henneberg], “Stellung der Frau,” 216.

in the theatre.”⁹⁰ Certain theatres were reputedly marketplaces of prostitution. For example, actresses in military cities were assumed to serve a double function. In the employment notices for available actress positions in these cities, a low salary offer would be coupled with the information that a military garrison was stationed nearby, implying that as a compensatory source of income. Actresses at Berlin *Tingeltangels* and variety theatres were associated directly with prostitution.⁹¹

To contemporary theatre critics, the number of actresses who resorted to prostitution appeared considerable. Managers Paul Schlenther, Adolph L'Arronge and Max Burckhard recognized that difficult financial circumstances drove a large number of actresses into prostitution. Julius Bab referred to actress prostitution as “the dark foundation” upon which the entire system of costuming was based. Herbert Roland called it “a bleeding wound of the theatre situation,” while Heinrich Stümcke

⁹⁰ Lorenz, “Prostitution in der Kunst,” 382.

⁹¹ GDBA, *Delegierten-Versammlung der Genossenschaft deutscher Bühnen-Angehöriger zu Berlin am 12. und 13. Dezember 1901*, transcript (December 1901): 19-20; Stümcke, *Die Frau als Schauspielerin*, 73; Kellen, *Die Not unserer Schauspielerinnen*, 97-98; Bab, *Die Frau als Schauspielerin*, 54.

labeled it “the most corrosive canker of the modern stage.”⁹²

However, an anonymous author in *Deutsche Bühnengenossenschaft* assured readers that the majority of actresses worked hard to pay for their costumes from their salaries, without resorting to prostitution.⁹³

As awareness of the complexities of costume financing for actresses spread, some observers expressed concern that one could not discern the morality of an actress merely from the elegance of her dress. Audiences wanted to know if an actress’s *grande toilette* was paid for by a wealthy lover or from her salary, aided by her own scrimping, sewing, or assistance from family. Street prostitutes in turn-of-the-century Germany often could not be marked by differences in dress from other women, but could be identified by their manner of meeting men’s eyes.⁹⁴

Audiences desired some similar test, some evidence from an actress’s behavior, something more accurate than the apparent worth of her costumes, by which they could judge her morality.

⁹² Bab, *Die Frau als Schauspielerin*, 60; Roland, *Vampyre der Schauspielerinnen*, 18; Stümcke, *Die Frau als Schauspielerin*, 84.

⁹³ “Zur Kostümfrage,” (16 October 1903): 353.

⁹⁴ Regina Schulte, *Sperrbezirke: Tugendhaftigkeit und Prostitution in der bürgerlichen Welt* (Frankfurt am Main: Syndikat, 1979), 20-25.

Theatre critic Stefan Großman suggested that if the actress sat in a risqué manner, cross-legged so that the audience sitting in the orchestra could see her fine hosiery, then she had to be a woman of loose moral character. Stümcke simply assumed that those who were untalented except in the worldly-wise roles owed their careers entirely to the patronage of rich lovers.⁹⁵

Critics of poverty and prostitution among actresses blamed them on a number of factors. Actresses' immorality and male audience members' solicitations were among the cited causes. Most often, however, blame was assigned to the system of costume provision, low wages, and the avarice of theatre managers. Managers, in general, were accused of either actively promoting or turning a blind eye to actress prostitution as a means of supplementing income because the custom was to their financial advantage. Actresses' outside income indirectly subsidized the managers' operating expenses. Those women who could turn to additional sources of income were not only cheaper for the manager to employ, but were considered more "piquant" for audiences.

⁹⁵ Großman, "Die Sittlichkeit der Schauspielerin," *Frauen-Zukunft* 1 (1911), 874; Stümcke, *Die Frau als Schauspielerin*, 74.

II. Efforts to Change the Costume System -- 1899-1904

In her 1896 article published in *Die Frau*, Henneberg advocated a series of actions intended to remedy actress poverty. Besides a petition by women's groups demanding contract changes and a summer home for women performers, she suggested the establishment of a costuming studio which would charge fees that just covered construction costs, so that actresses could have access to economically priced stage outfits. Although I find no evidence of her involvement with the project, the Coordinating Office for Germany's Female Stage Personnel was created along similar principles.

The Coordinating Office for Germany's Female Stage Personnel was established in 1899 in Berlin by a group of actresses, including such recognized performers as Louise Dumont and Franziska Ellmenreich, working in partnership with "ladies of society." Although there was no official connection between the Coordinating Office and organizations of the women's movement, it can be assumed that these "ladies of society" were members of bourgeois women's groups.⁹⁶ The Coordinating Office focused its efforts on charitable activity intended to mitigate the financial situation of actresses by making costumes available to them at

⁹⁶ Ida Gehrke, "Zur Kostümfrage," *DNW* 38 (1909): 339; Kellen, *Die Not unserer Schauspielerinnen*, 145.

low cost. The group solicited discarded clothing as well as donations of money for the construction or purchase of costume pieces from monied philanthropic women. Actresses could join the Coordinating Office for 3 Marks/year, giving them access to the dresses, blouses, skirts, cloaks, shawls, umbrellas, hats, muffs, fans, underclothes, stockings, shoes, gloves, veils, and historic costumes in the group's collection. In the Coordinating Office's first year, 261 women performers, over one third of the women working in Berlin's theatres according to the 1899 *Neuer Theater Almanach*, joined the organization.⁹⁷ Membership grew to 300 in 1900. In their second yearly report issued in April 1901, the group reported income of 2,206 Marks from the year's clothing sales. Member actresses purchased 1,241 items, with an average price of 1.78 Marks per item -- a nominal fee. Beyond costuming assistance, the 1901 *Neuer Theater Almanach* credits the Coordinating Office with aspirations of providing reasonably-priced housing, as well as medical and legal services. In the following years, however, the Coordinating Office's activities remained limited to making reasonably priced costumes available for actresses.

⁹⁷ From the annual report of the Coordinating Office for Germany's Female Stage Personnel, 1 April 1901, quoted in Kellen, *Die Not unserer Schauspielerinnen*, 145-146; *Neuer Theater Almanach* 10 (1899): 242-271.

A number of critics, while praising the intentions of assisting actresses in need, found fault with the Coordinating Office's methods. Tony Kellen and Heinrich Stümcke argued that charity was not the best solution to the problem of financing actress costumes. First of all, it was degrading for the actresses to admit that they, as working women, should require charitable assistance. Secondly, the organization could not begin to contend with the magnitude of the problem. Thirdly, they faulted the group for ignoring the causes of actress poverty.⁹⁸

Despite such criticism, the popularity of the Coordinating Office grew and its geographical influence spread quickly. By 1901, parallel organizations were established in Munich, Mannheim, and Frankfurt am Main. An office was added in Cologne in 1904 and another was operating in Hamburg by 1909.⁹⁹ With costume centers in these major cities, organized self-help assistance was made available for the first time to

⁹⁸ Kellen, *Die Not unserer Schauspielerinnen*, 138-139; Stümcke, *Die Frau als Schauspielerin*, 77-81.

⁹⁹ "Centralstelle für die weiblichen Bühnen-Angehörigen Deutschlands," *Neuer Theater-Almanach* 12 (1901): 179; "Centralstelle für die weiblichen Bühnen-Angehörigen Deutschlands," *Neuer Theater-Almanach* 13 (1902): 173; Ida Gehrke, "Zur Kostümfrage," *DNW* 38 (1909): 339; Redakteur S., letter to the editor, *DNW* 39 (1910): 93; Armin Osterrieth, "Anmerkung der Schrifteleitung," *DNW* 38 (1909): 800.

actresses across Germany.

Attempts to change the Costume Clause of Actresses' Contracts

The actors' union had no official connection with the Coordinating Office. Instead, GDBA leaders first attempted to assist actresses by pressuring theatre managers into changing their costume provision policies. Union leaders included a revised costume clause, requiring management to supply historic costumes for actresses as well as actors, in their first proposed standard contract drafted in November 1900. The contract was accepted by managers purely on an individual and voluntary basis and had little evident effect. Even at the small number of theatres at which the contract was used, according to an anonymous letter to the editor of *Deutsche Bühnengenossenschaft*, management often ignored their obligations. Actresses' costumes were not supplied and unagreed-to salary penalties were still made.¹⁰⁰

By 1902, as the suggestion of enacting government regulation of the theatre industry gained increasing political support, the managers of the Deutsche Bühnen-Verein agreed for the first time to negotiate a contract with the GDBA. A joint committee with seven representatives from each organization was¹⁰⁰ [Kruse], "Umfrage," (12 December 1902): 511.

named in December of 1902 for the purpose of setting common goals for potential theatre regulation and revising the standard DBV contract. At the GDBA annual national Delegates' Meeting in December of 1902, Max Henze, an alternate representative for the actors' union on the joint committee, proposed a list of issues to be addressed by the new organization: payment of actors when theatres closed for periods of national mourning, setting up a system for licensing theatre companies, clarifying the degree to which the laws set forth in the new Bürgerlichen Gesetzbuch (1900) applied to actors and managers, establishing an optional standard contract to regulate issues not covered by the Bürgerlichen Gesetzbuch, devising a voluntary set of house rules, creating local arbitration boards to mediate disputes between GDBA locals and regional managers, and establishing an official, cost-free employment agency. The issue of costume provision was never raised at this December meeting. However, one year later, Henze described the costume clause as the central issue under negotiation between the DBV and the GDBA.¹⁰¹

The explanation for this change in priorities appears to

¹⁰¹ GDBA, *Delegierten-Versammlung der Genossenschaft deutscher Bühnen-Angehöriger zu Berlin am 11. Dezember 1902*, transcript (December 1902): 28; Max Henze, *Der Dienstaufwand der Schauspielerinnen: Eine sozialrechtliche Untersuchung* (Berlin: Struppe & Winckler, 1904), 1.

have been a stream of publications directing attention at the issue of actresses' costumes, starting in late December of 1902. Only two articles addressing costume expenses had been published in *Deutsche Bühnengenossenschaft* before the December GDBA delegates' meeting. However, the costume issue quickly gained momentum in the journal, with four articles published over the five weeks following the Delegates' meeting. Tony Kellen's *Die Not unsere Schauspielerinnen* was published and critiqued in the late December 1902 issue of the union journal.¹⁰² In the fall of 1903, GDBA leaders such as Max Pohl, Ludwig Barnay, and Otto Kienscherf added their enthusiastic support of management provision of actresses' costumes in *Deutsche Bühnengenossenschaft* articles. Henze's book, *Der Dienstaufwand der Schauspielerin*, promoting reform of the costuming system, was published in the fall of 1903. Henze referred to negotiation of the costume paragraph as "the most important step to freeing women of the theatre from moral and psychic poverty and

¹⁰² Appearing before December 11, 1902 were [Kruse], "Gefälligen Beachtung" and K, "Aus der Frauenwelt." Appearing in the five weeks following the meeting were [Kruse], "Umfrage" (12 December 1902); *ibid.*, paraphrasing letter from Maxi Sontoneff, (29 December 1902); "Umfrage" (9 January 1903); and g, "Vorschlag zur Lösung" (16 January 1903). Kellen mentioned in [Kruse], "Sprechsaal" *DBG* 31 (29 December 1902): 534.

thereby to raising the entire actor's class."¹⁰³

The increased coverage of the costume issue was not limited to the union journal. As costume provision grew to be a major sticking point in the contract negotiations between the GDBA and the DBV, it received considerable press attention. Articles on the subject appeared in daily newspapers across Germany, including the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, the *Neuer Stuttgarter Tageblatt*, and the *Breslauer Morgenzeitung*, during the fall of 1903.¹⁰⁴ These articles reflected a growing interest and support in larger German society for actresses' problems and put pressure on the DBV to make changes. The little leverage actors had in persuading managers to accept responsibility for costume provision came from increased public awareness of the debate.

¹⁰³ Letter printed in "Umfrage," (9 January 1903): 10.

¹⁰⁴ Joachim zu Putlitz, "Die Kostüm-Frage der weiblichen Bühnenangehöriger und der Deutsche Bühnen-Verein," *Frankfurter Zeitung*, reprinted in *DBG* 32 (4 September 1903): 305-307; Karl Straup, "Zur Reform der Theaterverträge," *Neues Stuttgarter Tageblatt*, reprinted in "Zur Kostümfrage," (16 October 1903): 353-354; *Breslauer Morgenzeitung*, Oct. 14, 1903, reprinted in "Zur Kostümfrage," (23 October 1903): 361-362.

Arguments For and Against the Contract Clause for Costume Provision

Arguments for and against employer costume provision centered around a few key issues such as the anticipated financial impact on theatre managers and actresses, the complexity of the arrangements, hygiene, and artistic control. Managers were divided in their views, but most were not eager to change a system of costuming by which their production costs were substantially supplemented by external funding and labor.

Managers resistant to the idea of having to take on the expense of providing costumes warned that not only would many theatres be driven out of business by such a policy, but that those that survived would have to cut budgetary corners at serious artistic cost. Besides cutting salaries, managers would have to make up costs by cutting the number of chorus and orchestra positions and skimping on the quality of sets and costumes. Joachim zu Putlitz, manager of the Stuttgart Hoftheater, also warned of the impracticality of trying to enforce a costly costume provision through a DBV contract, since DBV membership was voluntary.¹⁰⁵ The policy, he predicted, would drive away a large portion of their membership and therefore have little positive

¹⁰⁵ Putlitz, "Kostüm-Frage," 306-307; Hochdorf, *Deutsche Bühnengenossenschaft*, 170.

effect.

The heart of the argument in favor of costume provision was that it would improve the desperate situations of countless actresses by relieving them of a considerable financial burden. For actresses, as with managers, this was an issue of money, but tightly linked with issues of sexual morality and social/cultural standing. The bourgeois revulsion for prostitution was a primary motivating factor for socialists, feminists, theatre critics, and managers alike in promoting management provision of actresses' costumes. Costume provision would help the "respectable actress" who paid for her costumes from her salary compete more fairly with the actress who exchanged sex for the financial support of rich patrons. *Deutsche Bühnengenossenschaft* writers also argued that men and women performers should enjoy the same contract privileges and that it was unethical to create contracts in which the expenses required of employees effectively allowed employers, in whole or in large part, to control the disposal of an employee's income.¹⁰⁶

By mid-October 1903, the DBV and the GDBA had come

¹⁰⁶ Pohl, "Zur Kostümfrage," 363; Ludwig Barnay, "An die lieben Kolleginnen," *DBG* 32 (13 November 1903): 393; "Zur Kostümfrage," *DBG* 32 (13 November 1903): 394; Otto Kienscherf, "Die Schauspielerinnen und Bühnengewänder," *DBG* 32 (20 November 1903): 407.

no closer to an agreement on what solution in the area of costume provision would be both fair and affordable. Negotiations for costume policy changes were complicated at this time by the results of a controversial survey.

The Actress Survey

In October of 1903, DBV manager Oskar Lange insisted that GDBA leaders were out of touch with their constituency, that actresses, in fact, did not want the proposed change in the costume clause. He backed his assertion with a survey he had conducted of actresses at unnamed “well-respected, premiere *Stadttheaters*” in which he had asked for their preferences in regard to costume provision.¹⁰⁷ These actresses expressed their desire that management not supply their costumes.

The results of the Lange questionnaire caused a storm of controversy. Union leaders reacted with a series of angry articles in *Deutsche Bühnengenossenschaft* angrily denouncing the respondents for deserting their less privileged sisters among provincial theatres who would depend on such a policy and for counteracting the efforts of the union’s leaders on their behalf.

¹⁰⁷ Agnes Werner named the theatres from which actresses were surveyed as the *Stadttheaters* in Königsberg, Freiburg, Danzig, and St. Gallen. Agnes Werner, “Zur Kostümfrage,” *DBG* 32 (20 November 1903): 408.

Ludwig Barnay, the GDBA's founder, patronizingly scolded the respondents for not thinking more carefully before replying.¹⁰⁸

Agnes Werner, one of only two actresses to write in support of costume provision without resorting to anonymity, was prompted to join the debate by her anger at the responses to the Lange survey. She was in the privileged position of working at Berlin's Schiller Theater, one of the only private theatres in Germany at the time to provide historic and peasant costumes for actresses. She attested to the great advantage of having management provide actresses' costumes, claiming that since implementation of the policy in 1893, management provision of costumes had reduced stress and improved the financial positions of actresses in the company. Only outer garments were shared and wardrobe personnel ensured fit and cleanliness.¹⁰⁹

Only one writer attempted to defend the actress respondents by questioning the legitimacy of the surveying method. This anonymous actress pointed out that the survey questions regarding costume provision preference had been phrased in combination with intimidating consequences: provided

¹⁰⁸ Pohl, "Zur Kostümfrage," 361-362; Kienscherf, "Schauspielerinnen," 407; Barnay, "Lieben Kolleginnen," 393-94; Hochdorf, *Deutsche Bühnengenossenschaft*, 170.

¹⁰⁹ Werner, "Zur Kostümfrage," 408.

costumes would not always fit, costumes would have to be shared, wages would be cut.¹¹⁰ This argument did little to counter hostility for the actress respondents among the union. Supporters of costume provision, whether angry or sympathetic with the actresses' response, urged the GDBA to disregard the survey results and continue negotiations with the DBV.

Negotiation Results

In November of 1903, DBV managers agreed to provide women's historic costumes to the lowest paid actresses, but insisted on a four-year delay before implementing the new policy. In September 1907, court theatres would be required to supply historic costumes for actresses earning below a set amount, depending on the size of the theatre's annual budget. For instance, a theatre spending over 150,000 Marks/year, the highest category, would be required to provide historic costumes for actresses earning up to 300 Marks/month. Theatres in the lowest category, with annual budgets of less than 50,000 Marks would be committed to providing historic costumes for actresses earning 80 Marks/month or less. State and private theatres would assume the same obligations starting in September, 1907, only after the management of a theatre had changed hands or renewed its
¹¹⁰ Eine für Viele, "Zur Kostümfrage," 363-364.

contract. DBV managers also agreed to supply historic costumes to chorus women earning less than 100 Marks/month by 1906. An actress concerned about hygiene and fit would be allowed to provide her own costume only if it was identical to that which was provided for her. The seven GDBA members of the joint commission reported the compromise at the GDBA's annual delegates' meeting in December. The commission's work was given the union's full endorsement and was praised in *Deutsche Bühnengenossenschaft* as an "ideal success."¹¹¹

The benefit of the agreement to actresses was limited. It did not go into effect for four years and then applied only to historic costumes for certain actresses at certain theatres. As GDBA historian Max Hochdorf described it, "Thereby, for a while, the poorest were helped, the bit players, the chorus women, and women dancers, those that suffered hardest under the burden of their costume expenses."¹¹²

Despite its shortcomings, the agreement produced some positive results. The number of theatres supplying historic

¹¹¹ "Die Lieferung der historischen Kostüme für die weiblichen Bühnengehörigen," *DBG* 36 (20 September 1907): 325; Hochdorf, *Deutsche Bühnengenossenschaft*, 170-171; "Die 32. Vertreter-Versammlung," *DBG* 32 (18 December 1903): 449.

¹¹² Hochdorf, *Deutsche Bühnengenossenschaft*, 170.

costumes for women grew from eighteen in 1899 to forty-two in 1907/08: twenty-nine court theatres and thirteen private or municipal theatres. In addition, the debate seems to have inspired the management of a number of theatres to augment their costume provision policies voluntarily. By 1907/08, fourteen theatres had begun supplying at least some modern costumes for their actresses.

In 1907/08, according to the GDBA survey results published by Engel-Reimers, modern and historic costumes were provided for actresses at the following theatres:

Deutsches Theater, Berlin	Friedrich Wilhelmstädtisches
Neues Schauspielhaus, Berlin	Schauspielhaus, Berlin
Komischer Oper, Berlin	Stadttheater, Dortmund
Schauspielhaus, Düsseldorf	Stadttheater, Freiburg i. Br.
Vereinigte Stadttheater, Frankfurt a. M.	Deutsches Schauspielhaus, Hamburg
Hoftheater, Schwerin	

The following theatres provided all historic and some part of the modern costumes to actresses:

Lessing Theater, Berlin -- supplied part of modern costumes
or a costume allowance

Schiller Theater, Berlin -- supplied modern costumes to low-
salaried actresses and all chorus

Stadttheater, Leipzig -- supplied some modern costumes
 Hoftheater, Stuttgart -- supplied an allowance for modern
 costumes

All court theatres provided actresses and women chorus members with historic costumes, except the Hannover Hoftheater which supplied no costumes for the women in its ensemble.¹¹³ In addition, according to a *Deutsche Bühnengenossenschaft* article, the provincial Bonn Stadttheater was providing costumes to actresses in secondary lines of business and, when necessary, leading lines of business in 1907.¹¹⁴ Although the growth in the number of theatres providing costumes was an important change, in 1907/08, the large majority of German actresses still worked at theatres which provided no costumes for women performers.

Chapter Summary

The issue of costume provision was exceptional in that it inspired actresses to organize for the first time to solve a work-related problem. However, fear of professional repercussions

¹¹³ Engel-Reimers, *Die deutsche Bühne*, 502.

¹¹⁴ "Spielhonorare -- Vorproben -- Kostümlieferung usw.," *DBG* 36 (21 December 1907): 431.

continued to prevent them from joining the activist efforts of the actors' union in sizable numbers, even as those efforts were exerted on their behalf. Very few actresses participated in the debate over costume provision reform. Of the sixteen articles appearing in *Deutsche Bühnengenossenschaft* in 1902 and 1903 addressing costume expenses or costume provision, only six appear to have been written by actresses. All of these women wrote anonymously except two, Agnes Werner and Maxi Sontoneff.

Although they were few in number, all of the actresses who expressed themselves in *Deutsche Bühnengenossenschaft* on the issue were passionate in their promotion of management provision of costumes. However, it is unclear how much support the drive for costume provision enjoyed among the large majority of German actresses who did not participate in the debate. Proponents of costume provision discussed numerous potential actress fears, including poor costume quality, fit and hygiene, as well as threatened salary cuts of up to 30% if managerial costume provision was made mandatory. Many actresses may have hesitated to relinquish control over their personal presentation in exchange for uncertain benefits.

The attempts of union leaders and actresses to secure improvements in the costuming situations of women performers

complemented each other well. Actresses focused on immediate practical assistance, while union leaders concentrated on eliminating an important source of the problem. However, these activities were far from coordinated. The two groups remained distanced from each other in their efforts. Few actresses participated openly in the contract debate and the GDBA had no official connection with the Coordinating Office.

The detachment between the actresses and the GDBA grew still greater after the disclosure of the Lange survey results. A lingering resentment among union leaders of the actresses' lack of support was displayed in 1904, when GDBA President Max Pohl argued against women members being given the right to stand for election as union representatives on the grounds of their gross mishandling of the costume issue.¹¹⁵ This estrangement between actresses and their union was not fully cleared up until 1910, when actresses first organized within the union structure.

Despite all of the criticism of their action and lack of action, in establishing the Coordinating Office, a small number of organized actresses made a substantial impact on the lives of women performers. In his 1912 evaluation of working problems of theatre employees, sociologist Johann Friedrich Bubendey referred to the Coordinating Office's work as the single successful
¹¹⁵ GDBA, *Delegirten-Versammlung* (1904), 25.

attempt to alleviate the socioeconomic disadvantages of performers prior to 1909.¹¹⁶ Although admittedly only a palliative for an abusive system, the Coordinating Office provided the only effective form of help that was available to actresses struggling under burdensome costume expenses between 1899 and 1904.

¹¹⁶ Johann Friedrich Bubendey, *Soziale Schäden im Arbeitnehmertum des deutschen Bühnengewerbes und ihre Abwendung durch Selbsthilfe und Staat: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der sozialen Bühnenbewegung* (Leipzig: Wilhelm Engelmann, 1912), 41.

Chapter Three

The Structural Expansion of the Actresses' Movement, 1904-1910

The years 1909 and 1910 were a turning point for the actresses' movement. For the first time actresses demonstrated publicly, in large numbers and in cities across the country. This sudden spurt of activism culminated in the formation of the Women's Committee in 1910, the first organization of German actresses attempting to improve the working conditions of women in theatre.

This period of actress activism was preceded by years of silence. Public discussion in Germany of actress issues had virtually disappeared between 1904 and 1908. The hesitance of actresses to step forward in significant numbers and agitate publicly for costume provision reform in 1903 had alienated them not only from the leadership of the GDBA but from women's groups as well.¹¹⁷

Several factors contributed to the renewal of interest in actress issues starting in 1909. First of all, the number of

¹¹⁷ Minna Cauer speech at actress meeting on March 1 and 2, 1910, "Die sozialen Probleme im Leben der Schauspielerin," 39 *DNW* (1910) 264.

actresses involved in protest grew quickly following the emergence of a few eloquent actress spokespersons, such as Hedwig Wangel, Irene Pangoff and Anna Rubner. Star actresses, such as Rosa Bertens and Irene Triesch, also began attending actress rallies and speaking on behalf of reforms. At the same time, the participation of women in unions had increased significantly across Germany. As public support grew for the passage of theatre industry regulation that would provide worker protections, important proponents of the legislation, such as Reichstag Representative Maximilian Pfeiffer, directed considerable attention to the situations of actresses.

However, the most important factor contributing to the renewal of interest in actress issues was the full reconciliation of actresses with bourgeois feminists and union leaders in 1909. Actress activism flourished under the nurturing of these highly organized and politically active groups. They helped actresses in practical ways by providing forums for actresses' political expression in their journals and meetings. More importantly, connections with these groups exposed actresses to the provocative ideas of the feminist and labor movements.

With the sudden increase in political participation among women performers in 1909 and 1910, actress activists had to decide how they would structure their activities and present

themselves to society. Actress activists agreed that they would benefit from the formation of an organization to represent their political concerns, but were divided in their opinions as to whether or how closely they should ally themselves with organizations such as the GDBA and the Women's Welfare Society. In establishing the Women's Committee in 1910, actresses decided to align themselves with both feminists and unionists and defined themselves as working women participating in the great social movements of their day.

Actresses Organizing within the Union

Although women had the right to membership in the GDBA from its origins in 1871 and the right to vote for union officials, they were excluded from the organization's leadership. Women members were barred from every kind of elected office -- administrative positions in their local branches, the office of local representative at the annual national Delegates' Meeting, and seats on the Central Board and the Pension Committee, the union's governing bodies. Actresses thereby participated only indirectly in union decisions. The only direct access to decision-making actresses could exercise was to present petitions to the gathered representatives at the annual Delegates' Meeting. Occasionally, actresses would write articles for the *Deutsche*

Bühnengenossenschaft. However, when in 1900 the actress Amalie von Ettner submitted an article to the editors of the *Deutsche Bühnengenossenschaft* to protest the dismissal paragraph in DBV contracts, the article was printed with the patronizing disclaimer:

The dismissal paragraph in our contracts has been already, as is well known, the subject of debate on repeated occasions that unfortunately have not yet led to a satisfactory result. The question has been thoroughly aired at our Delegates' Meetings and in the gatherings of the Bühnen-Verein -- and it cannot be allowed to appear as if, with the publication of the following article from the pen of Miss v. Ettner, we wanted to represent those efforts as irrelevant or even indolent and now want for the first time, as a result of this case, to sound the alarm! The lady can hardly tell us anything new, but we gladly want to grant her, as an injured party, a word in return.¹¹⁸

Actresses' attempts to involve themselves actively in the work and decisions of GDBA leadership were frequently dismissed abruptly.

In the first three decades of the GDBA's history, women's participation was largely limited to charitable activity. Actresses and singers with successful careers often gave large individual gifts providing charitable services for GDBA members in need, such as the provision of cost-free beds at hospitals for
¹¹⁸ Introductory comment to article by Amalie v. Ettner, "Unsere Sturm-und Drangperiode," 29 *DBG* (9 February 1900), 69.

sick performers or a cost-free home for retired performers living on union pensions. The guidelines established for some these charities directed that women members be shown a preference in the allocation of services. Performers Marie Seebach, Lilli Lehmann-Kalisch, and Klara Ziegler were among the major donors. A fund for the assistance of poor, talented actresses beginning their careers, modeled after a similar fund in Brussels, was started in Berlin in 1902 under the protectorate of the Hohenzollern Princess Carl.¹¹⁹

Actresses eventually used charitable activities as an early step toward activist organization within the union. In January of 1900, five actresses led by Louise Dumont formed the informal group known as the “Berliner Bühnen-Künstlerinnen” to organize a fund-raiser for the union pension program. Among their announced goals was a wish to demonstrate to their male colleagues by their effective handling of this effort the competence and solidarity of women union members. At the close of the year, the pension board thanked the actresses for the unprecedented success of the event which had brought in over

¹¹⁹ “Stiftung der Königl. preuß. Kammersängerin Frau Lilli Lehmann-Kalisch,” 28 *DBG* (20 October 1899), 426; “Bekanntmachung,” 29 *DBG* (23 February 1900), 91; “Von Nah und Fern,” 31 *DBG* (3 January 1902), 5.

10,000 Marks.¹²⁰

In general, actresses seem to have been supportive and uncritical of the union up to this point. In her speech to the 1904 International Frauen-Kongress in Berlin, actress Marie v. Bülow-Schanzer had nothing but the highest praise for the GDBA's efforts to improve the working situations of actresses.¹²¹

Actresses were seemingly content with a system in which male leadership was expected to act on behalf of both men and women members.

The limited political privileges women did enjoy within the union were rarely employed. According to discussions at the 1901 GDBA Delegates' Meeting, women members seldom made use of their right to vote.¹²² The apathy among actress members of the GDBA was a source of frustration for activists. In 1903, Agnes Werner despaired at the passivity of actresses during the costume provision reform debate, saying that "one can understand why the men do not allow us to work with them in

¹²⁰ "Berliner Nachrichtung," 29 *DBG* (26 January 1900), 38; "Das Bühnen-Genossenschafts Ballfest," 29 *DBG* (23 February 1900), 92.

¹²¹ Frida Katt, "Vom internationalen Frauen-Kongreß in Berlin," *DBG* 33 (24 June 1904): 233-234.

¹²² "Unsere Delegirten-Versammlung," *DBG* 30 (13 December 1901): 506.

the economic improvement of our position.” When the actresses’ movement surged with new support in 1909 and 1910, spokesperson Anna Rubner insisted that “the lethargy of the women in theatre, which has until now allowed untenable, deplorable conditions to be tolerated, must finally be conquered.”¹²³

The Granting of Passive Suffrage

The first demand to increase actresses’ access to GDBA leadership by giving women the right to stand for election as national delegates was made by actress Marie Günther-Brauer in an 1898 *Deutsche Bühnengenossenschaft* article. Her demand was rejected curtly by the union administration.¹²⁴ The first formal attempt to alter the situation was made in November of 1901. The motion, submitted by Max Pohl at the annual Delegates’ Meeting, would have given women members the right to stand for all elected offices of the union. The motion was withdrawn, however, before undergoing a vote and replaced with a motion suggested by Albert Patry that offered women members the right to hold

¹²³ Agnes Werner, “Zur Kostümfrage,” *DBG* 32 (20 November 1903): 408; “Die sozialen Probleme im Leben der Schauspielerin,” *DNW* 39 (1910): 269.

¹²⁴ Giesing, *Ibsens ‘Nora’*, 293.

elected positions only within the union's local offices, but disallowed locals the freedom to elect women as representatives to the national Delegates' Meeting. Shortly following the passage of this compromise motion, Pohl and Patry were elected as the GDBA's President and Vice-President respectively.¹²⁵

The issue did not come up in the Delegates' Meeting for another vote until 1904. The motion, presented by the Beuthen Neues Theater local, asked that adult women members be given full passive suffrage (*passives Wahlrecht*), the right to hold elected office. This time President Pohl voiced his opposition to the motion, citing actresses' irresponsible behavior in the costume matter as evidence of their lack of appropriate sense of communal responsibility.¹²⁶ The motion was voted down without further discussion in open retaliation for actresses' handling of the costume provision reform.

The following year, however, GDBA leaders attempted to heal the breach with actress members to a degree by offering women the right to hold national offices. At the 1905 Delegates' Meeting, when the Thorn local put forward a motion that would

¹²⁵ "Unsere Delegierten-Versammlung," (13 December 1901): 506; GDBA, *Delegierten-Versammlung*, transcript (December 1901): 16-17, 36.

¹²⁶ GDBA, *Delegierten-Versammlung* (1904), 25.

declare the union's intention of granting women members unrestricted passive suffrage, GDBA leaders Pohl, Patry, Gustav Rickelt, and Max Pategg all spoke at length in favor of the motion.¹²⁷ Their arguments centered around the tenet that since women were professionally equal to their male colleagues in their work on stage, it was only right that they enjoy equal rights in their professional organization. Speakers arguing in favor of the new policy carefully avoided using qualitative judgements of actresses' morality to decide the question of whether women members should be allowed to hold office, saying repeatedly instead that they were concerned with actresses' professional rather than private conduct. This was a very different approach from that taken by Pohl in 1901 when he was promoting this same policy change. Pohl had justified the change with the observation that the morality of actresses was no worse than that of women in other areas of society.¹²⁸ This time Pohl's arguments in favor of the motion were centered around the predictions that its passage would attract more women to the

¹²⁷ GDBA, *Delegirten-Versammlung der Genossenschaft deutscher Bühnen-Angehöriger zu Berlin am 14. Dezember 1905*, transcript (December 1905): 26-27; "Die 34. Vertreter-Versammlung," *DBG* 34 (16 December 1905): 463.

¹²⁸ "Unsere Delegirten-Versammlung," (13 December 1901): 506.

union and that meeting attendance and voting by present women members would increase if they were allowed to participate more fully in the organization's leadership. Pohl further admitted that it was a mistake to continue to punish all actresses for the misguided actions of the few who answered the costume survey. The motion passed unanimously. The measure was technically only an expression of the group's intentions. The changes in the GDBA statutes necessary to enact the policy were not made until the following year in December, 1906.¹²⁹

A slow but perceptible increase in the participation of women among various areas of GDBA leadership, with the exception of the governing Central Board, took place between 1908 and 1910. Olga v. Schmysingk from Stettin became the first woman representative to participate in the national Delegates' Meeting in December, 1908. Five months later, at the April 1909 Delegates' Meeting, there were two women representatives present and seven other women had been elected as secondary representatives, or *Stellvertreter*. Also in April 1909, Frau Müller-Rochell from the Vereinigte Theater in Graz was elected to the GDBA's Pension Committee and Berta Möller appears to have

¹²⁹ GDBA, *Delegierten-Versammlung der Genossenschaft deutscher Bühnen-Angehöriger zu Berlin am 13. und 14. Dezember 1906*, transcript (December 1906): 25; "Die 35. Vertreter-Versammlung," *DBG* 35 (16 December 1906): 434-435.

held the position of Provisional Editor of *Der neue Weg* in the autumn of 1909.¹³⁰

There is no indication in the GDBA's journal or the Delegates' Meeting protocols that actresses had any involvement in the effort to enact the new electoral right for women beyond Günther-Brauer's comments in 1898. In fact, General Secretary of the GDBA journal, Arnim Osterrieth, later referred to the initiative as an act of pure courtesy on the part of their male colleagues.¹³¹ The motives of the leadership in supporting the measure appear to have been both a recognition of its fairness of the suggestion and a desire to increase women membership numbers and participation levels at a time when the union was expanding its outreach.

Actresses may have been quiet, but they were still observant, and some became angry. In 1909, actress leader Hedwig Wangel expressed her outrage at hearing the arguments presented in 1904 to deny women the right to hold union office in

¹³⁰ [Arnim Osterrieth], Introduction to *Frauenzeitung*, *DBG* 38 (1909): 252; Hedwig Wangel-Stabernack, "Offenes Rundschreiben," *DBG* 38 (1909): 287; "Vertreter- (Delegierten-) Wahlen," *DBG* 38 (1909): 322-324; Berta Möller, "Kinderheim," *DBG* 38 (1909): 1110.

¹³¹ "Die sozialen Probleme im Leben der Schauspielerin," *DBG* 39 (1910): 265.

a petition for reforms that was signed by 119 women performers.¹³²

Limited Attention to Actress Issues, 1904-1908

In the years 1904-1908, there was a lull in the actresses' movement. Discussions within the union of actresses' working concerns came to a virtual standstill. After the costume agreement with the DBV had been reached in 1903, discussion of costumes and other socioeconomic actress issues were dropped from the GDBA's journal. Between 1904 and 1907 only ten articles mentioning actress-specific issues appeared in *Deutsche Bühnengenossenschaft*. Only one of these was a full-length treatment of an actress issue (the prejudice faced by married women performers).¹³³ The other nine articles were brief in their attention to actresses' concerns, made up of cursory news reports, actresses' letters to the editor, or asides in longer, more general articles. In comparison, sixteen articles focusing on actress issues had been published in *Deutsche Bühnengenossenschaft* in 1903 alone, seven of which were full-length articles. Women's groups similarly lessened their discussions of actress issues.

¹³² Wangel-Stabernack, "Offenes Rundschreiben," 287.

¹³³ "Verheiratete Bühnengehörige," *DBG* 34 (1905) 477.

Between 1904 and 1907, only one article about actresses' concerns was published in *Die Frau* and none in *Frauenbewegung*.

In addition to the small number of journal articles, there were a few books written by people not associated with the union between 1904 and 1908 which espoused actresses' interests. Theatre critic and historian Heinrich Stümcke's *Die Frau als Schauspielerin* and the pseudonymously published pamphlet *Bühne und Prostitution* examined sympathetically, with differing degrees of sensationalism, the working lives of actresses and emphasized the financial insecurity of the acting profession for women. The limited number of books and articles published demonstrates a loss of impetus in the actresses' movement, but shows that concern for the problems of actresses did continue even while many earlier supporters of actress rights had turned to other issues. The GDBA first renewed its active interest in the involvement of women members after the radicalisation of the organization in 1908.

Radicalisation of the GDBA

The Delegates' Meeting on December 10, 1908, was a turning point in the history of the GDBA. The confrontation between opposing political factions amid debate of the question of whether to accept a contract jointly negotiated with the DBV

between 1903 and 1908 resulted in a change of union leadership and initiated what was called the Stage Wars (*Bühnenkriege*), essentially breaking off open relations between the GDBA and the DBV. When the contract was put to the delegates for a vote it was rejected, despite the support of GDBA leadership. Leftists such as Gustav Rickelt and Hermann Nissen took advantage of the popular discontent with the negotiated contract to overthrow the moderate union leadership and take over the GDBA administration.

The DBV responded to the rejection of the joint contract by ending its earlier recognition of the GDBA as a representative of the acting community and adopted a measure declaring itself responsible for the preservation and promotion of the economic interests of stage performers.¹³⁴ DBV members voted to dismantle the joint court of arbitration (*Bühnenschiedsgericht*) and disallowed benefit performances to raise funds for the GDBA's pension fund. (The limited costume provision agreement made in 1903 was, however, maintained.)

Relations between the two organizations remained frigid until well

¹³⁴ "Die Delegierten-Versammlung der Bühnengenossenschaft," 1 *Deutsche Bühne* (1909) 104; "Protokoll der XXXVIII. (Außerordentlichen) Mitglieder-Versammlung des deutschen Bühnen-Vereins," 1 *Deutsche Bühne* (1909) 53-54; Else Lüders, "Schein und Sein im Künstlerberuf" 15 *Frauenbewegung* (1 March 1909) 35.

into World War I.

The rejection of the joint standard contract was a watershed that allowed the GDBA to redefine itself publicly and decisively as an organized labor group intent on achieving greater political leverage for its members. To do so, the new leadership established a twelve-person transition committee to oversee a series of structural changes in the union meant to reflect the activist ideology of the new leadership. These changes included the establishment of the new leadership position of Secretary-General, who was placed in charge of the newly renamed union journal *Der neue Weg* (The New Path), and the creation of a Rights Protection Office (*Rechtsschutzbureau*) in 1909 to protect the legal interests of member performers. The new leadership also initiated a successful membership campaign, drawing an additional 2,000 performers into the union between January and April of 1909.¹³⁵

Local branches outside of Berlin had especially large increases in

¹³⁵ Rübel cites an increase in membership of 2,000 from the transcript of the *Ausserordentliche Vertreter Versammlung* held in April 1909, Rübel, *Geschichte der Genossenschaft*, 145. An earlier article in *Sozialpolitische Rundschau* reported a recent increase of over 1,200 members, Richard Kirch, "Der soziale Kampf des Schauspielers," *Sozialpolitische Rundschau*, reprinted in 38 *DBG* (1909) 245; in February 1909, *DNW* reported membership more than doubling at locals in Stuttgart, Schweidnitz, and Würzburg as well as significant increased membership in Metz, Neustrelitz, Rostock, Thorn, and Wiesbaden. *DNW* 39 (1909) 184-185.

membership numbers. In addition to increasing their contacts to performers from within the organization, the GDBA expanded their alliances with other groups of theatre artists, joining the Austrian Stage Association (Österreichische Bühnenverein), the German Chorus Singers' Society (Deutscher Chorsängerverband), and the General German Musicians' Society (Allgemeiner deutsche Musikerverband) in 1910 to form the *Kartell der deutsch-österreichischen Verbände der Bühnen- und Orchestermmitglieder* (hereafter referred to as the Stage Artists' Cartel), to fight for joint socioeconomic and political interests.¹³⁶

The December 1908 Delegates' Meeting was the first at which a woman was sent as a voting representative, but no record remains of her thoughts on the important changes taking place within the organization. Actresses did not participate openly in the revolutionary events of December, 1908, nor in the restructuring of the GDBA that followed them, even though issues of specific concern to them, the treatment of pregnancy and marriage of actresses in contracts, were raised. Yet Rübel credits women members as being a driving force behind reform efforts of

¹³⁶ In 1914, the Stage Artists' Cartel was expanded to include Austrian orchestra musicians, ballet dancers and variety performers, Rübel, *Geschichte der Genossenschaft*, 147; L. Seelig, "Zum Kartell der Verbände der Deutschen Bühnenkünstler," *DNW* 39 (1910) 1527.

this period.¹³⁷

Actresses contributed to the reforms in this period of change within the organization in two ways. First, the issue of actresses costumes, which had been a source of heated controversy in the contract debate of 1903, continued to be a major point of division in the contract dispute of 1908. Secondly, actresses contributed greatly to the new activist spirit which followed the restructuring of the GDBA. A small number of actresses who began meeting in 1909 and 1910 to discuss issues of interest to them eventually formed a vocal pressure group, the *Frauenkomitee*, dedicated to the preservation of actresses' rights. The radicalisation of the GDBA seemed to act as a springboard for the actresses' movement and, at the same time, the newfound political activism of actresses fed the developing spirit of protest in the union.

Renewed Interest in the Actresses' Movement

Public interest for working conditions of actresses and actors heightened as managers and performers became more antagonistic. Their disputes were sensationalised in newspapers around the country and in journals of various disciplines, with sympathy frequently placed with the actors. In their discussions

¹³⁷ Rübel, *Geschichte der Genossenschaft*, 136.

of the theatre dispute, press commentators showed growing support for theatre regulation as a means of resolving the differences between actors and managers. As the working concerns of performers' came under intensified scrutiny, interest in actress issues was revived.

Political support for theatre regulation increased considerably within the Reichstag in 1909. Actors found a strong spokesman for them in Representative Maximilian Pfeiffer, whose book *Theaterelend* (*Theatre Poverty*, 1909) was highly controversial in theatre circles. Pfeiffer's book was written largely as an argument in favor of a *Reichstheatergesetz* and the legislation of protections for actors. DBV managers were particularly hard in their criticism of Pfeiffer, calling his work partisan and factually inaccurate. In response to Pfeiffer's accusations, manager Oskar Lange asked DBV members to submit information on the operations of their theatres to refute Pfeiffer's portrayal.¹³⁸ On the other side, actors frequently cited Pfeiffer's statistics in their arguments and defended their accuracy.

Pfeiffer granted a considerable amount of attention in his publication to the problems of actresses, including the first

¹³⁸ Oskar Lange, "Aufforderung," 1 *Deutsche Bühne* (1909) 46; A. Röder, "Zum Reichstheatergesetz," 1 *Deutsche Bühne* (1909) 93; "Eingesandt," 1 *Deutsche Bühne* (1909) 104.

significant protest since 1903 against the costuming system for women performers, and inspired the publication of a series of actress costuming articles in *Der neue Weg*.¹³⁹ Pfeiffer's comments on the situation of actresses were in no way new. They consisted largely of unattributed quotes from Alban von Hahn's *Die Bühnenkünstlerin* (1899), yet because his opinions were given wide attention, they were important in returning the subject of actress poverty and costuming once again to the public eye. Although a growing number of other parliamentarians publicly voiced support for regulation of the theatre industry,¹⁴⁰ because of his publication, Pfeiffer became the most prominent representative of the effort within government circles and was subsequently invited to speak at numerous important GDBA events. Pfeiffer was a particularly troublesome figure for managers because his prominent support of the actors' and actresses' position provided a strong legitimization of their efforts. It demonstrated that they had sympathy within the government

¹³⁹ "Zur Kostümfrage," 38 *DBG* (1909) 133; Marie Steffen-Wohlbrück, "Für Wahrheit und Recht," 38 *DBG* (1909) 416.

¹⁴⁰ Reichstag Representatives Müller-Meiningen and Osann spoke in favor of a National Theatre Law in 1909. Else Lüders, "Schein und Sein im Künstlerberuf," 15 *Frauenbewegung* (1 March 1909) 36; Hans Fischer, "Der Notschrei der Bühnenangestellten," 38 *DBG* (1909) 409.

and lent the impression of growing support from the general public.

Another book which drew heavy attacks from managers was GDBA leader Gustav Rickelt's *Schauspieler und Direktoren* (published in late 1909 or very early 1910). Many DBV managers displayed particularly bitter reactions to Rickelt's work because of his perceived betrayal in the handling of the joint contract. Rickelt had been a member of the joint commission that drafted the contract and, according to an editorial in *Deutsche Bühne*, had pledged to promote it within the union.¹⁴¹ He then turned around and led the initiative to defeat the contract. Thereafter Rickelt was regarded by managers as an impractical, unthinking extremist. Like Pfeiffer, Rickelt also offered an extended discussion of the problems faced by actresses' as a result of having to pay for their own costumes.

A further publication in 1909 which addressed working conditions in the theatre, particularly among actresses, was Vollrath von Lepel's *Prostitution beim Theater*. Although Lepel's brochure was largely sensationalist and moralistic in its tone, the book did seek to raise public awareness of some

¹⁴¹ "Schauspieler und Direktoren," 2 *Deutsche Bühne* (1910) 249; "Kundgebung des Deutsche Bühnen-Vereins," 1 *Deutsche Bühne* (1909) 76.

important working issues for actresses such as the links between poverty, costumes and prostitution, and common problems for actresses in marriage, suggesting theatre regulation of working conditions to curb the high incidence of prostitution within theatre circles.

Pfeiffer and Rickelt's books were important because they were widely read and discussed in theatre circles and laid the basis for much of the intense reform debate of 1909 and 1910. Their attention to actress costumes helped refocus interest toward the working concerns of actresses. That their work was perceived to be dangerous to opponents of the *Reichstheatergesetz* among DBV managers was demonstrated in the manner in which a number of them rushed to attack it in their new journal, *Deutsche Bühne*.

The DBV established *Deutsche Bühne* in January of 1909, immediately following the onset of hostile relations with the GDBA. The journal allowed DBV managers to present directly to the public their side of disputes with the GDBA for the first time. The establishment of *Deutsche Bühne* sparked an antagonistic debate between the two associations' journals over the severity of actor poverty, the necessity and purpose of theater legislation and the ethicality of each group's conduct.

Although the editorial staff of *Deutsche Bühne*

operated under an overt antipathy for the GDBA in 1909 and 1910, according to Rübél, rejection of the union was a contentious point within the DBV membership which almost caused a split in the association.¹⁴² Manager Baron zu Putlitz published a book titled *Theaterhoffnungen* (1909) representing one managerial view of the contract dispute. While critical of the GDBA, Putlitz rejected the open antagonism expressed regularly in *Deutsche Bühne* and expressed his support for a *Reichstheatergesetz* which would be fair to both actors and managers.

Actresses began to rejoin debates of working issues in the GDBA's journals in 1909, with particular emphasis on the concerns of women performers. The most important public discussion medium available to actresses protesting inequalities in the theatre work place was in the union journal, *Der neue Weg*, newly recreated with an activist mission under the guidance of the socially-minded, feminist-sympathizing political scientist Arnim Osterrieth in the position of General Secretary. In March of 1909, Osterrieth established the "Women's News" column, a regularly appearing section of *Der neue Weg* designed to provide an open forum for the exploration of issues important to women members. Readers were encouraged to contribute articles and letters.

¹⁴² Rübél, *Geschichte der Genossenschaft*, 144.

The "Women's News" column provided a means for nurturing the renewal of interest in actress affairs, a meeting place and proving ground for emerging actress activists. Although men were welcome to contribute to its discussions of issues and women contributors occasionally presented topics of general interest to both men and women readers, the "Women's News" column existed primarily as an outlet for discussions written by, for, and about women in theatre. In the months following its first printing, "Women's News" was successful in attracting the involvement of record numbers of women contributors to its pages. In short time, the journal section became an arena of active debate, presentation and exchange of ideas and arguments.

The Question of Alliances

As actresses began to develop their public voices, they struggled to identify themselves in German society. One of the earliest manifestations of this struggle was the intense debate that dominated the "Women's News" column in the first months of its publication over whom actresses should align themselves with and how closely. The debate centered around the strategic question of how actresses might benefit from association with women's groups and the GDBA or if actresses would best be served by remaining independent from either or both groups.

Some actresses favored the formation of a new organization independent of feminists or the actors' union created solely to represent the interests of actresses.

Most contributors to "Women's News" in 1909 and 1910 argued in favor of developing strong alliances with the bourgeois women's groups which had assisted actresses in the costume issue a decade earlier and were once again demonstrating interest in actress concerns. The heart of the argument of those supporting strong ties between actresses and women's groups was that the source of actresses' working problems was discrimination towards them as women. Emmy Osthaus, author of "Die Frau beim Theater" which appeared in the first issue of "Women's News," was attracted to women's groups for their perceived moral stature. Osthaus was among the actresses who rejected the association of women performers with prostitution and argued that convincing society that actresses were respectable, hard-working women was the key to reform. Osthaus inferred that for actresses to ally themselves with the other professional women in these groups would be a step toward changing society's perceptions of them. The editor of *Der neue Weg*, Arnim Osterrieth also pointed to the moral strength of women's groups as a strong

foundation for actress activism.¹⁴³ Other contributors emphasized the common interests of actresses and other working women: wage equality with their male peers, the combined duties of work and family, sexual harassment, and access to positions of power. Osterrieth saw the poverty of actresses as linked to the poverty of working women, more than to the poverty of actors.¹⁴⁴ Winning concessions on individual issues such as costume provision, he contended, would address only an economic symptom without changing the source of the problem: social prejudices against working women.

Three actresses questioned the effectiveness of joining with women's groups in achieving reforms for working actresses. Marie Leuchtman and Irene Pangoff both questioned the degree to which some goals of the women's movement (such as suffrage and financial aid to poor mothers) were compatible with the immediate working interests of actresses. Pangoff, despite her belief that actresses should participate in the women's movement, was the only contributor to point to one particular difficulty of the potential alliance. The women's movement was fragmented into

¹⁴³ Emmy Osthaus, "Die Frau beim Theater," 38 *DBG* (1909) 252; Arnim Osterrieth, "In Zusammenhang lesen!" 38 *DBG* (1909) 745.

¹⁴⁴ Arnim Osterrieth, "Eine Antwort," 38 *DBG* (1909) 451; *idem.*, *Zur Erwiderung und Klarstellung*, 38 *DBG* (1909) 637.

different groups with varying agendas (socialist, radical, moderate, and denominational) and, because of their unique social status, actresses would not fit in easily among any of these groups. Edith Beyer felt that working with women's organizations would not help actresses improve their relationship with the public.¹⁴⁵

Two of the actresses who published their arguments in favor of association with the women's movement in the "Women's News" column expressed their reluctance to work too closely with the GDBA. Emmy Osthaus felt that actresses should free themselves from their male colleagues and ally themselves with bourgeois women. Irene Pangoff was a determined advocate of creating a separate organization for actresses. In several *Neue Weg* articles, Pangoff urged actresses to be independent from all other groups, working only to a limited degree in alliance with the women's movement and the GDBA.¹⁴⁶ Pangoff argued that an organization made up exclusively of women would rouse actresses

¹⁴⁵ Marie Leuchtmann, "Eine Frage," 38 *DBG* (1909) 340; Irene Pangoff, "Anregungen zu einem 'Verein der Schauspielerinnen,'" 38 *DBG* (1909) 293; Irene Pangoff, "Reflexionen," 38 *DBG* (1909) 565; Edith Beyer, "Offener Brief an Fräulein Irene Pangoff," 38 *DBG* (1909) 604.

¹⁴⁶ Osthaus, "Frau beim Theater," 252; Pangoff, "Anregungen zu einem 'Verein,'" 293; Irene Pangoff, "Offener Brief an Frau Hedwig Wangel," 38 *DBG* (1909) 379; Irene Pangoff, "Ein Verein der Schauspielerinnen," 38 *DBG* (1909) 455.

from their political apathy and inspire them to increased participation.

Most writers in *Der neue Weg* supported the idea of heightened activism for the improvement of actresses' working conditions, but, not surprisingly, rejected the idea of an actress organization separate from the union. Some contributors favored the creation of a special group within the GDBA structure that would be responsible for looking at the concerns of women members. Others questioned the need for an actress organization, suggesting that women performers should simply work with increased activism within the GDBA as it presently existed, as equals alongside their male colleagues. Bruno Laaß complained that an actress organization would effectively split and weaken the union. He felt that the the "Women's News" column provided the only forum actresses should need to express their specific concerns. If an actress organization was found to be necessary, according to Laaß, it should be established within the present framework of the GDBA.¹⁴⁷ One actress, Frieda Ganzenmüller, felt that actresses were so overworked because of their costume obligations that they should not be expected to give the time needed for political activism and would best leave actress issues

¹⁴⁷ Bruno Laaß, "Ein Verein für Schauspielerinnen?" 38 *DBG* (1909) 415; Beyer, "Offener Brief," 604.

in the capable hands of their male colleagues.¹⁴⁸ Osterrieth argued that an independent actress organization was unnecessary because actors and actresses were fully equal in the GDBA and that actresses and actors shared joint economic interests. Osterrieth did, however, support the organization of actresses within the union.¹⁴⁹

Two particular issues complicated the proposed organization of actresses within the GDBA. First was the issue of non-member actresses and the degree to which they would be represented by any actress organization that were to be formed. A second issue was the proposal of a *Mutterschutzkasse*, a fund designed to give financial support of poor actress mothers which was popular with many women activists, but not with the GDBA membership as a whole.¹⁵⁰

All of the cited writers supported the association of actresses to some degree with either the GDBA, women's groups, or both. Even Irene Pangoff, the most dedicated proponent of a separate actress organization felt that alliances with both groups

¹⁴⁸ Frieda Ganzenmüller, "Frauen-Verein oder nicht?" 38 *DBG* (1909) 565.

¹⁴⁹ Osterrieth, "Zur Erwiderung," 637.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*; C.B., "Frauenschutz-Kasse," 38 *DBG* (1909) 454.

would be important. She felt, however, that actresses' first priority should be to establish themselves independently and to decide afterward which alliances with other organizations would best help their cause. On the other hand, feminist journalist Louise Faubel urged actresses to associate themselves with each group conditionally for as long as they shared the same goals. Faubel's pragmatic advice was to form subgroups with each movement and take what help they could from them.¹⁵¹ This seems to have been the prevalent view the debaters in "Women's News" and the actresses' movement remained tightly bound to both the women's movement and the GDBA. Ultimately, activist actresses worked with and received a great deal of help from both groups as the cause of reforming actresses' working conditions once again gained momentum in 1909 and early 1910.

Gathering Momentum

Actress Hedwig Wangel led the first major gathering of German actresses at the Berlin Theaterschule on March 23, 1909. The meeting was the first event in which actresses demonstrated widespread public support for reforms. Wangel expressed her anger at the men of the GDBA for waiting so long to allow women

¹⁵¹ Louise Faubel, "Die Schauspielerinnen-Organisation und die Frauenbewegung," 38 *DBG* (1909) 564.

passive suffrage and demanded that attention be given to the reform of costuming and what was called *Respekttage*, allowing women days of rest during their menstrual cycles. Following the meeting, a petition was circulated demanding full costume provision for all actresses and paid 'days of indisposition' without loss in salary which was signed by 119 women performers, ninety-nine of whom were working actresses.¹⁵² These ninety-nine actresses represented almost a third of the 329 actresses employed in permanent, winter-season theatres in Berlin in 1909. Actresses working at Berlin's most prominent houses appeared in the greatest numbers. More than half of the actresses in the ensembles of the Schiller Theater, Hebbel Theater, Lessing Theater, Königliche Schauspiele, Deutsches Theater and Kleines Theater signed the protest petition. The effort drew the support of actresses with widely recognized names, such as Rosa Bertens, Irene Triesch, Gertrud Eysoldt, Lucie Höflich, Ilka Grüning, Tilla Durieux, Adele Sandrock and singer Amanda Lindner, thereby increasing the effort's prestige and visibility.

Women's groups and the GDBA provided significant support for the meeting. Each group was represented by a

¹⁵² Wangel-Stabernack, "Offenes Rundschreiben," 287; "Agitation," 15 *Frauenbewegung* (1 April 1909) 55. Actress employment figures are from the 1909 *Neuer Theater Almanach*. Volunteer performers were not included.

speaker, the GDBA by Arnim Oesterrieth and the bourgeois women's movement by Adele Schreiber. In addition, the second issue of "Women's News" contained a report of the meeting along with a copy of the petition and the names of its signators. Feminists, besides publishing a report in *Frauenbewegung*, reportedly attended the meeting in considerable numbers. The support given by feminists to actresses was increased further in 1910, a visible demonstration of which was their sponsorship of the highly publicized actress meeting in March of that year.

Not only did the actors' union support Wangel's meeting, but it also sought to capitalize on the excitement generated from it. The establishment of the "Women's News" column coincided with Hedwig Wangel's 1909 landmark meeting of actresses. Although Wangel criticized the union for not doing more for actresses sooner, she also enjoined actresses to participate in active agitation. Oesterrieth, in starting the new journal section, used the opportunity to try to direct this enthusiasm toward the work of the GDBA.

Almost a year later, the midnight meeting of actresses and their supporters on March 1 and 2, 1910, in Berlin's Philharmonie was a watershed for the actresses' movement. The size of the crowd and the prominent speakers it attracted captured wide attention in the press, raising the visibility and

perceived legitimacy of the actresses' actions. Estimations of attendance at the meeting ranged between 1,500 and 3,000 people. Attendance was so high that the gathering was relocated to the main hall of the Philharmonie after the Beethovensaal proved too small for the crowd.¹⁵³ The event was organized by three Berlin women's groups -- the Women's Welfare Society, the Women's Suffrage Society (Verein Frauenstimmrecht), and the Maternity Care Society (Verein Mutterschutz) -- and was led by the well-known radical bourgeois feminist, Minna Cauer.

The importance and prestige of the meeting was reinforced by recognized speakers, which, besides Minna Cauer, included actress Rosa Bertens, Reichstag member Maximilian Pfeiffer, actor Emanuel Reicher, and feminist activist Adele Schreiber-Krieger. Less prominent speakers, such as actresses Anna Rubner and Margot v. Hallé, also took the podium. The speakers protested the contractual treatment of costuming, pregnancy, marriage, unpaid rehearsals and low salaries for actresses, while emphasizing the pragmatism of actresses working closely with both the GDBA and women's groups to achieve

¹⁵³ The original GDBA estimate of 1,500 attendees was revised to 2,000-3,000. "Die sozialen Problemen in Leben der Schauspielerin," 39 *DNW* (1910) 264; Arnim Osterrieth, "Die sozialen Problemen in Leben der Schauspielerin," 39 *DNW* (1910) 378.

reform. The GDBA's support was shown by its promotion of the meeting in "Women's News" and the presence of Arnim Osterrieth and Rickelt as spokespersons. Activist actresses Irene Pangoff and Margot Bienz, employed outside Berlin, sent telegrams of support.

Those assembled at the meeting voted in approval of a petition to the Bundesrat of the Deutsches Reichstag to address particular concerns of women performers in their proposal for theatre regulation: provision of costumes, observance of indisposition days (*Respekttage*), elimination of pregnancy paragraphs and marriage ban, and introduction of insurance for pregnant women, (*Mutterschaftsversicherung*). The group also approved a motion asking actresses to undertake vital self-help action as a complement to the sought governmental assistance and urging them to work with their male colleagues in the GDBA.¹⁵⁴

Numerous suggestions for the reform of actress problems were made throughout the meeting. The most fruitful was actress Anna Rubner's proposal to create an actress office within the GDBA that would coordinate the efforts of actresses across the country. One month later, the Women's Committee came into being.

What was said at the meeting to describe the hardness of actresses' working conditions and prescribe measures to solve actresses' work-related problems had been heard before on ¹⁵⁴ "Sozialen Problemen," 39 *DNW* (1910) 265-269, 306.

previous occasions. However, the forum was new, as were many of the celebrated speakers and the audience. This meeting differed from that led by Hedwig Wangel almost a year earlier most significantly in its far greater size and accessibility by the nation via the press. Coverage of the meeting exceeded anything that organized actresses had enjoyed before. Write-ups in *Der neue Weg* consisted of multiple full-length articles in the main section of the journal, rather than in the back pages of the separate "Women's News" section, illustrating the perceived importance of the event in the eyes of GDBA leadership. The meeting was not only reported in trade journals such as *Frauenbewegung* and *Der neue Weg*, but was given prominent coverage in newspapers across the country. With broad attention from the national press, the meeting became an important opportunity for actresses to communicate with the German public openly about their employment concerns.

The midnight meeting of March 1 provoked the first strong response to actresses' concerns from the DBV since the costume debate of 1903. The actress meeting and the debate that followed it exacerbated the tension between the GDBA and the DBV. Anti-DBV sentiment had been strong at the gathering. For instance, a number of anti-DBV comments, such as Rickelt's description that night of the DBV as immoral and hostile to

civilization, met with “tumultuous applause.”¹⁵⁵ Many of the speakers held managers, and particularly the DBV, responsible for actresses’ problems.

Once again, as in 1903, actress issues came to dominate discussions between the GDBA and DBV. In the weeks following the March 1 meeting, the journals of the GDBA and the DBV became forums of debate, criticism and defense. The initial response to the meeting from organized managers, in an anonymous *Deutsche Bühne* article entitled “The Night Performance,” was scornful and condescending in its attitude toward the participants and their goals. The feminists present were dismissed as well-intentioned but naive, knowing too little about the real conditions of theatre employment. Representative Pfeiffer was also criticized for his faulty understanding of the situations of women performers. Actresses themselves were made targets of the harshest criticism. The anonymous author accused them of exaggerating and sensationalising their problems while adopting a feigned modesty for the attending public.¹⁵⁶ The article provoked angered responses from Arnim Osterrieth and Stefan Großman in *Der neue*

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 304.

¹⁵⁶ X. “Die Nachtvorstellung,” 2 *Deutsche Bühne* (1910) 65-66.

Weg articles, in which they accused the DBV of evading its responsibility to look seriously at the problem of actress poverty.¹⁵⁷

Two subsequent articles in *Deutsche Bühne* about actresses adopted a less hostile approach. Ulrich Frank in “Künstlerin – Schauspielerin . . . Prostituierte?” and Hans Dassis in “Die Frau auf der Bühne” both admitted that many actresses faced hardship, but emphasized the advantages that theatre careers provided for women.¹⁵⁸ Frank and Dassis rejected the idea that political agitation by actresses would be useful.

Establishment of the Women’s Committee

The midnight meeting spurred the creation of a new organization concerned solely with the interests of women performers. A month after the actress gathering, the Women’s Welfare Society called a second smaller, closed meeting of women performers for the purpose of establishing a standing committee to examine and work to improve actress concerns. Irene Pangoff,

¹⁵⁷ Stefan Großman, “Theatersittlichkeit,” 39 *DNW* (1910) 346; Arnim Osterrieth, “Die sozialen Probleme im Leben der Schauspielerin,” 39 *DNW* (1910) 378.

¹⁵⁸ Ulrich Frank, “Künstlerin – Schauspielerin . . . Prostituierte?” 2 *Deutsche Bühne* (1910) 72; Hans Dassis, “Die Frau auf der Bühne,” 2 *Deutsche Bühne* (1910) 95.

who had led the call for the separation of actresses from the union in 1909, wrote in approval of the Committee's formation.¹⁵⁹ The seven-member Frauenkomitee, made up of five women performers and two feminists, led by actresses Angelika Frey and Anna Rubner, was immediately invited to apply for formal recognition as an office of the GDBA. Their application at the Delegates' Meeting in December 1910 was approved unanimously. Speaking on the Committee's behalf at the Delegates' Meeting, Marie Sera listed the work priorities of the new organization as follows:

- “1) Handling of the costume issue,
- 2) Advice and protection in cases of abuses that particularly affect women's issues,
- 3) Promotion of the union among non-member actresses,
- 4) Administration of a Maternity Care Fund (*Mutterschutzkasse*),
- 5) Working together with charitable groups to improve the living situations of single actresses, and
- 6) Spreading public awareness of social problems in the

¹⁵⁹ Irene Pangoff, “Zur Organisation der Schauspielerin,” 39 *DNW* (1910) 490.

lives of actresses.”¹⁶⁰

The group was independently financed through private donations and fund-raising, and so did not threaten to be a financial drain on the GDBA.

By associating their cause with the work of the union and women’s rights groups, actresses availed themselves of an established network of organizational branches in cities across Germany. In 1909 and 1910, support for the actresses’ movement not only flourished in Berlin, but extended throughout the country for the first time. The establishment of the “Women’s News” column in March of 1909 allowed actresses nationwide to establish a dialogue among themselves about their work-related rights. The creation of the Women’s Committee and its formal acquisition by the GDBA gave actresses access to the organizational structures of the union. The Women’s Committee was connected to each local branch of the GDBA by elected women representatives, called *Vertrauensdamen*.

Reports of actress gatherings in Berlin inspired a series of such meetings across Germany. The alliance of actresses with women’s groups provided an organizational basis for lectures and agitational meetings for actress rights. In 1909 and 1910, such

¹⁶⁰ Marie Sera, “Zur Begründung des Antrages des Frauenkomitees,” 39 *DNW* (1910) 1506.

meetings were sponsored by women's groups in Heidelberg, Breslau, and Magdeburg. Another actress protest meeting, apparently organized without the aid of local women's groups, was held in Düsseldorf.¹⁶¹ Attendance at these meetings by women performers was inconsistent. Actresses showed up in large numbers at Breslau and Düsseldorf, but no actresses appeared to have attended the Heidelberg and Magdeburg meetings beyond those who had been invited to speak.

Leaders of the women's movement gave actress issues a high priority in 1910. The national umbrella organization of bourgeois women's groups, the Alliance of German Women's Associations (*Bund deutscher Frauenvereine*) petitioned the Reichstag to pass national theatre regulations that would include protections for actresses and voted to establish a commission of "specialist advisor women" to inform the group on actress issues.¹⁶²

¹⁶¹ "Die Berufslage der Schauspielerin," 39 *DNW* (1910) 292; "Die IX. Generalversammlung des Bundes deutscher Frauenvereine – ein Markstein in der Geschichte der sozialen Entwicklung der deutschen Schauspielerinnen," 39 *DNW* (1910) 1224; "Die soziale Lage der weiblichen Bühnengehörigen," 39 *DNW* (1910) 1537; "Allgemeiner Frauenverein Magdeburg und die Bühnenmitglieder," 39 *DNW* (1910) 1562.

¹⁶² "Die IX. Generalversammlung," 39 *DNW* (1910) 1224.

Chapter Summary

The depth of support from radical bourgeois women's groups and the actors' union fueled the actresses' movement and, at the same time, added to its legitimacy. The organization of actresses in formal connection with these associations reinforced the increasing social identification of actresses as working women and validated their connection to two powerful contemporary social forces sweeping across Germany, the labor and women's movements. The creation of the Women's Committee gave actress activists a pragmatic boost by providing them with established organizational structures through which they could coordinate reform efforts. Even before the founding of the Women's Committee, the support of the GDBA and women's groups for actresses' political concerns in their journals and meetings helped spur the increased involvement of growing numbers of actresses.

In 1909 and 1910, the political self-awareness of German actresses as a group flourished. This was a vital period of expansion for the actresses' movement during which it made significant gains in size, prestige, and scope. Actresses stepped forward in record numbers to participate in activist efforts to improve their working situations by writing articles and attending meetings and lecturing. The prestige of the movement was elevated by the support of star actresses, bourgeois women's

groups, the actors' union, and government representatives. The scope of the movement widened as affiliation with the national network of the organized women's movement and the establishment of the "Women's News" section facilitated the participation of actresses from across the country. As a result of actresses' newfound political self-confidence, they also expanded the scope of their reform demands from costume provision, to a wider range of issues including sexual harassment, motherhood, marriage, indisposition days, and retirement.

The new leftist GDBA leadership assisted actresses in their shift toward political activism by establishing the "Women's News" column in 1909 and inviting the Women's Committee to become an official body of the union in 1910. Perhaps less obvious were the ways in which the actresses' movement in return fostered the radicalisation of the union. GDBA leaders used the surge of public interest and support for actress reform to promote its own agenda of theatre regulation. The union provided support, structure and outlets of expression for actresses and, at the same time, borrowed energy and inspiration from the gathering movement. Actor and actress leaders each made important contributions to one another's causes.

One disappointing consequence of the closer association of actress activists with the GDBA was that it left non-

member actresses virtually unrepresented. By the end of 1910, the Coordinating Office for Germany's Female Stage Personnel still remained the only formal organization dedicated to providing services to all working women performers, regardless of union affiliation.

The fostering of actress activism by the women's groups and the GDBA provides only a partial explanation for the growth in actresses' political involvement. Another important factor was the increasing acceptance in German society of women taking on public roles formerly reserved solely for men. The largely sympathetic coverage of actress protests in newspapers across the country reflected a change in social attitudes towards performing women in particular. The heightened awareness of actresses' working conditions and changed perceptions of the social position of actresses among the public seemed to offer some protection to counteract the earlier vulnerability of actresses who engaged in protest. Whatever the reasons for the surge in activism, 1909 marked the beginning of the heyday of the actresses' movement.

Chapter Four

Expanding the Range of Actress Issues, 1909-1914

The actresses' movement underwent a period of rapid expansion and growth during the years 1909 and 1910. The number of actresses participating at meetings or contributing to debates of actress-related issues in the union journal rose quickly. The movement was mobilized and focused by a series of actress spokespersons such as Hedwig Wangel, Irene Pangoff, Helene Riechers and Anna Rubner and also garnered the support of respected stars, including Rosa Bertens and Irene Triesch. Important books written by Charlotte Engel-Reimers, Gustav Rickelt and Maximilian Pfeiffer offered extensive arguments and statistics in support of actresses' cause. Awareness of parallel activity among actresses in neighboring countries such as Austria, the Netherlands, Denmark and Hungary further reinforced their work. All of these factors contributed to the heightened energy of the movement and elicited greater attention to actresses' demands. In their new confidence, organized actresses began to expand their list of demands for workplace reforms beyond the sensationalized subject of costume provision.

Starting in 1910, the actresses' movement was increasingly defined by the GDBA Women's Committee. The

Committee led actresses in its adoption of new strategies for achieving reforms and represented their interests in official negotiations. Although the Committee was not responsible for introducing all of the new issues promoted among actresses, the topics it pursued dominated the movement.

The Women's Committee led actresses from 1909 to 1914 in their shift away from the earlier strategy of emphasizing the financial desperation of actresses and their closeness to prostitution and instead emphasized arguments that demonstrated their similarity with other German women. In their new demands for paid maternity leave, a shorter work day, the right to marry freely, privacy of personal information, and paid days of leave during monthly menstruation, actresses dealt with issues that were of common concern to working women throughout Germany.

Costume provision remained a vital issue and was strongly promoted by the Women's Committee, but after 1910 actresses changed their tactics, no longer relying on the threat of descent into prostitution as an argument justifying reform. Despite actresses efforts to associate themselves with the bourgeoisie and respectability, however, many of the issues taken up by actresses between 1909 and 1914 in the union journal's "Women's News" column were connected with the sexual lives of actresses and

thereby controversial. Actresses continued to be stigmatized and felt ashamed at having to publicly discuss their needs with regard to pregnancy, marriage, and menstruation.

In addition to readjusting their arguments in justification of reform, actresses changed their approach toward the means by which desired changes were to be effected. Following the lead of the GDBA, actresses no longer attempted to win contract concessions from organized managers, but instead sought protective legislation from the national government. In 1912 a non-binding proposal for a National Theatre Law was drafted by the German Interior Ministry (*Reichsamt des Innern*). The Women's Committee successfully lobbied for two seats on the panel negotiating changes to the draft. A number of the issues newly raised by activist actresses were addressed in the proposed legislation.

Pregnancy and Child-Rearing

An actress who became pregnant in early twentieth century Germany was typically subject to instant dismissal. Managers generally enjoyed the right to fire actresses immediately upon learning that they were pregnant without further salary obligation. Contracts allowed managers complete control of decisions regarding how long an actress could perform

with the typical provision that all “claim on salary or *Spielgeld* ceases from that day on which the theatre management declares further performance unpermissible.”¹⁶³ As a consequence, many actresses reportedly attempted the unhealthy practice of binding their midsections to conceal their pregnancies as long as possible. Furthermore, actresses tended to return to work after giving birth to begin earning money again at an earlier point than was considered healthy by at least one contemporary physician.¹⁶⁴

Besides the risk of dismissal as a result of pregnancy, actress mothers often faced problems in returning to play lover or heroine roles after they gave birth. Some actresses were required to switch to an older *Fach*. Unmarried mothers also faced potential loss of social standing. Prejudice was far from uniform, however. One unmarried Berlin actress reported having experienced no negative impact on her career and facing no change in treatment from either her employer or audiences when she became a mother. Another actress reported that the manager at her theatre

¹⁶³ Paul Mulzer, “Der Schwangerschaftsparagraph -- eine gesundheitliche und soziale Gefahr,” *DNW* 38 (1909): 414.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*; speech by Anna Rubner reported in “Die soziale Lage der Schauspielerinnen,” *DNW* 40 (1911):12; E. Forchhammer, “Die soziale Lage der Schauspielerin,” *DNW* 40 (1911): 507; Anna Bergé, “Eine Entgegnung aus dem ‘Leben,’” *DNW* 38 (1909): 640.

continued to pay her full salary throughout her pregnancy.¹⁶⁵

Employers with voluntarily generous pregnancy benefits appear to have been few, however. The GDBA acknowledged the need for reform in this area in December, 1908, when it rejected the joint DBV-GDBA standard contract. Among grounds for its decision, the GDBA cited the continued right of managers to instant dismissal of pregnant unmarried actresses.¹⁶⁶

Dismissal on grounds of pregnancy was the first working issue to draw forth the unfettered published expression of opinions among actresses. In 1909, "Women's News" was dominated by an unprecedented flurry of articles discussing the working rights as well as the financial and social treatment of pregnant actresses. The interest expressed in the journal in turn generated a two-pronged response in an attempt to change the situation: lobbying for legislative reform and establishing a fund to help pregnant actresses in need of financial assistance. Complicating the discussions of both efforts was the fiercely debated question of whether and how to discriminate between the

¹⁶⁵ Helene L. "Eine Entgegnung aus dem Leben," *DNW* 38 (1909) 567; Frauenkomitee, "Protokoll der Sitzung vom 8. April 1913," *DNW* 42 (1913): 567.

¹⁶⁶ L. M., "Emanzipation des Schauspielers," *DNW* 38 (1909): 163.

treatment of married and unmarried actresses.

In response to the prevalence of pregnant actresses who found themselves without personal income, a number of actresses argued for self-help action. The debate over the necessity and the potential scope and costs of a proposed Maternity Care Fund (*Mutterschutzkasse*) that took place in the pages of *Deutsche Bühnengenossenschaft* and beyond in 1909 was extremely active. Along with the question of whether or not actresses should start their own union-style organization, actress pregnancy was the most heatedly discussed issue in the "Women's News" column in 1909. The debate intensified to such a degree that the editor finally resorted to a temporary ban on further discussion of the subject.

Actresses wanted the Maternity Care Fund to be coordinated through the union. However, the idea was controversial among members for a variety of reasons. One of these was its cost. Actress Margot E. Bienz, writing anonymously under the initials C. B., was the first contributor to *Deutsche Bühnengenossenschaft* to suggest establishment of the fund and proposed specific guidelines for its operation. Her idea consisted of a fund with a starting base capital of 30,000 Marks and would require monthly fees of 50 Pfennig from all women performers over age eighteen and earning at least 120 Marks/month. Under

her proposal, managers would be required to continue paying a percentage of the actress's salary (which worked out to about 50 Marks/month) for the last four or five months of pregnancy and the first month following delivery in which she would be inactive. Bienz did not specify how this requirement might be enforced. The fund would then supplement the monthly income of every woman performer on pregnancy leave to raise it to 200 Marks/month.¹⁶⁷

A secondary point of debate was whether membership would be voluntary or required. General Secretary Armin Osterrieth expressed his belief that GDBA members would not support a form of mandatory insurance for maternity care, but would be open to a charitable fund to provide support in cases of need. Actresses themselves were divided on whether the optimal system would be a mandatory insurance program or a charitable fund. Performer Edith Beyer voiced her doubt of the financial ability of actresses to support a mandatory program available to all who would have need of it. An anonymous actress suggested that the program be voluntary, run along the lines of the pension fund with benefits available to every women who had contributed

¹⁶⁷ C. B. [Margot E. Bienz], "Frauenschutz-Kasse," *DNW* 38 (1909): 454. (Margot E. Bienz claimed authorship of this article in "Mutterschutz-Kasse," *DNW* 38 (1909): 911.)

for a certain period of time in proportion to the level of monthly dues they had paid.¹⁶⁸

By far the thorniest issue with respect to the establishment of a Maternity Fund was one of scope, centering on the question of whether or not unmarried pregnant women would be included among those eligible for help from the fund. Passions ran high amid the intense debate between moralizing and liberal actress viewpoints, which occasionally descended to insulting personal attacks. The subject was so divisive among GDBA members that Margot Bienz suggested that actresses might sever themselves from the union if it failed to establish a Maternity Care Fund.¹⁶⁹

The potential stigma of being seen as tolerant of the defiance of contemporary sexual morés contributed to the bitterness of the debate. In their eagerness to be included in the bourgeois class, actresses were careful to voice their

¹⁶⁸ Armin Osterrieth, "Zur Erwiderung und Klarstellung," *DNW* 38 (1909): 637; Edith Beyer, "Drei Entgegnungen auf den Artikel in Nr. 26 'Zur Mutterschaft der Schauspielerin,'" *DNW* 38 (1909): 827; Marie Steffen-Wohlbrück voiced her support of an insurance-style program in "Drei Entgegnungen auf den Artikel in Nr. 26 'Zur Mutterschaft der Schauspielerin,'" *DNW* 38 (1909): 828; Eine Mutter, "Zur Mutterschaft der Schauspielerin," *DNW* 38 (1909): 1056.

¹⁶⁹ Bienz, "Mutterschutz-Kasse," 911.

condemnation of sexual liberality in accordance with bourgeois morality, but at the same time many still insisted on compassion and equal treatment for unmarried mothers and their children in theatre contracts and reform legislation.

Actresses against the establishment of the fund argued that it would be of primary benefit to unmarried mothers and would thereby promote sexual irresponsibility and legitimize the situations of unmarried pregnant actresses. This prejudice was fostered by mixed implications of the name of the fund. Though the term "*Mutterschutz*" referred to the care of pregnant women, it also carried an association with unwed motherhood. The German charity entitled *Bund für Mutterschutz*, for example, was dedicated to the assistance of unmarried pregnant women.

Opponents wanted to assure that the position of unwed motherhood remained stripped of all dignity, so as to deter pregnancies outside of marriage. They did not want women who were seen as placing themselves in a bad situation by their own mistaken actions to have any relief from the humility of their choice. Another actress argued that unwed mothers should be helped, but privately through charitable means on an individual basis, so as not to support the institution of unmarried motherhood: "As much as possible can be done under the table for such a poor unfortunate through collections, etc., so as to lighten

her heavy burden. But something such as this cannot be allowed to make its way into the public if we do not want our social position to sink deeper and deeper.”¹⁷⁰ According to conservative actresses, unmarried mothers should not be allowed the dignity of feeling entitled to financial assistance.

The majority of actresses expressing their opinions about a Maternity Care Fund were comparatively liberal. Actresses such as Marie Steffen-Wohlbrück emphasized the common concerns that all actress mothers shared, whether married or not, and the widespread need among all mothers in the theatre for financial assistance. Actress Anna Bergé adopted a compromise approach, condemning the missteps of actresses that brought them to unmarried motherhood, but approving a fund to help them as a last resort, in cases where the father would not assume financial responsibility. Erna Manegg, who promoted the active support of the GDBA among actresses, argued that in exchange for active membership the union would then in turn be obligated to provide for its women members in need, particularly the sizeable number of unwed mothers. She contended that it

¹⁷⁰ Eine, welcher die Hebung unseres Standes am Herzen liegt, “Drei Entgegnungen auf den Artikel in Nr. 26 ‘Zur Mutterschaft der Schauspielerin,’” *DNW* 38 (1909): 826; Auch eine, welcher die Hebung unseres Standes am Herzen liegt, “Zur Frage der Mutterschutzkasse,” *DNW* 38 (1909): 880.

would create a more positive image for the union to assume care for deserted, disowned or inadequately financed children than if it were to leave them to public assistance.¹⁷¹

A vital concern among both opponents and proponents of the fund was how larger German society might judge their choice. Actresses contributing to "Women's News" agreed that whatever action was taken should foster the respectability of the acting profession as equal to that of other 'educated professions.'¹⁷² 'Dalliance' ('*Liebelei*') in the theatre was unanimously condemned for lowering the profession in the minds of the public. Each actress was concerned with maintaining the standards of morality and decency accepted by bourgeois society. Those disapproving of the fund, such as the actress writing under the pseudonym 'One to Whom the Raising of the Actors' Class Lies Near to Heart,' condemned it on the grounds that it would degrade actors to provide public financial protection to unwed mothers. Those in favor of the fund considered public opinion of no less significance, but argued that showing compassion for unwed

¹⁷¹ Steffen-Wohlbrück, "Drei Entgegnungen," 827; Bergé, "Eine Entgegnung," 639; Erna Manegg, "Zur Mutterschutzfrage," *DNW* 38 (1909): 852.

¹⁷² Auch eine, welcher die Hebung unseres Standes am Herzen liegt, "Mutterschutzkasse," 880.

mothers through this fund would only benefit the image of stage performers as a class.¹⁷³

Irene Pangoff and a series of anonymous women performers condemned the unrealistic philistinism expressed among actresses that refused to acknowledge the realities of life among the theatre. Pangoff and an anonymous mother referring to herself as 'Eine Mutter' stressed the particular concern of unmarried motherhood to GDBA members, because it was a danger uniquely interwoven into the conditions facing every woman who entered the acting profession. The loneliness of the profession, resulting from travel and common dissociation with family, as well as the intense competition, financial instability and the driving need to pay for costumes were all factors that fueled the rate of pregnancy among unmarried actresses.¹⁷⁴

In their advocacy of equal treatment for unmarried mothers, liberal actresses had the support of bourgeois feminists. With regard to its treatment of pregnant women in the workplace, Germany in the early decades of the twentieth century was a world leader. Feminists had successfully fought for expansion of

¹⁷³ Bergé, "Eine Entgegnung," 639.

¹⁷⁴ Irene Pangoff, "An die moralischen!" *DNW* 38 (1909): 879; E. F. "Zur Gründung einer Mutterschutzkasse," *DNW* 38 (1909): 913; Eine Mutter, "Zur Mutterschaft," 1056.

national health care to cover maternity as well as the extension of maternity leave to six weeks in 1903. In 1911, a new law required that a woman be allowed two weeks of paid leave before her expected delivery date.¹⁷⁵ So, although actresses were to some degree challenging bourgeois morality in their attitudes toward unmarried mothers, their efforts to aid pregnant women had a considerable degree of sympathy among German society as reflected in the aforementioned legislation. The support of bourgeois feminists probably influenced the Women's Committee in its strong promotion of equal treatment for unmarried mothers.

The debate of this issue elicited an unprecedented response among actresses. Maternity care was the first working issue for performers whose discussion was dominated by women. Only three men contributed to the debate. It was medical physician Paul Mulzer's article about the dangers associated with pregnancy faced by actresses that first fired the discussion. Arnim Osterrieth, in his position as General Secretary, edited the "Women's News" column and occasionally commented on its articles. The only other male to comment on the maternity question in the union journal in 1909 was an anonymous actor, R. B., who considered the discussion distasteful and dishonorable

¹⁷⁵ Quataert, *Reluctant Feminists*, 43.

and asked that it be stopped.¹⁷⁶ Looking back at the debate in 1910, actor Erich Platten described it earlier as a “not exactly edifying chapter of our paper.” He offered that his suggestion of including pregnancy as an illness in contracts would have the benefit of eliminating the “ugly aftertaste” of the subject’s public discussion.¹⁷⁷

The enthusiasm among actresses for the debate in defiance of its perceived distastefulness marked a new stage in actress activism. Actresses now showed themselves willing for the first time to shock others in their attempts to address working conditions, in spite of possible damage to their social standing. In this case, actresses overcame the social shame of taking a controversial moral stand.

Osterrieth bowed to pressure to censor further discussion of maternity aid in August of 1909, claiming that the full range of possible opinions and arguments on the subject had been aired and did not warrant repetition.¹⁷⁸ He was required to

¹⁷⁶ R.B., letter to the editor, *DNW* 38 (1909): 909.

¹⁷⁷ Erich Platten, “Krankenkasse und Mutterschutz,” *DNW* 39 (1910): 1217.

¹⁷⁸ Armin Osterrieth, “Nachwort der Schriftleitung,” *DNW* 38 (1909): 910.

repeat his announced ban on the subject twice more in response to the articles he continued to receive. "Women's News" remained largely quiet for months after the ban.

Plans for establishing a Maternity Care Fund continued after the journal's ban and the initiative was taken over by the Women's Committee in the spring of 1910. The Committee offered not only financial help to pregnant women in need, but also gave advice and information as to affordable delivery clinics, childcare and adoption options.

The larger GDBA membership finally bowed to actress demands for a Maternity Fund that was to be conducted along the lines of a charity with independently raised, donated monies when they incorporated the Women's Committee as a GDBA institution in December, 1910. Administration and financing of the Maternity Fund remained a responsibility of the Women's Committee. Its adoption by the union was a boon to the fund's organization, reach and financial stability, but it was a loss to non-union actresses, cutting off those most likely to be in need of its charitable services. Only professionally employed actresses who were members of the union before becoming pregnant were eligible for assistance from the fund.¹⁷⁹

Between 1909 and 1912, actresses and their
¹⁷⁹ **Frauenkomitee notice, *DNW* 42 (1913): 1529.**

supporters demanded that the National Theatre Law eliminate pregnancy as a grounds for dismissal. These demands were discussed at actress and women's group meetings in Berlin, Breslau, Leipzig and Wiesbaden and frequently resulted in petitions being sent to the *Reichstag* clarifying their expectations of the Theatre Law. Irene Pangoff and Arnim Osterrieth promoted the change in *Der neue Weg* articles.¹⁸⁰

In the unbinding draft of the Theatre Law presented by the Interior Ministry on January 3, 1913, married actresses were protected from dismissal on the grounds of pregnancy and standards for maternity leave, treated the same as leaves for illness or injury, were established. For example, actresses with contracts of at least five-months' duration would be entitled to six weeks fully paid maternity leave, with a limit of 400 Marks/month. However, actress activists were disturbed to find that a discrimination between pregnancy among unmarried and unmarried actresses in the proposed legislation. In §20, pregnancy of an unmarried actress was listed as one of the six grounds which

¹⁸⁰ "Die soziale Lage der weibliche Bühnengehörigen," *DNW* 39 (1910): 1537; Rubner, "Die soziale Lage," 11-12; "Die sozialen Probleme im Leben der Schauspielerin," *DNW* 39 (1910): 265; "Die Lage der Schauspielerinnen im Hinblick auf ein Reichstheatergesetz," *DNW* 41 (1912): 1508; "Die sozialen Probleme im Leben der Schauspielerin," *DNW* 39 (1910): 305; Irene Pangoff, "Eine Antwort auf den Artikel ' Audiatur et altera pars,' vom Gesichtspunkte der Frau," *DNW* 39 (1910): 143.

would entitle management to instant dismissal of a performer.¹⁸¹

Not only did the law not restrict the dismissal of unmarried actresses in case of pregnancy; it explicitly protected the rights of managers to continue to fire actresses on that basis.

Helene Riechers and Elise Zachow-Vallentin of the Women's Committee immediately attacked the new policy on pregnancy, listing it as one of the three points in the proposed legislation most needful of being changed on behalf of actresses (along with provision of modern costumes and extended rest periods between rehearsals and performances).¹⁸² Through 1913 and early 1914, Riechers continued to actively promote the equal treatment of married and unmarried pregnancy within the National Theatre Law in a seemingly endless spate of lectures to women's groups across Germany. Feminists such as Henni Lehmann also joined their voices to Riechers' in protesting the discrimination of unmarried pregnant actresses.¹⁸³ However,

¹⁸¹ "Das Reichstheatergesetz," *DNW* 41 (1912): 1576-1577.

¹⁸² Elise Zachow-Vallentin and Helene Riechers, "Einiges über die Besprechungen des Reichstheatergesetzes," *DNW* 42 (1913): 33-34.

¹⁸³ Speech by Helene Riechers reported in "Misstände der Schauspielerberuf," *DNW* 42 (1913): 1424; Henni Lehmann, "Was der Entwurf eines Reichstheatergesetzes den Bühnenkünstlerinnen verheißt und was er ihnen schuldig bleibt," *DNW* 42 (1913): 286.

attempts to alter the proposed Theatre Law on this issue were unsuccessful.

Aside from trying to help actresses during pregnancy, activists also attempted to ease the lives of working actress mothers by promoting the standardization of working hours and establishing affordable childcare options for women performers. Riechers and Zachow-Vallentin argued that working mothers needed regular time with their families and urged inclusion in the National Theatre Law provisions requiring a five-hour rest period between day rehearsals and evening performances as well as mandating a minimum ten-hour break between evening performances and the start of rehearsals on the following day. Although these efforts were unsuccessful, the proposed Theatre Law did grant performers the right to refuse to rehearse after an evening performance as well as, with some exceptions, on Sundays and holidays. Performers who did rehearse at these times were to be entitled to an additional quarter day's salary.¹⁸⁴ Otherwise managers would remain unrestricted in scheduling rehearsals.

In 1909, actresses began discussions of creating a union childcare center in Berlin that would provide a stable home environment and schooling for performers' children whose parents might have to travel frequently. The idea was first
¹⁸⁴ "Das Reichstheatergesetz," *DNW* 41 (1912): 1575.

proposed in “Women’s News” by Berta Möller and was soon championed by nationally recognized figures such as actress Irene Triesch and feminist Lily Braun, as well as lesser known actresses such as Anna Rubner. After its establishment in 1910 the Women’s Committee took charge of fund-raising for and promotion of the Children’s Home (*Kinderheim*).¹⁸⁵ The Committee also researched costs and investigated possible sites, but final planning and building decisions were made by the GDBA Central Board.

Fund-raising for the Children’s Home was an enormous task. Not only did the plan entail the cost of building the home, but the project was envisioned as a means of subsidizing performer parents in financial need who would not otherwise be able to afford care and education of their children. This increased the expected cost. The donated services of professionals such as teachers and doctors as well as the donation of land for the building site were expected to help keep costs down. The opening of the home which originally was planned for the spring of 1911¹⁸⁵ Berta Möller, “Kinderheim,” *DNW* 38 (1909): 1110; Frauenkomitee, “Protokoll der Sitzung vom 12. Dezember 1912,” *DNW* 41 (1912): 1586-1587; Anna Rubner, “Ein Heim für Schauspielerkinder,” *DNW* 40 (1911): 149. The Children’s Home was meant to extend beyond the assistance already provided by the Marie Seebach Charity, which paid for the education and housing for children of poor performers, “Soziales,” *DNW* 42 (1913): 328.

had to be postponed, reportedly because available funds were inadequate to handle the unanticipated number of applicants.¹⁸⁶ In response to the over forty placement requests, the Committee estimated the cost of starting the home at 200,000 Marks; only 27,000 Marks had thus far been raised. In 1912, the Women's Committee expanded the range of its fund-raising, asking GDBA members to voluntarily offer monthly contributions of 10 Pfennigs, deducted from their salaries, to benefit the home. The project was extremely popular and a large number of members agreed to pay the dues.¹⁸⁷ The goal of establishing the Children's Home remained unfulfilled, however, at the start of World War I.

Actress Marriage

For the majority of actresses, marriage meant retirement from one's profession, whether voluntary or involuntary. In 1909, entering marriage was grounds for an actress's immediate dismissal. In addition, actresses were typically required by their contract to give the theatre manager

¹⁸⁶ Frauenkomitee, "Protokoll: Sitzung vom 17. Dezember 1912," *DNW* 41 (1912): 1620; Rubner, "Ein Heim," 149; Frauenkomitee, "Kinderheim," *DNW* 40 (1911) 465; Frauenkomitee, "Protokoll der Sitzung vom 20. November 1913," *DNW* 42 (1913): 1599.

¹⁸⁷ Frauenkomitee, "Aufruf," *DNW* 41 (1912): 1133.

fourteen days notice before they married. Essentially, an actress had to receive permission from her employer to marry without risking the loss of employment. At the same time, actresses did not enjoy the right to decide to leave their jobs when they married. If an actress was dismissed for marriage, she could not choose to resume her profession at any other theatre for the duration of her original contract without substantial financial penalty.¹⁸⁸ Male performers faced no equivalent restriction.

The limitations on actresses' prerogative to marry separated them markedly from other women in German society. An anonymous actress writing in 1905 asserted that opposition to actress and actor marriage was one of the theatre's worst problems, insisting that without an unrestricted right to marry, performers would never be accepted in bourgeois society.¹⁸⁹

Managers' motives for this discrimination appear to have been to be primarily financial. An actresses' private sexual status was expected to influence audience reception of her public/theatrical persona, which in turn affected ticket sales and

¹⁸⁸ Alexandrine Malten, "Die verheiratete Schauspielerin," *DBG* 34 (1905): 454; Stümcke, *Die Frau als Schauspielerin*, 105-107; Rübel, *Geschichte der Genossenschaft*, 122.

¹⁸⁹ Pn, "Verheiratete Bühnengehörige," *DBG* 34 (1905): 477-478.

profits. The perceived sexual availability of women performers was considered an essential component in attracting audiences, particularly male audiences. Actresses who married essentially declared themselves sexually inaccessible to the male public. Managers insisted that audiences would reject a married woman in lover, naive, or soubrette roles and that this rejection would be reflected in a loss of profits.¹⁹⁰ According to actresses' protests, marriage curtailed their careers by diminishing their chances of employment in the best lines of business, particularly in the younger lines. In 1905, actress Trude Schulz complained that despite three years of experience as a young lover (*Lieberhaberin*), following her marriage she was offered only small roles: walk-ons, messengers, and, at best, a comic old woman.¹⁹¹

Married actresses bitterly protested the preferential treatment that was shown to single actresses who were believed to participate in non-marital sexual relationships. In contrast to

¹⁹⁰ Malten, "Verheiratete Schauspielerin," 454; Pn, "Verheiratete Bühnengehörige," 477; Stümcke, *Die Frau als Schauspielerin*, 108; "Die Sozialen Probleme im Leben der Schauspielerin," *DNW* 39 (1910): 304; Frau T., "Eine Entgegnung aus dem Leben," *DNW* 38 (1909): 697.

¹⁹¹ Trude Schulz, "Die verheiratete Schauspielerin," *DBG* 34 (1905): 464.

the effect of marriage, a single actress's sexual activity supposedly added "spice" to her reputation. Actresses, and to a lesser degree actors, were assumed to become less interesting to the public when they married.

In addition to audience's perceived reluctance to accept a sexually unavailable woman playing the role of a sexually available character, it was widely argued that a woman's marriage would divert her energy and attention away from her work. Some contemporaries justified this marriage restriction with claims that an actresses' marriage greatly changed her mental and physical status, affecting her ability to perform. Critic Heinrich Stümcke gave voice to the common perception that the married actress "responds more reservedly and coolly to ovations, dedicates herself to her family life, is more frugal in costume and jewelry, and, as many managers believe, is more reserved with her acting partner than is good for many roles."¹⁹² Managers were also reported to fear a husband's potential legal interference with an actresses' performance of her contractual obligations as well as the possibility of pregnancy.

¹⁹² Stümcke, *Die Frau als Schauspielerin*, 108; Philos, *Bühne und Prostitution* (Berlin: J. Singer, [1907]), 39; Pn, "Verheiratete Bühnengehörige," 477; William Wauer, "Audiatur et altera pars: Bemerkungen zu den Forderungen der weiblichen Bühnengehörigen," *DNW* 39 (1910): 115.

Working women faced similar policies in other industries. For instance, the state employed only women teachers who remained single.¹⁹³ Married women, however, were becoming a larger part of the German workforce. Between 1895 and 1907, the number of married women workers almost doubled, growing from 140,804 to 278,387, expanding from 9% to 12.8% of the total number of working women.¹⁹⁴ Among working class women, poverty was typically the reason for a woman working outside of the home. These women were typically wives of unskilled workers, having no skills of their own, and were given the most unpleasant work, such as quarrying, brickmaking, and dyeing.

For actresses who continued to perform, marriage was reported to result in potential loss of income, job security and good roles. Fair-paying acting positions were more difficult for married actresses to find, particularly for beginning performers or couples wanting to perform together. Managers reportedly gave preference to single actresses in their hiring decisions. Those who did hire married women offered them lower salaries. Actresses repeatedly complained of having to accept wage reductions after

¹⁹³ Wauer, "Audiatur," 115; Ellger, "Die soziale Lage," 67.

¹⁹⁴ Quataert, *Reluctant Feminists*, 37-39.

they married.¹⁹⁵ If a married couple were hired at the same theatre, they were offered a joint contract with a substantially reduced combined salary. In his seven-month study of job offers posted in the "Theater-Courier," Hermann Conrad inferred that 32.7% of available positions were offered specifically to couples because these theatres were interested in finding the cheapest possible ensemble.¹⁹⁶

The prejudices against married actresses contributed to their marital stress. Not only was it more difficult for married performers to find meaningful, fair-paying work; it was often also difficult to stay employed at the same theatre or in the same town. Actresses complained that many theatres refused to hire couples.¹⁹⁷ Actress wives also faced the new added responsibilities of running households. The stress of married life for actresses, permissive attitudes among theater circles, and the comparable financial independence of women performers, particularly those with pensions, may all have contributed to what

¹⁹⁵ K., "Aus der Frauenwelt," *DBG* 31 (1902): 233; N. M. T., "Gerichtliches," *DBG* 33 (1904): 300.

¹⁹⁶ Conrad, "Theater-Courier," 832.

¹⁹⁷ Frau T., "Eine Entgegnung," 697; Actress Völker' speaking at lecture by Hans Elger-Lüttinghausen, "Die soziale Lage der Schauspielerinnen," *DNW* 40 (1911): 596.

Stümcke refers to as a shockingly high occurrence of divorce among actors.¹⁹⁸

The first people to protest marriage restrictions for actresses were some of the same commentators who had first openly criticized the costuming system in the 1890s. Attempts to protest and change discrimination of actress marriage began in 1896, with Burckhard's discussion of the issue in his groundbreaking *Das Recht der Schauspieler*. Burckhard upheld a manager's right to fire an actress for marrying, but protested the actresses' inability to leave her job in the same circumstance. He claimed that this inability to retire from the profession prevented many actresses from marrying outside the theatre into more prestigious social circles where for a man to have a wife who maintained a career as a performer would be unacceptable.¹⁹⁹

Tony Kellen added his voice to the protest in 1902 and Stümcke in 1905. A number of early male protesters such as Burckhard and Stümcke, were offended seemingly more by the infringement of the actresses' husband's rights -- to choose where he and his wife should live, for example -- than by the infringement of the

¹⁹⁸ Stümcke, *Die Frau als Schauspielerin*, 109; Schulz, "Verheiratete Schauspielerin," 464; Philos, *Bühne und Prostitution*, 39-40.

¹⁹⁹ Max Burckhard, *Das Recht der Schauspieler*, 50-51.

actresses' rights.²⁰⁰ These authors may, however, have emphasized this point because it was deemed the most persuasive argument to bring about a loosening of the widespread restrictions.

Actresses began protesting limitations on their right to marry freely and discrimination against married women performers with a *Deutsche Bühnengenossenschaft* article in 1902. Three more brief articles written by actresses appeared in the union journal on the subject in 1905, a time when discussion of actress issues was otherwise at a virtual standstill.²⁰¹ Actresses Alexandrine Malten and Trude Schultz called on fellow women performers to expose the discrimination of married actresses by writing about their experiences in the journal. Actress protests of the limitations of their right to marry surged in 1909, and discussion of regulation of the issue via a National Theatre Law intensified. In addition to discussing marriage discrimination in journal articles, actresses and their allies also started raising the topic at lectures and meetings, beginning at the large midnight actress gathering on March 1, 1910.

²⁰⁰ Ibid; Stümcke, *Die Frau als Schauspielerin* , 105-106.

²⁰¹ K., "Aus der Frauenwelt," 233; "Gerichtliches," 300; Malten, "Verheiratete Schauspielerin," 454; Schulz, "Verheiratete Schauspielerin," 464; Pn, "Verheiratete Bühnengehörige," 477.

Protestors sought to gain shock value with the argument that the numerous hardships associated with marriage fostered a trend of non-marital relationships and illegitimate children among theatre circles. As an additional justification of reform, Irene Pangoff argued that having married performers in theatres was not only socially desirable, but would also benefit managers since she considered these performers to be more responsible employees. Pangoff also insisted that the contention that audiences would not accept married performers was a myth.²⁰²

Actresses Alexandrine Malten and Frau Sanden, among others, suggested one immediate reform to eliminate prejudice against married women performers that would not require legislative action. They proposed that all women of the theatre adopt the social title "Frau" and eliminate the use of the title "Fräulein," which signalled unmarried female status.²⁰³ This

²⁰² Pn, "Verheiratete Bühnengehörige," 477; Rubner, "Die soziale Lage," 11; Frau T., "Eine Entgegnung," 697; Pangoff, "Eine Antwort," 141.

²⁰³ Malten, "Verheiratete Schauspielerin," 454; "Die IX. Generalversammlung des Bundes deutscher Frauenvereine -- ein Markstein in der Geschichte der sozialen Entwicklung der deutschen Schauspielerin," *DNW* 39 (1910): 1223; K., "Aus der Frauenwelt," 233; Frauenkomitee, "Protokoll der Sitzung vom 26. November 1913," *DNW* 42 (1913): 1712.

action, however, was not widely adopted during this period.

One failed court challenge to the legal validity of the marriage clause, was reported in the DBV journal, *Deutsche Bühne*, in 1910. The actress's legal counsel in the case based their argument on the vague paragraph of the Bürgerlich Gesetzbuch (BGB) stating that any contract that went against 'good moral conduct' ('die Guten Sitten') was non-binding. The court ruled that the marriage restriction was ethical in the case of shorter, one-year contracts and that, although a manager could not force a woman to work against her husband's wishes, in such a case the manager would be entitled to financial compensation for her the actresses' departure.²⁰⁴

The unsuccessful GDBA reform contract of 1900 would have given actresses a reciprocal right to quit upon marriage. The GDBA-DBV negotiated joint standard contract rejected by the GDBA membership in 1908 would have continued offering managers the right to fire actresses immediately following their marriage, while offering actresses only the freedom to leave at the end of the season. This was one of the one-sided dismissal privileges kept by managers which prompted the GDBA's rejection

²⁰⁴ Syndikus des Deutschen Bühnenvereins, "Gegen die guten Sitten!: Urteil des Reichsgerichts über die Rechtsfolgen der Heirat weiblicher Bühnenmitglieder," *Deutsche Bühne* 2 (1910): 168; Burckhard, *Das Recht der Schauspieler*, 50.

of the joint contract.²⁰⁵

Actresses went beyond the suggestions of Burckhard, Kellen, Stümcke and the GDBA in demanding not only that they be given the opportunity to leave their employment to counterbalance a manager's prerogative to dismiss them, but insisted instead upon the right to marry freely without fear of losing their position as well as equal treatment of married women in the theatre workplace. They sought to enforce such a change through the proposed National Theatre Law. Between 1910 and 1912, actress activists, such as Irene Pangoff, along with feminist proponents of actresses' rights, argued in journal articles, lecture meetings and petitions to the *Reichstag* that the Theatre Law should protect the actresses' right to marry without restriction by declaring contracts which included marriage prohibitions null and void.²⁰⁶

Actresses' demands regarding marriage were not met in the National Theatre Law draft made public on January 3, 1913. However, the lesser demand of Burckhard, Kellen, Stümcke and

²⁰⁵ Syndikus des Deutschen Bühnenvereins, "Gegen die guten Sitten!" 168; Stümcke, *Die Frau als Schauspielerin*, 105-106; Rübel, *Geschichte der Genossenschaft*, 122, 138.

²⁰⁶ Pangoff, "Eine Antwort," 141; "Die soziale Lage," *DNW* 39 (1910): 1537-1539; Rubner, "Die soziale Lage," 12; "Soziales," *DNW* 41 (1912): 1508.

the GDBA was met. The proposed legislation did not include actress marriage among the six grounds which would allow managers to immediately dismiss employed performers on a one-sided basis. At the same time, the Theatre Law draft did not prohibit the inclusion of a marriage prohibition in contracts. A contract granting managers the right to dismiss an actress for marriage would be considered legal, according to the proposed legislation, if it also allowed the actress the equivalent right to quit upon marriage.²⁰⁷

Retirement and Old Age

One of the biggest drawbacks of a career in theatre for women was the prospect of financial insecurity in old age. Maintaining a stable career in later years and providing for an adequate retirement was a significant challenge. Actresses had to cope with age discrimination in hiring, casting and salaries as well as restrictive pension rules. To maintain one's career beyond a youthful age was difficult for actresses because of a lesser demand for older performers. To be professionally successful in later years, an actress needed a recognised artistic identity.

Many actresses reported having to deal with fewer

²⁰⁷ "Das Reichstheatergesetz," *DNW* 41 (1912): 1574; Lehmann, "Entwurf eines Reichstheatergesetzes," 286.

employment opportunities and salary reductions when they entered the old woman *Fach*. However, evidence regarding the degree to which age discrimination adversely affected actresses' salaries is ambiguous. According to Charlotte Engel-Reimers's analysis of the 1907/08 GDBA survey, there appeared to be some financial advantage for women in later stages of their careers. Although actresses in the old woman *Fach* were paid on average less than those in the heroine and lover *Fachs*, they were paid more than actresses in the naive and soubrette *Fachs*. Most significantly, older actresses reported having expense levels considerably lower than younger actresses, typically leaving them with higher post-expense salaries than other women performers.²⁰⁸ Part of the explanation for older women having higher net incomes was that their costume requirements were generally fewer. Despite an indication of comparative financial prosperity among older actresses from the survey, anecdotal evidence suggests that many older actresses led lives of financial

²⁰⁸ Engel-Reimers, *Die deutschen Bühnen*, 510-534; see earlier salary/expense analysis in chapter two. The reported post-expense incomes of older women was only 56% of the post-expense incomes of performers in the old man/father *Fach*.

need and insecure employment.²⁰⁹ This discrepancy may be accounted for by the limited pool, including only GDBA members, from which the survey was conducted.

The early decades of the twentieth century, however, did see some improvements for the situations of mature women performers. Older women had greater opportunities to exercise their artistic skills. The richness of the roles assigned to older women grew, particularly with the increasing popularity of Ibsen productions. Classic plays were also reinterpreted to offer greater emphasis to roles for mature women. Engel-Reimers remarked on the striking production of *Hamlet*, with the star Franziska Ellmenreich playing the role of Gertrude, a role which Engel-Reimers suggested was formerly treated as background for the Ophelia-Hamlet scenes.²¹⁰

Maintaining a lengthy career was particularly important for actresses who depended on a GDBA pension for their retirement. Since its establishment in 1871, this pension system gave participating actresses a degree of financial

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 508; "Zur Kostümfrage," *DBG* 32 (1903): 354; Jutta Ahlemann, *Ich bleibe die große Adele: Die Sandrock* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1988), 262.

²¹⁰ Charlotte Engel-Reimers, "Die Frau im Theaterberuf," *Die Frau* 17 (1909): 166-169.

independence, regardless of their marital status, that relatively few contemporary German women enjoyed.²¹¹ A pension essentially made single life financially feasible for successful actresses. Heinrich Stümcke attributed a higher divorce rate among actresses, in part, to the relative financial independence they enjoyed as a result of the union's retirement fund.²¹²

The GDBA pension plan gave qualifying actresses unprecedented monetary freedom, but maintaining one's participation in the plan was a substantial challenge. Actresses had to join by the age of 20. (Actors, on the other hand, were given until age 25 to join). They had to earn a fairly substantial salary at this early age in order to afford the pension payments ranging between 1.50 and 10 Marks every month. They also had to work regularly to make each monthly contribution for forty years until their allowed retirement at age sixty.²¹³ Other pension plans were also available at individual court and municipal theaters as well as through private insurance companies. However, according to a comparison study by Rudolf

²¹¹ Rudolf Spuhl, *Die Genossenschaft deutsche Bühnen-Angehöriger und ihre wirtschaftliche Bedeutung für das Theater* (Altenburg, 1914), 30.

²¹² Stümcke, *Die Frau als Schauspielerin*, 109.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, 110; Henneberg, "Volksoper/Stellung der Frau," 116.

Spuhl, private plans gave far lower returns for one's investment and actors participating in individual theatre pension plans were financially reliant on their continued employment with that company. The reliability of individual theatre pensions was put into question by occasional stories of incidents in which actors and actresses were dismissed shortly before they were to become eligible to collect from the funds.²¹⁴ An important advantage of the GDBA fund was its availability to professional performers employed at any theatre, allowing performers career mobility.

When deciding whether or not to participate in the union's pension fund, women had to consider the anticipated length of their careers. The plan was generally advantageous only to women with long careers since pension rules provided substantial penalties for early retirement. Members of the plan had to participate for a minimum of ten years before they would be eligible for any payments. Actresses who voluntarily retired after ten years but before the official retirement age of sixty were eligible for some return on their investment in the form of a small annuity.²¹⁵ Full pensions could not be collected until the actress reached the age of sixty, despite protests that it was too difficult

²¹⁴ Spuhl, *Die Genossenschaft*, 28-33.

²¹⁵ *Ibid*; *Neuer Theater Almanach* 10 (1899): 183.

for women performers to continue working for so long and suggestions that the age at which women begin collecting pensions be lowered.²¹⁶ Because of the difficulty in qualifying for the GDBA pension, the great majority of actresses were not in a position to enjoy the security it offered. An actress who reached retirement age without having provided for her future by way of a pension or personal savings faced a life of poverty.

Faced with the likelihood of meager retirement prospects, many women chose to leave the theatre while still young to find other means of financial support, such as marriage or another change of profession. Whether by choice or necessity, actresses' careers tended to be short. Tony Kellen's analysis of 1895 census statistics indicated that almost half of women performers were between the ages of twenty and thirty.²¹⁷

Marriage appears to have been the most frequent reason for retirement. Of the 300 actresses listed in the 1909 *Neuer Theater Almanach* as having retired, 223 of them were married.²¹⁸ The difficulty of marrying, raising children and

²¹⁶ Henneberg, "Volksoper/Stellung der Frau," 117.

²¹⁷ Kellen, *Die Not unserer Schauspielerinnen*, 10.

²¹⁸ *Neuer Theater Almanach* 1909, figure cited in Engel-Reimers, "Die Frau im Theaterberuf," 166.

running a household while maintaining a career, as well as the pervasiveness of demanding workloads combined with low salaries inspired many women to leave the stage at an early point in their careers.

Some actresses chose to leave the stage for an alternative career and for these women, the options multiplied in the early years of the twentieth century. The Women's Committee worked in conjunction with Berlin women's groups to find employment in bourgeois professions for actresses interested in leaving the theatre profession. Strong career alternatives for older women, however, remained limited.

After the pension protests instigated by Anna Henneberg in 1896 and 1897, activist actresses did not focus any significant attention on the challenges faced by older performers until 1912. In that year, actresses were made aware of a complication associated with the eagerly awaited inclusion of performers in a national government program that was to go into effect on January 1, 1914 requiring employers to pay a percentage of employees' premiums for mandatory health insurance. For older actresses, however, the new program was a mixed blessing. Benefits were coordinated through one's employer and an actress would be required to submit information forms to managers which included her date of birth. This was not a

voluntary choice. Unless a performer earned over 5,000 Marks/year or could show that she had adequate private insurance, she was obligated to join the state health insurance system.²¹⁹ Because of prevalent age discrimination in the theatre, older women were reluctant to comply with the age declaration requirement.

The efforts of individual actresses concerning this issue were largely limited to complaints, through letters or personal visits, and exhortations for change directed to the Women's Committee. Beyond that, action was left to the Committee. Most of the articles regarding age declaration which appeared in *Der neue Weg* in 1913 were reports, written by Helene Riechers, chairperson of the Women's Committee, or Ludwig Seelig, head of the Stage Artists' Cartel, of the progress in negotiating a change in the government's policy. Among these articles, age was purported to be among the prime factors in

²¹⁹ In the case of the government's pension program, which included performers as of January 1, 1913, the option of choosing a private pension plan was given only to those who had been members of private pension programs for at least three years at the time of the government program's taking effect in addition to the person being over 30 years of age. Der Vorstand der Pensionsanstalt der GDBA, "Zum Gesetz betreffend die Angestelltenversicherung," *DNW* 42 (1913): 65; Martha Krüger, "Das Alter der Bühnenkünstlerin," *Frauenbewegung* 19 (1 June 1913): 85.

casting decisions. Riechers asserted that older women specializing in youthful lines of business, particularly in provincial theatres, would be hardest hit by the age declaration requirement. Seelig and Riechers both insisted that the government's requirements be changed.²²⁰

One actress who voiced her opinion, independent of these union leadership groups, was Martha Krüger. Her article, published on June 1, 1913, in *Frauenbewegung* criticized the apathy of actresses on this subject and the reliance on men to represent their concerns on this issue. At the same time, Krüger inferred that the issue was not as serious as had been claimed, that managers cared not about actresses' ages, only that their lovers and heroines looked handsome and could perform their roles. An actress who looked young would continue to play young roles.²²¹ Helene Riechers, in a written response, appears to have been insulted by the suggestion of actress indolence and emphasized the activities of the Women's Committee with regard to the issue beginning in October, 1912. Krüger's article excited a

²²⁰ Gustav Rickelt and Ludwig Seelig, "Die Angabe von Geburtstag und -Jahr bei der Invaliden-, Kranken- u. Angestelltenversicherung," *DNW* 42 (1913): 245; Frauenkomitee, "Die Angabe von Geburtstag und -Jahr bei der Invaliden-, Kranken- u. Angestelltenversicherung," *DNW* 42 (1913): 246.

²²¹ Krüger, "Das Alter der Bühnenkünstlerin," 85.

second response from dancer Else Bonitz, who criticized Krüger for undervaluing the importance of age discrimination on the careers of mature women performers, and consequently the impact of the age declaration requirement.²²² With the exception of Krüger's article and Bonitz's response to it, women performers left public discussion of the subject of age declaration to the leaders of the Women's Committee, GDBA and Stage Artists' Cartel.

In addition to spreading awareness of the problem with journal articles and hearing actresses' opinions of the issue at their weekly discussion hours, in October, 1912, the Women's Committee wrote letters to the National Insurance Office (*Reichsversicherungsamt*) requesting that theatre employers not be given access to information regarding a performer's age. When notified that the Insurance Office was not in a position to change the date-of-birth declaration policy without a change in insurance legislation, the Women's Committee, in conjunction with Ludwig Seelig of the Stage Artists' Cartel and Gustav Rickelt, Acting President of the GDBA, petitioned the Bundesrat to change the insurance requirements. The petition, submitted in February, 1913, requested that date of birth not be included on insurance

²²² Helene Riechers, "Erwiderung: Das Alter der Bühnenkünstlerin," *DNW* 42 (1913): 924; Else Bonitz, "Das Alter der Bühnenkünstlerin," *DNW* 42 (1913): 1005.

cards and that government insurance recipients be required to report their dates of birth directly to the Insurance Office rather than having their employers responsible for doing so. Shortly after the petitions were submitted, the Women's Committee further submitted to the *Bundesrat* a collection of 1,605 signatures of solo performers (actors and singers) in support of the policy change.²²³ Actresses were eager to have the law changed before the program's scheduled starting date, January 1, 1914, because once a manager became privileged to the information of an actresses' date of birth, the effect was irreversible for as long as the actress was with that employer. Once the information was revealed, it could not be made private again.

The national government made no legislative changes in response to the petition submitted to them. The *Bundesrat* referred the petition to Chancellor Caspar of the Interior Ministry, who responded to it in October, 1913. He informed the Stage Artists' Cartel that although the *Bundesrat* was responsible for the establishment of data requirements for other insurance programs, requirements for health and disability insurance were the

²²³ Ibid; Rickelt and Seelig, "Die Angabe von Geburtstag," 245; Frauenkomitee, "Protokoll der Sitzung vom 18. Februar 1913," *DNW* 42 (1913): 293.

province of individual states and insurance companies.²²⁴

In a subsequent legal analysis, Ludwig Seelig asserted that while the law specifically required the inclusion of date of birth on the enrollment card (to which the employer would not have access), date of birth was not specifically required to be placed on the insurance card held by the employer. Seelig therefore urged performers not to include this information when they filled out their cards. Some individual states' policies allowed another solution. In those states, such as Prussia, where employers were required to pay insurance premiums on behalf of their employees, performers had no choice but to give employers access to their insurance cards. However, seven states allowed program members to send in their premiums directly and thereafter be reimbursed for half of the expense by their employers.²²⁵

The Women's Committee was not successful in its goal of solving this issue before the activation of the program on January 1, 1914, and continued its efforts thereafter. On February 6, Helene Riechers was summoned to the Interior Ministry for

²²⁴ Ludwig Seelig, "Die Altersangabe bei der Sozialversicherung," *DNW* 42 (1913): 1494.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*

further discussion of the insurance issue, however, no further change was reported before the outbreak of war that summer.²²⁶

Indisposition Time

Hedwig Wangel was the first actress to emphasize the issue of indisposition time (*Respekttage*), days of rest during menstruation periods, at her March 23, 1909, lecture on the working problems of women performers and in the well-supported actress petition that followed. Wangel demanded that actresses be given the same right already proffered to women singers to decline to rehearse or perform on days of menstrual flow without suffering loss of income. She argued that performing during this period was too great a strain on an actress's voice and nerves, endangering her health.²²⁷ Physician Paul Mulzer concurred with Wangel's assessment of the risk to a woman's health and advised that actresses be allowed to rest during menstruation. If they should have to perform, Mulzer urged that actresses refrain from vigorous activity such as dancing, jumping, prolonged walking or standing, as well as that they avoid

²²⁶ Frauenkomitee, "Protokoll der Sitzung vom 11. Februar 1914," *DNW* 43 (1914): 277.

²²⁷ Wangel-Stabernack, "Offenes Rundschreiben," 290.

restrictive clothing.²²⁸

Wangel was to a large degree responsible for the surge of actress activism demonstrated by the “Women’s News” articles in early 1909 and it is not surprising that activists joining the growing discussion adopted her priorities. A number of actresses, between 1909 and 1911, agitated in the “Women’s News” column and at lecture meetings for changes in legislation that would allow actresses to take some days of paid leave each month. Performers Irene Pangoff, Anna Rubner, Julie Lucas, and Nelly Stahl as well as General Secretary Arnim Osterrieth asserted the significance of the issue and called for legislative action that would offer women performers the option of resting on these days without loss of earnings and suggested ways in which such a policy might be enacted. The issue was complicated by the impracticality of attempting to schedule such frequent absences of an ensemble’s actresses and a general conviction that even if offered the right to refuse to work, competitive pressures would still motivate

²²⁸ Paul Mulzer, “Die Respekttage,” *DNW* 43 (1914): 336-337.

actresses to perform.²²⁹

A number of actresses responded passionately to demands for indisposition time, but they were far from united. Interest in indisposition time seemed to stem from Wangel's energetic presentation of the subject in March, 1909, and eventually, after she ceased contributing to the discussion of actress issues after the spring of 1909, it faded from view. The impracticality of success may have also have caused support for indisposition time reforms to dwindle. According to Osterrieth, there existed no such legislative protections for any group of women workers. By the time the National Theatre Law was drafted, the issue of indisposition time was no longer being discussed.²³⁰ The Women's Committee never adopted it among its causes and when the subject was omitted from the Theatre Law, neither Committee members nor any other actresses criticized the omission.

Despite the brevity of the discussion of menstruation,
²²⁹ Julie Lucas, "Ungerechtigkeiten gegen die Frauen am Theater," *DNW* 38 (1909): 380; Nelly Stahl, "Nochmals die Respekttage," *DNW* 38 (1909): 380; Rubner, "Die Soziale Lage," 12; Armin Osterrieth, "Die Hauptaufgaben eines Reichstheatergesetzes," *DNW* 38 (1909): 819; Forchhammer, "Die soziale Lage," 507; Wauer, "Audiatur," 114; Pangoff, "Eine Antwort," 141; Ellger, 67, 76.

²³⁰ Osterrieth, "Die Hauptaufgaben," 819.

it was important in signalling a change in attitude. One anonymous actress observed in 1909 that if anyone were to have had the courage to discuss such a subject earlier, she would have been “dragged through the dirt.”²³¹ Public airing of a woman’s physical needs in the theatre workplace was another indication of the change of environment actresses had successfully effected in overcoming the sense of shame in public discussion of their rights as women.

Sexual Harassment

Sexual Harassment was another theme which, like indisposition time, had been a taboo subject, but which came under increased scrutiny in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Actresses did not often refer to sexual harassment directly and most open discussions of the subject were offered by their male contemporaries. Neither was sexual harassment the object of organized legislative reform efforts by actresses. However, starting in 1909, some actresses did begin to discuss the problem directly, if briefly, in the union’s “Women’s News” column. These few actresses endeavored to move people to take sexual harassment in the theatre more seriously.

In early twentieth-century Germany, sexual
²³¹ S., “Zu dem Thema ‘Respekttage,’” *DNW* 38 (1909): 604.

harassment of actresses was looked at differently from sexual harassment of other working women, because of the perceived eroticness and physicality of the theatre workplace. The actress was openly acknowledged to be an object of the public's sexual desire. Actresses were still to a large degree considered outside the strict sexual morés of German bourgeois society. Non-marital sexual relationships among actresses reportedly sprang from a range of reasons inherent to the profession, including a desire for career advantage, a need for financial support, or to counter the loneliness and instability of one's personal life (as the result of relocations) that frequently accompanied an acting career. In addition to the perception of immoderate sexual activity, the standard bourgeois rules of etiquette governing relations between members of the opposite sex were regularly transgressed by actresses because of unusual work requirements. The physicality and nearness of the work, the portrayal of familiar relationships between male and female performers were supposed to heighten the likelihood of intimacy. In the practical matter of pursuing harassment charges in court, according to contemporary theatre critic Stephen Grossman, sexual harassment cases in the theatre were all flawed by the perceived unreliability of the witnesses

involved.²³²

The case of Elsa Schabelsky in 1890 resulted in the first attempts to discuss seriously the sexual pressures placed on actresses in their work environment.²³³ The intense debate over costume expenses which started in the 1890s indirectly touched on the issue of sexual harassment insofar as it dealt with prostitution and the economic desperation of many actresses. The GDBA discussed problems such as the prevalence of casting couch situations in the theatre starting in 1909 at actor meetings and in journal articles.²³⁴

A number of actresses touched on the issue briefly and indirectly in their discussions of costumes or actress poverty, but sexual harassment was rarely made a central issue of protest. Few actresses writing in "Women's News" gave it significant emphasis in their writing. Those who did wrote anonymously. An actress calling herself 'A Nameless One' protested against the sexual predatoriness of "society gentlemen" and the way in which

²³² Stefan Großman, "Die Sittlichkeit der Schauspielerin," *Frauen-Zukunft* 1 (1911): 871-875.

²³³ See earlier discussion in chapter two.

²³⁴ "Prinzipale und Schauspieler," *Berliner Volkszeitung* (26 February 1909), reprinted in *DNW* 38 (1909): 157; "Die soziale Problemen," *DNW* 39 (1910): 304.

poverty eroded an actress's capacity for resistance: "Our horrified rebukes will be taken with a highly suggestive shrug of the shoulders. He has time and can wait until the little bird has been tamed by hunger."²³⁵ Actress K. S. wrote to complain that prostitution among actresses was as much the result of the prevalence of 'casting couch' practices as costume expenses or poverty. She urged the creation of legislative measures for actresses equivalent to those enjoyed by store saleswomen to protect them from being coerced into sex.²³⁶

In addition to the limited increases in discussion of workplace harassment, some action was taken in the area of enforcement. In 1910, a Berlin manager named Zickel was stripped of his theatre license by the police because he had allegedly assaulted an actress in his company and made a practice of handing out roles in exchange for sexual favors. Munich theatre manager Schrupf was similarly dispossessed of his license in 1914 after the GDBA accused him of harassment of women in his

²³⁵ Eine Namenlose, "Gekündigt," *DNW* 39 (1910): 7.

²³⁶ K. S., "Die Frau beim Theater," *DNW* 38 (1909): 456.

ensemble.²³⁷ The fact that these cases of sexual harassment of actresses were dealt with seriously by local authorities is a further demonstration of a shift in the societal identification of the German actress from sex object and constituent of the demimonde to that of a professional woman with a right to legal protection from sexually inappropriate behavior in the workplace.

The GDBA journal *Der neue Weg* also reported a case in 1910 in Copenhagen where a group of Danish actresses accused a theatre manager of sexual harassment and threatened to take the case to the police for full investigation unless he quit within twenty-four hours. The “Women’s News” commentator Emil Holm of Stuttgart praised the manager’s subsequent resignation as a triumph of actress solidarity.²³⁸ German actresses, however, did not respond to or comment on the Danish situation.

Discussions of sexual harassment by actresses, actors or their supporters were generally brief and secondary to other issues. Actresses remained for the most part passive in regard to reform of attitudes toward sexual harassment during this period.

²³⁷ Großman, “Sittlichkeit der Schauspielerin,” 871; “Ein Angriff auf die Genossenschaft,” *DNW* 39 (1910): 855; “Theater und Sittlichkeit,” *Frauenbewegung* 20 (1 July 1914): 102.

²³⁸ Emil Holm, “Die Kopenhagener Theatersittenaffäre,” *DNW* 39 (1910): 1486.

Social Prejudice

From 1909 to 1914, activist actresses and the feminists sympathetic to their effort tried to implement a series of practical measures to combat social prejudice against actresses and earn for them closer contact with and further access to bourgeois society. In 1910 and 1911, actresses focused most of their energy in this area on trying to help themselves find socially respectable, fairly-priced living quarters.

The housing effort was first introduced by Marie Sera, a representative of the newly-formed Women's Committee, in a speech outlining the Committee's goals given at the GDBA Delegates' Meeting in 1910. Through its connections with bourgeois women's groups, the Committee tried to locate favorable housing for actresses in cities across Germany. The Committee also began to assemble a collection of information sheets on every city in which GDBA members performed. These sheets included information on the city's housing situation, including recommended hotels and furnished apartments, as well as information on local theatre costume provision, restaurant prices, seamstress fees, available stores and laundering opportunities.²³⁹

Actresses could request the sheets in order to familiarize

²³⁹ "Zur Wohnungsfrage: Auskunft über Wohn- und Lebensbedingungen," *DNW* 40 (1911): 307-308.

themselves with cities in which they might choose to work. Beyond this, Helene Riechers joined others in suggesting that feminists help break the social barriers for actresses in their communities by befriending local women performers and inviting them into their homes.²⁴⁰

Although I could find no evaluation of the success of the Committee's efforts to improve the housing situations of actresses, the collection of city information sheets proved popular among union members and in 1913 the GDBA planned to incorporate them in its annually published *Almanach*.²⁴¹

Following the adoption by the union administration of the information-sheets project, the Committee's attention to actress housing waned, overwhelmed by the group's work in charity and legal reform. Starting in 1913, the Committee focused its activist efforts primarily on incorporating improvements in the areas of pregnancy, marriage and costume provision in the National Theatre Law.

²⁴⁰ Riechers, "Mißstände," 1425; van der Elst, "Warum wollen die Schauspieler ein Reichstheatergesetz?" *DNW* 41 (1912): 849; Emmy Osthaus, "Die Frau beim Theatre," *DNW* 38 (1909): 253.

²⁴¹ Frauenkomitee, "An die Obmänner und Vertrauensdamen," *DNW* 42 (1913): 1130.

Costume Provision

In the years 1909 to 1912, costume provision remained the one of the most frequently raised causes of complaint among actress protesters. Still a problem affecting the majority of women performers, the costuming system continued to be blamed as the primary cause of actress poverty. Protests of the costume issue reemerged after years of silence in 1909 with the publication of Maximilian Pfeiffer's *Theaterelend*. Pfeiffer focused his discussion of actress poverty around the issue of costuming for women performers, as did Gustav Rickelt the following year in his book, *Schauspieler und Direktoren*.

The arguments used to justify reform of the costuming system between 1909 and 1912 were largely the same as they had been in the costume debates of 1899-1903. Yet beyond this, major differences existed, the most remarkable being the active, widespread, and public participation of actresses after 1909. Actresses rallied around the issue of costume provision at lecture gatherings and in journal articles. The issue was emphasized in numerous articles by actresses, feminists and union supporters in *Der neue Weg* between 1909 and 1912.

Another major difference from the earlier costume debate from 1899 to 1903 was the tenor of the calls for change. Because actresses were no longer seeking concessions from

managers, but rather legislative reform, they could afford to be more aggressive in their demands. Starting in 1909 actress leaders began insisting on full costume provision, both historic and modern. Actress Hedwig Wangel was the first to voice the demand that management at all German theatres be required to provide all costumes to all performers without regard to salary level in her petition, signed by 119 actresses. At the midnight actress meeting on March 1 and 2, 1910, Anna Rubner expressed the demand for legislative action that would enact such a requirement. Helene Riechers also emphasized the issue on her lecture tours in 1913 and 1914. Union leader Gustav Rickelt, activist Ludwig Seelig, critic Paul von Szcsepanski and numerous women's groups soon joined their voices to support the cause of costume provision legislation.²⁴²

After 1910, actresses and their supporters no longer shied away from the idea that full costume provision might be attained only at the cost of forcing some theatres out of business.

In direct contrast to GDBA member Otto Kienscherf's attitude in
²⁴² Wangel-Stabernack, "Offenes Rundschreiben," 290; speech by Anna Rubner reported in "Die sozialen Probleme," *DNW* 39 (1910): 269; speech by Helene Riechers, reported in "Die Delegiertenversammlung von 1913," *DNW* 42 (1913): 448; Riechers, "Misstände," 1425; Rickelt, *Schauspieler und Direktoren*, 68-80; Ludwig Seelig, "Kurze Betrachtungen zum Reichstheatergesetz," *DNW* 43 (1914): 171; Paul von Szcsepanski, "Theatertoiletten," *Berliner Anzeiger*, reprinted in *DNW* 42 (1913): 171.

1903 reassuring managers that they wanted to avoid any measure that would result in theatre bankruptcies,²⁴³ actresses began to endorse the closure of theatres that could not afford to bear the additional expenses associated with full provision. At the March 1, 1910, actress meeting, Gustav Rickelt gave expression to this new sentiment that “a theatre that cannot provide costumes does not have the right to operate.”²⁴⁴ Helene Riechers repeated this assertion in her lecture tours.²⁴⁵ This view was certainly controversial within the GDBA. Actor Goswin Mooser wrote to *Der neue Weg* to express his opposition to the costume provision because he expected that it would force smaller theatres to close and put many actors out of work.²⁴⁶

Alternative suggestions to full costume provision, such as costume allowances and curbing costume extravagance, were still raised briefly, but these ideas were rejected immediately by the majority of actresses participating in the debate. For the most

²⁴³ Otto Kienscherf, “Die Schauspielerinnen und ihre Bühnengewänder,” *DBG* 32 (1903) 406.

²⁴⁴ “Die sozialen Probleme,” *DNW* 39 (1910): 305.

²⁴⁵ Riechers, “Misstände,” 1425.

²⁴⁶ Goswin Mooser, “Die Schauspielerbewegung,” *DNW* 42 (1913): 318.

part, actresses agreed that full provision of costumes by management, required by law, was the only satisfactory solution to their concerns.

Until the goal of mandatory costume provision could be achieved, actresses continued operating organized self-help institutions to alleviate the financial pressures on them. Costume collection centers remained the most prevalent form of assistance between 1909 and 1914. Beyond the operations already active by 1904 in Berlin, Munich, Mannheim, Frankfurt a. M. and Cologne, costume centers were also established in Hamburg, Hannover, Cassel, Göttingen, Straßburg, Bonn, Augsburg, Wiesbaden, Osnabrück, Mainz and Bremen.²⁴⁷ These appear for the most part to have been run independently by local women's groups as charitable institutions and were generally praised for their work.

At the time of its acceptance into the GDBA in 1910, the Women's Committee expressed no immediate intention of adding to current costuming self-help efforts. Spokesperson Marie Sera acknowledged that the issue of costumes was vital to actresses, but implied that area was already being well handled

²⁴⁷ Arnim Osterrieth, "Anmerkung," *DNW* 38 (1909): 800; van der Elst, "Warum wollen die Schauspieler?" 845; "Soziales," *DNW* 41 (1912): 1508; Frauenkomitee, "Protokoll der Sitzung vom 12. Oktober 1912," *DNW* 41 (1912): 1265; Frauenkomitee, "Protokoll: Sitzung vom 11. Februar 1913," *DNW* 42 (1913): 252; Frauenkomitee, "Protokoll/18. Februar 1913," 294.

by the Coordinating Office for Germany's Female Stage Personnel in Berlin and similar centers around the country. Therefore the Committee planned to focus its energy on actress housing.²⁴⁸

Within a year, however, the Committee attempted to consolidate or replace the existing costume collections across Germany through the foundation of a new union-based costume dispersement office in Berlin known as the Costume Center (Kostüm-Zentral). The new Center, established in 1912, at once limited and expanded availability of subsidized costumes for actresses. The new organization was open only to union performers and, as such, was limited in its outreach. At the same time, it provided costumes to GDBA members in any city in which they worked, expanding the usefulness of the service for those who were eligible.

The Women's Committee Costume Center had a single office in Berlin through which all costume requests were handled. Shortly after the publicizing of a theatre's repertoire, actresses were expected to inform the local *Vertrauensdame* (the women's representative of the union local and the Women's Committee contact) of their costuming needs. An appropriate selection of materials would then be shipped from which the ensemble could choose items for purchase. The rest would be returned to the

²⁴⁸ Sera, "Zur Begründung," 1506.

Center in Berlin. Only *Vertrauensdamen* could request a selection of costumes on this trial basis, but individual actresses could purchase costumes directly if they paid for them in advance. Use of the Center was limited to active performers. Actresses were required to show proof of GDBA membership and a copy of the contract with their current employer. Costume prices were then adjusted to suit the actress's salary. Modern and historic costumes, footwear, headwear and underclothes were made available. As in the case of the Coordinating Office, the Committee's Costume Center found it easier to satisfy the demand for historic costumes than that for elegant, modern clothing.²⁴⁹

The Women's Committee attempted to promote its ideals through its operation of the Costume Center. For instance, in an attempt to discourage the practice of theatres' engaging volunteer performers, actresses with extremely low salaries (such as 40 Mark/month) were denied costume assistance. Similarly, the practice of charging actresses for the predominately donated clothing was justified in part by a desire to stem the perceived

²⁴⁹ Frauenkomitee, "Protokoll der Sitzung vom 3. Oktober 1912," *DNW* 41 (1912): 1203; Frauenkomitee, "Protokoll/12. Oktober 1912," 1266; Frauenkomitee, "Protokoll der Sitzung vom 21. Oktober 1912," *DNW* 41 (1912): 1301; Frauenkomitee, "Protokoll/8. April 1913," 567; Frauenkomitee, "Protokoll der Sitzung vom 24. April 1912 [sic]," *DNW* 42 (1913): 645; Frauenkomitee, "Protokoll/18. Februar 1913," 293.

flood of performers entering the profession by not entirely eliminating the difficulty of furnishing a wardrobe.²⁵⁰ Above all, the Committee intended the Costume Center to serve as a pragmatic benefit of GDBA membership that would encourage actresses to join the union.

The degrees of success and influence enjoyed by the Costume Center are unclear. According to Women's Committee reports, 285 actresses made use of its services by December, 1912, increasing to 730 by April, 1914. The Center expanded significantly in 1913 and 1914 with the hire of a secretary, purchase of fire insurance, relocation to a larger facility and creation of a new division for men's costumes.²⁵¹ Although the center was expanding, the number of users was not as high as might be expected from a national and international project.

The establishment of the Women's Committee Costume

²⁵⁰ Frauenkomitee, "Protokoll der Sitzung vom 15. April 1913," *DNW* 42 (1913): 601; Riechers, "Mißstände," 1425.

²⁵¹ Frauenkomitee, "Protokoll/17. Dezember 1912," 1620; "Delegiertenversammlung von 1914," *DNW* 43 (1914): 523; Frauenkomitee, "Protokoll/18. Februar 1913," 293; Frauenkomitee, "Protokoll der Sitzung vom 21. Februar 1914," *DNW* 43 (1914): 365; Frauenkomitee, "Protokoll der Sitzung vom 19. Juni 1913," *DNW* 42 (1913): 931; Frauenkomitee, "Protokoll der Sitzung vom 1. April 1914," *DNW* 43 (1914): 498; Frauenkomitee, "Kostümzentrale," *DNW* 43 (1914): 498.

Center prompted the formation of a two-tiered system of union and non-union costume charity efforts which the Committee rigidly maintained. Its attempt to consolidate existing costume collections scattered across the German-language theatre world was only partly successful. The original Berlin Coordinating Office and costume centers in other German cities continued to operate, providing resources for non-union actresses and union actresses who could not order costumes in advance. The Women's Committee refused to promote or work with these groups in any way. They were seen as undermining the attractiveness of the Costume Center as a benefit of union membership.

A second point of difference between provincial costume collections and the Costume Center was the Committee's insistence that costumes not be sold within the same region from which they were donated. To avoid possible embarrassment for the actress by eliminating the possibility that her costume might be recognized from the audience as one that had been donated, the Committee redistributed all clothing through its Berlin Center. The only exceptions to this rule were made for GDBA actresses performing in Russia and Switzerland, in which case border tariffs rendered shipping clothes from Berlin impractical. In these cases, the Women's Committee approved initiatives to set up separate

centralized costume collections for union members abroad.²⁵²

Provincial costume collection centers, typically run by area women's groups, were not always amenable to this concept of redistribution. Some groups, such as the German Evangelical Women's Society in Posen, decided to merge their costume service with the Committee's and agreed to exchange all clothing through the Costume Center in Berlin. Other organizations, such as one in Osnabrück, insisted that donated costumes be used by local actresses and therefore remained independent of the GDBA Costume Center. Groups running costume collections in Frankfurt and Wiesbaden were eager to exchange locally donated costumes with the Committee's Costume Center but were rebuffed because they did not limit their service to union performers. Located within the same region, Frankfurt, Wiesbaden and Mainz attempted instead to arrange costume exchanges between their collections.²⁵³ Independent collections and those associated with

the union were forced to compete with each other for donations.

²⁵² Frauenkomitee, "Protokoll der Sitzung vom 7. Januar 1913," *DNW* 42 (1913): 73; Frauenkomitee, "Protokoll/18. Februar 1913," 293; Frauenkomitee, "Protokoll/1. April 1914," 498.

²⁵³ Frauenkomitee, "Protokoll der Sitzung vom 28. Januar 1913," *DNW* 42 (1913): 175; Frauenkomitee, "Protokoll/17. Dezember 1912," 1620; Frauenkomitee, "Protokoll der Sitzung vom 10. September 1912," *DNW* 42 (1913): 1219; Frauenkomitee, "Protokoll/11. Februar 1913," 252.

Beside the costume collection centers, an additional resource was made available to actresses in need of costuming assistance during this period. The Margarethe Formes Foundation, endowed by a former actress, was established in 1913 to ease the costuming expenses of beginning actresses who demonstrated strong talent and financial need. Award recipients were supported for up to three years with stipends of 400-600 Marks/year. All German and Austrian actresses were eligible regardless of their union status so long as they earned what was referred to as a "living wage" (so as to avoid promotion of volunteerism). Although GDBA members such as Grete Ilm served on the Foundation's board, the selection of recipients remained otherwise independent of the union. Awards in the region adjoining Berlin, for instance, were administered by the DBV Welfare Fund (*Wohlfahrtskasse*), the primary source of charitable aid for non-union performers.²⁵⁴

Although actresses continued to work in self-help efforts to ease costume expenses for those in need, the consensus among protestors was that these were meant to be short-term aids available only until costume provision was regulated by the National Theatre Law. Since the breakdown of contract

²⁵⁴ Grete Ilm, "Margarethe-Formes-Stiftung," *DNW* 42 (1913): 782.

negotiations in 1908 between the GDBA and the DBV, it had generally been recognized that any widespread reform of costume provision would have to come from the passage of the National Theatre Law. Between 1909 and 1912, actresses lobbied energetically for the legislation, emphasizing costume provision as their highest priority for reform.

Actresses agitated for the National Theatre Law in lectures, women's group meetings, published articles and petitions. One significant statement of expectations of what should be included in a future Theatre Law was published in *Der neue Weg* in late 1912. Among the multiple views expressed by influential political supporters of the National Theatre Law, were the opinions of seven important contemporary women performers: Marie Barkany, Rosa Bertens, Irene Triesch, Gertrud Eysoldt, Zelia Normann, Grete Ilm, and Marianne Wulf.²⁵⁵ Among their demands, the need for costume provision was particularly stressed.

The working draft of the RTG put together by the Interior Ministry in late 1912 required managers to supply all historic costumes, but only some modern costumes. Article II, §13 established the manager's legal responsibility to "provide the [ensemble] member with clothing articles necessary for the
²⁵⁵ "Theaterelend und Theatergesetz," *DNW* 41 (1912): 1290.

performance of stage productions with the exception of those which can be worn outside the theatre without substantial alteration.” Furthermore, this managerial obligation could not be curtailed within an individual performer’s contract.²⁵⁶ The Interior Ministry apparently assembled this working draft of the legislation from suggestions made from both actor and manager groups. Whether the costume clause which ended up being included in the draft was first proposed by the GDBA or the DBV is unclear.

Leaders among organized actresses opposed the costume clause. In their report on Theatre Law draft discussions, the Women’s Committee representatives Helene Riechers and Elise Zachow-Vallentin listed partial costume provision as one of their greatest sources of dissatisfaction with the draft as it stood.²⁵⁷ Actress leaders had called for full costume provision, without restrictions, and instead were offered partial provision. The proposed partial provision of costumes represented a significant improvement over the present costume situation, yet fell far short of actress activists’ expectations. It went beyond the proposed

²⁵⁶ “Das Reichstheatergesetz,” *DNW* 41 (1912): 1574.

²⁵⁷ Zachow-Vallentin and Riechers, “Besprechung des Reichstheatergesetzes,” 33-34.

DBV compromise of 1903 by providing all historic costumes to all actresses at all German theatres, not just the DBV theatres that met the complicated conditions set forth within the earlier agreement. Also, for the first time, managers were obligated to offer some provision of modern costumes. At the same time, a number of supporters of full costume provision worried that the vagueness of the wording could be exploited. What clothing could be deemed appropriate for off-stage use without substantial alteration was unclear.

Many of actresses' allies who had earlier joined them in calling for the inclusion of full costume provision in the National Theatre Law later offered only limited protest to the compromise position of partial provision adopted in the draft in December, 1912. Women's groups continued to support the Women's Committee in their agitation against the existing version of the Theatre Law predominantly by soliciting lectures and articles by Helene Riechers. Riechers's lectures, sponsored by bourgeois women's groups in at least ten cities across the country in 1913 and 1914, were typically followed by passage among the listeners of a resolution along the following lines:

The gathering of the Cologne branch of the West-German Society for Women's Suffrage on October 14, 1913, in the Isabelle Hall of Gürzenich puts forward the following resolution: We demand that

women in the theatre, no matter what position they may hold, be given the same moral protection that is accorded by legislation to women in other professions. We expect that the future National Theater Law will provide a satisfactory solution for the costume provision paragraph and an alteration in § Abs. 5 (concerning unmarried motherhood) in the manner demanded by the Women's Committee.²⁵⁸

Nonetheless, the support of women's groups protesting inadequacies of the proposed legislation was less energetic than that offered on actresses' behalf before the Theatre Law was drafted. Actress supporters, such as feminist Henni Lehmann and jurist Georg Gillhausen, criticized the vague wording of the clause rather than the absence of full costume provision. The only staunch, vocal proponent of full costume provision, aside from Riechers, was Ludwig Seelig, director of the Stage Artist's Cartel. Paul von Szcepanski, writing for the *Berliner Anzeiger*, also expressed his support for full provision as well as his assessment that this was also what the theatre-going public wanted.²⁵⁹

²⁵⁸ Frauenkomitee, "Protokoll der Sitzung vom 1. November 1913," *DNW* 42 (1913): 1573.

²⁵⁹ Lehmann, "Entwurf eines Reichstheatergesetzes," 286; Georg Gillhausen, "Die Kostümlieferung seitens der Direktoren," *DNW* 41 (1912): 947; Ludwig Seelig, "Kostümlieferung," *DNW* 42 (1913): 366; *Ibid.*, "Kurze Betrachtungen zur Reichstheatergesetz," *DNW* 43 (1914): 171; Frauenkomitee, "Protokoll der Sitzung vom 11. March 1913," *DNW* 42 (1913): 459; Szcepanski, "Theatertoiletten," 170.

GDBA leadership lent no support to the Women's Committee efforts to alter the proposed National Theatre Law with regard to costume provision. GDBA General Secretary Arnim Osterrieth and Vice President Gustav Rickelt had voiced their support of full costume provision in 1910. Yet when the National Theatre Law draft was made public in late 1912, the compromise position which guaranteed only partial costume provision was endorsed by GDBA President Hermann Nissen. Nissen emphasized the positive effect of partial provision: "One of the most important of the reforms provided by the Theater Law is the obligation of managers for provision of historic costumes in their entirety and of modern costumes to a certain extent, namely insofar as they do not serve for daily use."²⁶⁰

President Nissen's lack of support for full costume provision undoubtedly influenced the positions of other GDBA leaders. Earlier proponents of costume provision within GDBA leadership were absent from discussion of the issue. Arnim Osterrieth, the former General Secretary, had left the union after a falling out with Nissen before the National Theatre Law proposal was made public. Vice President Gustav Rickelt, who had pushed

²⁶⁰ Armin Osterrieth, "Die sozialen Probleme im Leben der Schauspielerin," *DNW* 39 (1910): 378; Rickelt, *Schauspieler und Direktoren*, 80; Hermann Nissen, "Die Schauspielerbewegung," *DNW* 42 (1913): 168.

for full costume provision in 1910 both in his book, *Schauspieler und Direktoren*, as well as at the actresses' midnight meeting in March, remained virtually silent on the issue in 1913 and 1914. In an article published March 10, 1913, in *Der neue Weg*, Rickelt praised actresses for their activism, but his criticism of the Theatre Law's costume provision measure (he referred to it as an incomplete solution) was vague and lacked the forcefulness of his earlier protests.²⁶¹ As a whole, the union leadership accepted partial costume provision as a necessary compromise and did its best to engender support for the existing National Theatre Law draft.

Lack of union support for alteration of the costume provision measure may in turn have limited actress protests. With the exception of members of the Women's Committee, actresses themselves did not actively protest the compromise proposal. The only article appearing in *Der neue Weg* relating to costume provision written by an actress during this period, aside from publication of Riechers's lectures, proposed compromising with managers to find mutually agreeable means of sharing the responsibility for costuming. Essentially Nella Wagner's article was

²⁶¹ Gustav Rickelt, "Die Schauspieler und das Reichstheatergesetz," *DNW* 42 (1913): 677.

an endorsement of partial provision.²⁶² One possible explanation for the absence of protest is that the new editors of *Der neue Weg*, might have neglected to publish opinions sent in by actresses in response to the union leadership's approval of the existing costume provision measure. The journal, in general, appeared less dedicated in its advocacy of actress-related reforms after Osterrieth's departure. However, in other venues, too, such as meetings, Women's Committee discussion hours, and in the journals of women's organizations, actresses failed to protest the proposition of partial costume provision. Instead, they generally focused their activist efforts at this time on the issue of age declaration.

The compromise position on costume provision undermined the value of costumes as a rallying issue for actresses. Despite its vagueness and uncertainty, the partial provision adopted in the Theatre Law apparently satisfied actresses as a whole. Helene Riechers and Ludwig Seelig, however, continued to agitate for full provision throughout 1913 and the first half of 1914. Riechers and Seelig's protests did not bear fruit. Even upon the death of Hermann Nissen in February, 1914, after Gustav Rickelt assumed the GDBA Presidency, no changes were made in the union position regarding costume provision. As a ²⁶² Nella Wagner, "Ein Kompromiß," *DNW* 42 (1913): 843.

result, organized actresses were forced to reconcile themselves to the anticipation of a need for charitable costume collection centers continuing in the foreseeable future.

Chapter Summary

The National Theatre Law promised benefits to actresses, but offered predominately compromise solutions that reformed only the most extreme issues of gender discrimination. Even these limited reforms remained elusive as the process of the National Theatre Law's passage was repeatedly stalled. Advancement of the National Theatre Law to the Reichstag was subject to frequent delays through 1913 and 1914 due to the efforts of organized managers. On November 8, 1913, Ernst Schlesinger estimated that the Theatre Law would go to the Reichstag sometime after Christmas. In February, 1914, Ludwig Seelig reported that the Theatre Law had not yet made it to the Reichstag because of continued manager protests. Similar legislation being pursued in Austria was making faster headway. In April, 1914, the Women's Committee sent a petition, with the backing of the Maximilian Pfeiffer, Minna Cauer, Else Lüders and feminist Dr. Helene Stöcker requesting that the Bundesrat take action with regard to the National Theatre Law as soon as possible. On July 25, 1914, a *Der neue Weg* article reported an indefinite

postponement resulting from managers' request that the DBV be given time to examine Austrian theatre regulation and look for possible links with it.²⁶³ A mutually satisfactory final draft was not completed by mid-1914 and the outbreak of World War I thereafter postponed the legislation indefinitely.

The era of expansion in the actresses' movement was short-lived, leaving much of its promise unfulfilled. The tremendous energy and momentum which had characterized it in 1909 and 1910 had slowed by mid-1914, even before the outbreak of war. Little tangible political progress was actually made in the areas newly taken up by actress activists between 1909 and 1914. The leaders of the Women's Committee frequently complained of actress apathy; however its members did little after 1911 to maintain the vitality that characterized the movement in previous years.

The compromise reforms in costume provision, marriage and pregnancy offered by the National Theatre Law top a list of projects that remained unfinished at the outbreak of World War I. The matter of age declaration on insurance cards

²⁶³ Ernst Schlesinger, "Reichstheatergesetz," *DNW* 42 (1913): 1454; Ludwig Seelig, "Jahresbericht des Kartells der Verbände der deutsch-österreichischen Bühnen- und Orchestermmitglieder 1913/1914," *DNW* 43 (1914): 267; Frauenkomitee, "Protokoll/1. April 1914," 498; "Das Reichstheatergesetz abermals verschoben?" *DNW* 43 (1914): 902.

stayed unresolved, the Children's Home effort lacked sufficient funds to get off the ground and indisposition time was ignored. In fact, beyond the establishment of the union Costume Center and Maternity Care Fund, as well as a continued spreading of the general awareness of actress issues, the Women's Committee could claim few successes during this period.

Actresses continued to be marked by a perceived sexual difference and the sexuality of actresses colored many of the discussions of reform initiatives. In her history of prostitution in Germany, Regina Schulte comments on the social prejudice against actresses that remained at the beginning of the twentieth century: "When a woman stood on the stage, before everyone in the parade-roll of the lover, she was considered a female idol; when she left the stage, she was disreputable. She was a sexual object, both in the projections of her audience and as the mistress of the man who kept her, as well as in the contempt of society that needed and ostracized her."²⁶⁴ The actress's status as sexual object continued to complicate her assimilation into the German bourgeoisie.

However, the expansion of legal protections extended to actresses was a sign of the diminution of social prejudice. The promotion of the National Theatre Law, the inclusion of ²⁶⁴ Schulte, *Sperrbezirke*, 106.

performers in national health insurance programs and the increased prosecution of sexual harassment can be attributed to German society's growing acceptance of performers in general and actresses in particular. This shift in the social identification of actresses may be explained, at least in part, as a response to actresses' organized efforts to attain greater legal, social and financial status.

Despite some degree of success in social assimilation, actresses remained hampered in their efforts at social advancement by their continued identification as objects of the public's sexual desire. Although actresses were largely successful in shifting discussions of costume provision away from an association with prostitution after 1910, the sexuality of actresses still colored discussion of many of their suggested reform initiatives. The consideration of unmarried actress mothers, for example, was complicated by the specter of sexual promiscuity. In the debates over marriage and age discrimination, actresses attempted to combat the threat to their careers from a lessening of their perceived sexual, and hence financial, desirability.

Actresses' desire to be accepted in bourgeois circles intensified pressure to adopt attitudes of sexual conservatism. They may have felt the need to overcompensate in the strictness of their position in order to stress their moral correctness and

counter social perceptions of actresses as immoral persons. Many actresses also felt a social responsibility, in view of their public position, to act as social role models, and thereby role models of sanctioned sexual behavior.

The political failures of the actresses' movement may partly have been the result of the waning participation and energy already evident in 1911. The rapid expansion and energy characterizing the movement in 1909 and 1910 had faded by 1914. Apathy began to take hold following the adoption of the Women's Committee by the GDBA at the end of 1910. Thereafter, actresses allowed the Committee to assume most of the responsibility for reform efforts.

When actresses outside of the organized leadership of the movement did become involved after 1911, they used different means of protesting from the ones in 1909 and 1910. They rarely contributed articles to the "Women's News" column, but instead wrote letters to the Committee, attended its regular discussion sessions or signed petitions it circulated. Large actress meetings were no longer called. By 1913, when the Theatre Law draft was made public, actresses had come to rely completely on the Women's Committee to protest on their behalf.

The diminished use of the "Women's News" column as a forum for discussion of work issues makes it more difficult to

assess the continued level of interest in reform among the wider body of union actresses. In 1911, the column essentially became an outlet for the Women's Committee reports and opinions. At least one actress article submitted to the editors of *Der neue Weg* was referred to the Committee for the decision of whether or not it would be published. It was apparently, at least to some degree, the Committee's choice to consider actresses' letters internally rather than maintain a published discussion of actress issues in the union journal. Another factor in the changed direction of the "Women's News" section was the departure of Arnim Osterrieth, a staunch supporter of actress rights, during this period after a fallout with President Nissen.

In other decisions, too, the Women's Committee may have discouraged the active participation of actresses. The Committee insisted on keeping its activities centralized in Berlin. Attempts to assume some part of the leadership of actress organization efforts in other cities were ignored by the Committee. For instance, in 1913, Munich's Society for the Interests of Women (Verein für Fraueninteressen) requested permission to establish a second office of the Women's Committee in Munich and run discussion sessions similar to those offered by the Berlin office. The request was denied on the basis that only in Berlin would a Committee office maintain close contact to the union

administration.²⁶⁵ The Hamburg Society for Women Theatre Personnel (Hamburger Verein für weibliche Bühnengehörige) was also operated independently from the Berlin organization. The refusal of the Women's Committee to delegate part of its work to other regional cities combined with control of the "Women's News" column effectively cut off actresses living outside of Berlin from the decision-making within the movement. Regional actress protestors active before the integration of the Committee into the union, such as Irene Pangoff, Martha Krüger and Marie Steffen-Wohlbrück, were left out of organized leadership. Of course, non-union actresses remained cut off entirely from the actresses' movement so long as it was dominated by the Committee.

On the other hand, the centralized position of the Women's Committee provided for focused direction and a united front for the actresses' movement, allowing it to make important headway in areas of legal reform and public relations. Helene Riechers, speaking and writing prolifically during her chairmanship of the Committee, did more than any other actress during this period to shape the movement. Riechers differed from earlier influential activists, such as Hedwig Wangel and Irene Pangoff in directing her agitation efforts primarily at persons

²⁶⁵ Frauenkomitee, "Protokoll der Sitzung vom 2. Mai 1914," *DNW* (1913) 685.

outside of the theatre world, rather than focusing on invigorating actress support.

Chapter Five

The Actresses' Movement During and After the First World War, 1914-1919

By 1914, with support from the actors' union and national women's groups, actresses' attempts to lobby the German Reichstag for national theatre industry regulations that would include important protections for women performers were on the verge of fruition. However, the outbreak of World War I scuttled the attempt to put through the proposed legislation and, at the same time, essentially destroyed the actresses' movement. Right from the start of the war, the movement was weakened by the general adoption across Germany of a domestic peace policy (*Burgfrieden*) that made political protest impossible. In addition, actresses lost the leadership of important members of the GDBA Women's Committee. Despite the breakdown of the actresses' movement during World War I, the earlier work of actress activists eventually bore fruit with the establishment of the national standard contract in 1919.

Discussion of actress issues virtually disappeared after mid-1914 when actresses and their earlier allies in reform efforts, the actors' union and women's rights groups, turned their attentions to other concerns. Material about the actresses'

movement, which had appeared in such venues as the “Women’s News” column, Women’s Committee meeting transcripts, articles in *Der neue Weg*, *Die Frau*, and *Frauenbewegung*, as well as a wide variety of books and dissertations, was very rarely published after the start of the war. Most of the references to actress issues that appeared after mid-1914 were made as asides in more general writings about the state of the German theatre during the war. Even authors such as Heinrich Stümcke and Rudolf Karl Goldschmidt, who wrote *Die Frau als Schauspielerin* (1905) and *Die Schauspielerin: Ihr Weg, ihre Gestalt, und ihre Wirkung* (1922) respectively, virtually ignored actress issues in their books about German theatre during the war. Julius Bab’s *Die Frau als Schauspielerin* (1915) is a unique exception in its choice of the actresses’ work issues as a subject. This dearth of material complicates any attempt to ascertain the effect of the war on actresses’ lives. Yet, at the same time, the sudden cessation of publications is in itself an indication of the strength of the blow the war delivered to the actresses’ movement.

Relevant material is more readily available with regard to the national standard contract of 1919 and how it affected women performers. Beyond publications in *Der neue Weg*, the contract and its implications were discussed in Wenzel Goldbaum and Gerhard Jacoby’s *Rechte und Pflichten der Bühnen-*

und Filmschauspieler (1922), Adolf Eiermann's "Die soziale Lage des Solopersonals der Südwestdeutschen Bühnen" (Ph.D. diss., 1921), and Fritz Henn's "Der Tarif- und Normalvertrag vom 12. Mai 1919 in seiner Bedeutung für die soziale Lage der Bühnenangehörigen" (Ph.D. diss., 1925).

This chapter will cover two basic areas. In the first, I will describe how important organizational structures of the actresses' movement, such as the Women's Committee, the "Women's News" column, and the Coordinating Office for Germany's Female Stage Personnel were disabled during the war. The second section will evaluate what effect earlier actress activism had on the 1919 standard contract and examine the degree to which actresses' working situations were improved by the contract.

At the Start of the War

The outbreak of war in the summer of 1914 brought chaos to the theatre world. It spurred an immediate rash of theatre closures. Uncertainty reigned over the question of whether theatres would reopen and, if they continued to operate during the war, whether audiences would attend. Many theatres remained closed for months after the traditional start of the winter season in the fall of 1914. According to statistics assembled

by manager Oskar Lange and published in the October 26 issue of *Deutsche Bühne*, 103 German theatres had opened for the fall season while 110 remained closed, 24 of these by government order. Many theatres remained closed for the duration of the war. Of the 103 travelling theatre companies in Germany, Lange estimated that less than one third would remain in operation during the war.²⁶⁶

Joblessness among actors and actresses inevitably soared. According to Lange's statistics, the closed theatre companies had employed roughly 7,200 theatre personnel (at least 2,000 of whom were women performers). In addition, this estimated unemployment figure failed to account for ensemble cutbacks made by managers of operational theatres to reduce costs. Managers relied widely on a common contract paragraph known as the war clause which allowed them to dissolve employment contracts during times of military conflict. Many of the men made unemployed were probably drafted into military service, while women performers were left to search for alternative work.

Those performers who retained their jobs were

²⁶⁶ Oskar Lange, "Der Krieg und die wirtschaftliche Lage der Bühnen-Angehörigen im Winter 1914," *Deutsche Bühne* 6 (26 Oktober 1914): 531-534.

subjected to widespread wage reductions. Managers, uncertain of their financial prospects for the coming season, typically cut ensembles members' wages by a quarter or a half. In an attempt to maintain their job security for the season, actors and actresses generally agreed to return to work at these considerably reduced wages. One anonymous actress writing in 1918 reported that wages of 90-100 Marks/month were typical for the first two to three years of the war.²⁶⁷

Along with persuading managers and local governments to keep theatres in operation, the GDBA focused its efforts in the first weeks of the war on providing assistance to the mass of suddenly unemployed performers. The union helped members in need by providing free housing, clothing, meals, and when possible, alternative employment. Many were hired, for example, to perform in "Patriotic Plays" for local school groups. GDBA members who were drafted into the army were excused from having to pay union dues and a new fund was established to help their families. Drafted performers, their families, and anyone left unemployed by the war could defer pension fund payments without penalty. The charity services provided by the union were

²⁶⁷ Einer für viele [possibly Marie Steffen-Wohlbrück], "Die wirtschaftliche Notlage der deutschen Schauspieler zur Zeit der Hochkonjunktur," *DNW* 47 (15 November 1918): 379.

at first restricted entirely to members, but eventually non-member colleagues were allowed in GDBA kitchens for lunch and supper. For further assistance, non-member performers had to rely on the generosity of the DBV, which also provided free meals, lodging and monetary help from its Welfare and War Assistance Funds.²⁶⁸

The effect of the war on the actresses' movement was immediate. The Women's Committee followed the lead of the GDBA and also bourgeois women's groups in embarking on a flurry of charitable activity to help its constituents as a demonstration of its patriotism. As of June 1, 1915, the Committee had provided member actresses in financial need with 1,383 Marks from its Assistance Fund, 1,520 Marks from the Maternity Care Fund, and 2,546 Marks in emergency loans. It employed member actresses to do knitting work, provided housing for

²⁶⁸ "Bekanntmachung," *DNW* 43 (15 August 1914): 960, 976-977; "An die Lokalverbände," *DNW* 45 (11 March 1916): 271; "Das Hilfswerk der Genossenschaft Deutscher Bühnen-Angehörigen vom Beginn des Krieges bis zum 1. Juni 1915," *DNW* 44 (12 June 1915): 327-328; "Hilfsfonds für die Angehörigen der im Felde stehenden Bühnenkünstler," *DNW* 43 (22 August 1914): 976; "Mittagstisch," *DNW* 43 (12 September 1914): 1005; "Ich kenne keine Parteien mehr," *DNW* 43 (29 August 1914): 993; "Bekanntmachung," *Deutsche Bühne* 6 (1 September 1914): 475; "Aufruf!" *Deutsche Bühne* 6 (1 September 1914): 474; "Das Kriegsheim des 'Deutschen Bühnen-Vereins,'" *Deutsche Bühne* 6 (26 Oktober 1914): 535.

children, placed unemployed actresses in housing donated by women's groups, helped locate jobs in alternative professions, offered private charitable meals for women members, and distributed clothing from its Costume Center for domestic as well as theatrical use.²⁶⁹

Organized actresses had little choice but to return to the non-confrontational role of dispensing charity that had been the focus of organized actress action back in 1899. The policy of domestic peace (*Burgfrieden*) which now pervaded the country made political agitation impractical. The general consensus in Germany at the start of the military conflict was that the war would be a short one. Therefore actresses might have expected only a short-lived diversion of the energies and resources of the Women's Committee, as well as the GDBA and bourgeois women's groups, away from political agitation for economic, legal, and social reforms and toward charitable services. This expectation turned out to be incorrect.

For actresses, the war was a time of hardship and hunger from the outset. Theatre closures, unemployment and wage reductions brought them professional instability and increasing poverty. Prominent women performers were not exempt from the hardship. According to her biography by Jutta ²⁶⁹ "Das Hilfswerk," 327-328.

Ahlemann, the celebrated older actress Adele Sandrock was forced to rely on charity during the war, including handouts from soup kitchens. She could not find work even in variety theatres and earned money by doing readings at a pub for 50 Marks per month. The well-respected actress Tilla Durieux was forced to abandon her plan of opening her own theatre. A number of women performers in Berlin, such as Johanna Arnstädt, Hannes Hoff, Anna-Müller-Lincke, and Brigitt Engell received charitable housing from the DBV.²⁷⁰ Many actresses were forced by economic circumstances to leave the theatre profession and scramble for alternative occupations.

Despite the tremendous problems brought upon actors, the union offered its enthusiastic support of the war effort. Hundreds of actors and other theatre personnel serving in the military were listed proudly in *Der neue Weg* and the *Deutsches Bühnen-Jahrbuch*.²⁷¹

²⁷⁰ Ahlemann, *Ich bleibe die große Adele*, 325-327; "Das Kriegsheim," 535.

²⁷¹ "Ich kenne keine Parteien mehr," *DNW* 43 (29 August 1914): 993; "Unter der Fahne stehen folgende Kollegen," *DNW* 43 (31 October 1914): 1082.

As the War Continued

As the war dragged on, optimism and enthusiasm diminished among Germans. Food shortages began in 1915. By June, bread was rationed. Potatoes soon followed. Shortages emerged in coal, gas, clothing, and other necessities. The government enacted quotas among farmers and established price ceilings, and a black market flourished. Already in 1915, food riots, demonstrations and strikes had erupted around the country.²⁷²

The legal and financial vulnerability of actors remained high as the war continued and soon sparked the resumption of political protest in the GDBA. Reductions of wages made at the start of the war mostly remained in 1915 and 1916. Growing inflation exacerbated the effect of wage suppression. The weak economic position of performers was further aggravated by a trend of regression in their legal rights. A sizeable number of managers assumed increasing powers to fire actors at will in new contract provisions and through broad interpretations of the war clause. Ludwig Seelig, General Secretary of The Stage Artists' Cartel, rigorously protested use of the war clause for this purpose. The clause allowed managers to close their theatres in the event of war and fire their ensembles with eight days notice, during

²⁷² Craig, *Germany, 1866-1945*, 353-357.

which period performers were to be paid one third of their regular salary, including *Spielgeld*. Seelig protested examples, most often in private theatres, where the clause was used months after the start of the war or was used repeatedly to reduce wages or dismiss unwanted individual employees.²⁷³

In addition to the misuse of the war clause, many managers were reported in *Der neue Weg* to have instituted new contracts during the war, restricting actors' rights. Contracts became increasingly conditional and alterable. For example, a contract cited in *Der neue Weg* from the Würzburg Stadttheater during the 1915/16 season gave the management the right to change the dates of the season at will or dissolve the contract at any time in response to war events. In contracts quoted in *Der neue Weg* from the Stadttheaters of Crefeld and Bremen, managers explicitly reserved the right to make wage reductions as they deemed necessary. Contracts would often be of short duration, perhaps a month, sometimes less, and at the end of the contract period could be renewed repeatedly under the same

²⁷³ The firing of employees whose contracts did not contain a war clause was governed by the *Bürgerliche Gesetzbuch* (1900). Ernst Schlesinger, "Krieg und Theater," *DNW* 43 (8 August 1914): 947; Ludwig Seelig, "Kriegsschäden," *DNW* 44 (22 May 1915): 285; Ludwig Seelig, "Krieg und Bühne," *DNW* 44 (29 May 1915): 302.

conditions at the sole discretion of the manager.²⁷⁴ Actors attempting to break out from such agreements risked blacklisting as contract violators.

Overall, the war years appear to have been a time of profit for theatre management. Through the use of one-sided dismissal and continuation privileges in contracts combined with wage reductions, managers in large part successfully shifted the economic risk of war-time operation onto their employees. (There were, of course, a number of exceptions -- managers who committed themselves to reinstating wages as soon as ticket sales permitted.) Audience attendance remained strong throughout the war. Ticket prices, reduced in the first months of the military action, were soon brought back to pre-war levels. According to *Der neue Weg*, no theatre bankruptcies were announced in the 1914/15 season.²⁷⁵

Performers felt increasingly trapped in low-wage positions as they witnessed theatre managements prosper, and

²⁷⁴ Ludwig Seelig, "Soziales und Rechtliches vom Theater im Krieg," *DNW* 44 (27 November 1915): 744-745.

²⁷⁵ Seelig, "Kriegsschäden," 285; Friedrich Schramm, "Änderung in Bühnen-Engagementsvertragsrecht durch Abschluß eines für allgemein verbindlich erklärten Tarifvertrages zwischen dem deutschen Bühnenverein und der deutschen Bühnengenossenschaft" (Ph.D. diss., Universität Frankfurt am Main, 1923), 8.

despite the policy of *Burgfrieden*, actors began to protest wage cuts and new contract clauses with articles in *Der neue Weg* in November 1914.²⁷⁶ Actors were also eventually successful in challenging war-time contract abuses in the courts. The GDBA's resumption of political action, however, did not extend to a return to lobbying for the National Theatre Law. Union leaders were well aware that legislators would not be interested in dealing with theatre regulation until after the war. The GDBA instead fell back to an older approach. Citing the prevalent spirit of nationalism, the union attempted in 1916 to reopen friendly relations with the DBV. The GDBA appealed to the good will of DBV members for the enactment of some of the reforms deemed most pressing: wage increases and job security. The relationship between the two organizations had remained tense in the early years of the war and did not ease until April 1916. At the 1916 Delegates' Meeting (the first held since the outbreak of war), GDBA members unanimously passed a measure declaring their willingness to establish "professional relations" with the DBV despite multiple differences on social and economic issues. The effort at

²⁷⁶ Ludwig Seelig, "Sozialpolitik und Theaterkunst in der Kriegszeit," *DNW* 43 (28 November 1914): 1151; "Die Genossenschaft – eine Zwangsinnung," *DNW* 45 (7 October 1916): 1014; "Organisation ist Macht und Sieg," *DNW* 45 (21 October 1916): 1071.

reconciliation was formally accepted by members of the DBV with a unanimous vote of approval at its next meeting. A joint panel of leaders from both organisations began meeting on January 24, 1917.²⁷⁷

Unlike the larger GDBA, the Women's Committee did not shift back from the charity work it had embarked on in the summer of 1914 to resume political agitation at a later point during the war. The depoliticization of the Women's Committee resulted, in part, from a shift in the Committee's composition. Its membership suffered particularly from the disruptions of the war. By the end of 1914, not a single member who had served before the war remained. Helene Riechers, President of the Committee until 1914 and the driving force for political reform within the actresses' movement, followed her husband to the eastern front and served there as a Red Cross nurse.²⁷⁸ Of those women who sat on the Committee in 1915 and afterward, none had previous experience in political agitation of any kind within the actresses'

²⁷⁷ "Bekanntmachung," *DNW* 45 (29 April 1916): 473; Leopold Jessner, "Bühnenverein und Bühnengenossenschaft," *DNW* 45 (22 July 1916): 749; "Mitteilungen," *DNW* 46 (18 December 1917): 102; Together the DBV and GDBA also began producing benefit performances in support of war-relief charities in 1917. "Nationaltag der deutschen Bühnen für die 6. Kriegsanleihe," *DNW* 46 (17 March 1917): 309.

²⁷⁸ *Deutsches Bühnen-Jahrbuch* (1915): 193, 232, 747.

movement.

Actresses were almost completely silent on issues of reform after August of 1914. Only one article was published in the "Women's News" column during the war. Appearing on August 15, 1914, it was a reprinted article by a non-performer about the problems of educated women in finding work, with individual attention given to the problems of actresses recently made unemployed by the war. In addition to the discontinuance of "Women's News" articles, the Women's Committee ceased printing the transcripts of its meetings. It was not made explicit in the journal whether the decision to cease publication of these political outlets for actresses was made by the editorial staff of the journal, by the Women's Committee, or, in the case of the "Women's News" column, was simply a result of a lack of contributions. In place of the column and the published transcripts, a short section was published toward the back of *Der neue Weg*, entitled "Women's Committee" ("Frauenkomitee"), in which appeared repeatedly posted lists of available sources of charitable assistance outside of the union, solicitations for donations, and help in fund-raising, as well as the locations and hours of the Costume Center and the Committee's office.

Notices of legislative changes that might affect actresses were also occasionally published in the new "Women's

Committee” section of the union journal. For the most part, the articles were brief reports of changes occurring in the country and the world that reflected indirectly on issues which the Committee had pioneered before the war. They were far shorter than earlier articles in the “Women’s News” section. The greatest number addressed efforts to eliminate discriminatory treatment of unmarried mothers. In one such article, a law was reported to have been passed in Norway offering legal equality to children of unmarried and married parentage. Another article notified readers that the government was considering a change in policy that would extend maternity benefits to married women who were not enrolled in the government health plan if they earned less than 2,500 Marks/year and also to unmarried women, if the fathers of their children were soldiers and acknowledged the child as theirs. This last issue was the only instance I could find of Women’s Committee participation in political action during the war. In 1915, the Committee added its name to a petition supporting the proposed increase in federal maternity benefits, recalling the group’s earlier efforts to promote equal treatment of married and unmarried pregnancy in the National Theatre

Law.²⁷⁹

Issues of specific concern to actresses were not directly addressed by the Women's Committee during the war. What little writing was done regarding actress-related issues on behalf of the Women's Committee was anonymous. The Committee put most of the little energy it seemed to have left into fundraising, particularly for the Costume Center (which appears to have served an increasing demand during the war). Starting with the paper shortage in early 1918, even the Committee's minimal work of directing actresses to sources of assistance outside the union was eliminated when the Women's Committee section of the paper was reduced to eight lines of print announcing only their office and Costume Center hours.²⁸⁰

The only other writing by a female author to appear in *Der neue Weg* during the war was published anonymously. Written in 1916 as a letter to GDBA President Rickelt, it was a plea for assistance in putting together a new wardrobe (hers having been confiscated for debts) and locating a job so that the author

²⁷⁹ Frauenkomitee, "Bund für Mutterschutz," *DNW* 44 (20 March 1915): 160; Frauenkomitee, "Die Erweiterung der Kriegs-Wochenhilfe," *DNW* 44 (19 June 1915): 344; Frauenkomitee, "Für die unehelichen Kriegswaisen," *DNW* 44 (30 October 1915): 652.

²⁸⁰ "Frauenkomitee," *DNW* 47 (16 February 1918): 50.

might return to the acting profession after having been forced to find alternative work after the layoffs in 1914. Rickelt chose to publish the letter and appealed to readers to assist its author.²⁸¹

As had been the case in the 1890s, most of the limited discussion of actress issues offered during the war stemmed from non-actresses. By far the most significant discussion of actress reform issues was influential drama critic Julius Bab's *Die Frau als Schauspielerin*. Bab's work seems to have fallen largely on deaf ears when it appeared in 1915. Having been written before the war as an argument for including protections for actresses in the National Theatre Law (drawn from material he had been using in lectures as early as 1912), the book's impact upon publication was largely negated by the changed political landscape. In an introduction to his summary of the actresses' movement in the 1890s and 1900s and his discussion of such issues as costume provision, the marriage ban, and the sexual exploitation of women performers, Bab found it necessary to defend his promotion of actress reforms as a patriotic act – saying that it was patriotic even during this time of war to recognize the failings in the theatre system and society as a whole and want to improve

²⁸¹ “Leibes- und Seelennot,” *DNW* 45 (23 December 1916): 1333.

them.²⁸² Bab's work was greeted with no public response from actresses and very little reaction from the union. The only attention to the book in *Der neue Weg* was the reprinting of a portion in the journal's literary section, preceded by a short introduction in which the editor refers to the book as an affirmation of the GDBA's earlier work in exposing the social problems of performers.²⁸³

Ludwig Seelig was the only other writer in this period to give significant attention to actress issues. In *Der neue Weg* articles published in 1915 and 1916 he raised the issues of costume provision, marriage rights, equal pay, and sexual harassment. He expressed frustration, no doubt felt by many, at the lack of progress in reforms of these areas, asking: "What have all of the exhortations of affliction accomplished? What has the famed Night-Meeting of the union's women from the 1st to the 2nd of March 1910 in Berlin achieved in the area of modern

²⁸² Julius Bab, "Die Frau als Schauspielerin," *Die Frau* 19 (1912):279-290, 365-373; Bab, *Die Frau als Schauspielerin*, 9.

²⁸³ "Das soziale Problem der Schauspielerin," *DNW*, "Literarische Teil," 44 (1915): 754.

costume provision?"²⁸⁴ Seelig's discussion of actress reforms was usually, however, raised as a secondary point to his main concerns of the restoration of wages and contract security, promotion of a future National Theatre Law or his proposal to have state and municipal governments nationwide take over the management of local theatres.

As a whole, union leaders gave minimal attention to actress issues during the war. However, the union did promote the concerns of its members in areas that could have been expected to affect women performers more than men, such as costuming and age discrimination. It was the GDBA administration and not the Women's Committee who approached the National Clothing Office (*Reichsbekleidungsstelle*) in 1917 and 1918 to ascertain how its policies for the rationing of clothing would affect performers' wardrobes. Rickelt announced on June 30, 1917, that this government office was calling upon theatres to reduce their demands for modern costumes with the warning that although performers received extra clothing, they would not be given clothing substantially beyond standard issue. When in 1918 the

²⁸⁴ Ludwig Seelig, "Vertragsmoral," *DNW* 45 (8 January 1916) 28; *idem.*, "Soziales und Rechtliches," *DNW* 44 (6 November 1915) 672; *idem.*, "Die Schaubühne als unmoralische Anstalt?" *DNW* 45 (15 January 1916) 57; *idem.*, "Der Theaterbetrieb im Kriegswinter 1915," *DNW* 45 (22 April 1916) 448; *idem.*, "Theater und Parlament," *DNW* 47 (10 August and 15 October 1918): 242, 323.

National Clothing Office threatened widespread confiscations, it was Rickelt who approached the office for reassurance that performers' wardrobes would be exempt from clothing seizures.²⁸⁵ It was also the president's office that announced a loosening of the government's policy regarding the reporting of age on insurance cards.²⁸⁶

Because so little was written about actresses' working conditions during this time, it is difficult to gauge how practices that discriminated on the basis of gender such as dismissal for marriage and pregnancy, age discrimination, and costume provision were affected by the war. Seelig and others did not go into detail beyond saying that the problems cited earlier still existed and needed to be fixed.

Even in its charity work, the Women's Committee became less and less visible as the war progressed. One of the only successes that actresses had during the war was the establishment of a Children's Home. This was instigated by the

²⁸⁵ "Bekanntmachung: Bühne und Bezugsschein," *DNW* 46 (30 June 1917): 697; "Zur Kleiderabgabe," *DNW* 47 (6 July and 7 September 1918): 217, 269.

²⁸⁶ Insurance cards for the national employees' insurance (*Angestellten-Versicherung*) were no longer required to state the insured's age if identity could be established by other means. *DNW* 45 (23 December 1916): 1335.

donation to the union in 1917 of the Wildbad estate in Rothenburg o. d. Tauber. The estate was used as a recreation and recuperation center, and the Women's Committee established its long-awaited Children's Home on the grounds here in May of 1918. The Committee had reported funds of 50,000 Marks designated for the Children's Home in their accounts at the end of 1914 (up from 27,000 Marks in 1912). Many union locals continued to have voluntary salary withdrawals of 10 Pfennigs/month from their members during the war for the benefit of the fund. In 1918, the Women's Committee initiated a modest renewal of fund-raising efforts to help support the new institution. The home was inevitably more modest than had been envisioned in pre-war days. Among the significant compromises were the location of the site at a considerable distance from Berlin and the limitation of the number of resident children to around twenty. These were aged between five and fifteen and, in 1920, fifteen of them were housed free of charge. The children were not educated at the home (as had also been originally planned), but instead were given access to schools in the town.²⁸⁷

²⁸⁷ *Deutsches Bühnen-Jahrbuch* (1915): 193; Frauenkomitee, "Aufruf," *DNW* 41 (1912): 1133; Seelig, "Theater und Parlament," 242; "Spenden für das Kinderheim," *DNW* 47 (7 September 1918): 270; *Deutsches Bühnen-Jahrbuch* (1920): 178-179.

Beyond the Union

The Coordinating Office for Germany's Female Stage Personnel continued to operate during the early years of the war, but it did not fare well. Beginning in 1916, it suffered from accusations of the financial mismanagement and corruption of its supervisor, Emmy Rotth, who had run the operation since 1901. Complaints of tax evasion and the misuse of donated materials were directed at the organization. Two former employees of the Coordinating Office complained to the Berlin police that clothing was being sold or given to non-actresses (against the official policy by which only actresses who showed their contracts would be eligible for donated materials) and that the best pieces were taken by Rotth and her sister. A third witness attested that when she approached the shop poorly dressed, she was turned away, and that only after she had assured Rotth that she could pay was she allowed inside. On the basis of these complaints, on August 3, 1917, Berlin police ordered the Coordinating Office to be discontinued until it could be reorganized.²⁸⁸

Louise Dumont, who along with Paula Klaar-Eberty was in charge of the organization, attempted to find a way to

²⁸⁸ From Rotth to an unnamed female recipient, 26 December 1916; from Berlin Polizei-Präsidium to Dumont, 3 August 1917. Dumont-Lindemann Archive.

continue to serve the population of non-union women performers who depended on the Coordinating Office. In a letter to Gustav Rickelt dated October 16, 1917, she maintained that she could not abandon the Coordinating Office so long as “women performers, *who are not members of the union* (and these are the poorest of the poor) have no refuge from their costuming plight.”²⁸⁹ At first Dumont suggested that the organization be reformed and institute a stricter system of controls. Dumont then appealed to Rickelt to allow the Office’s work to be continued by the Women’s Committee Costume Center, in return for the donation of the its remaining assets. This suggestion was rejected on the grounds that it was antithetical to the function of the union to serve non-members.

On May 6, 1918, at the recommendation of the GDBA president, Berlin police ordered that the Coordinating Office be dissolved. Dumont and Klaar-Eberty then turned to the DBV for the means to continue assisting women performers, regardless of union status, in keeping with the Coordinating Office’s original purpose. In exchange for the donation of 22,500 Marks to the DBV Welfare fund from the sale of the Coordinating Office’s remaining

²⁸⁹ From Dumont to Rickelt, 15 October 1917; from Dumont to Berlin Polizei-Präsidium, 9 November 1917. Dumont-Lindemann Archive.

assets, Klaar-Eberty and Dumont were assured that actresses who had been members of the Coordinating Office would be given preference in the dispersal of moneys from the fund.²⁹⁰

Revolution and the End of the War

In 1917 and 1918, shortages of all kinds were worsening, inflation was rising quickly, and growing discontent among the populace could be seen through an increased occurrence of riots and strikes. Actors in the GDBA made use of the rising unrest to make their discontentment with present working conditions felt. In January 1918, they were successful for the first time in negotiating a minimum wage agreement with the DBV. The newly instituted DBV-GDBA joint panel agreed that soloist (non-chorus) performers would earn a minimum wage of 200 Marks/month and that those earning between 200 and 1000 Marks/month would be given salary raises of 5-20% as an adjustment for inflation.²⁹¹ By November of 1918, with the

²⁹⁰ From Berlin Polizei-Präsidium to Dumont, 6 May 1918; from Paula Klaar-Eberty to Hülsen-Hasseler, 14 June 1918; from Hülsen-Hasseler to Klaar-Eberty, 21 December 1918. Dumont-Lindemann Archive.

²⁹¹ "Zur wirtschaftlichen Lage der Bühnenangehörigen," *DNW* 47 (19 January 1918): 17; "Bekanntmachung," *DNW* 47 (16 March 1918): 81.

outbreak of revolution, this agreement was widely viewed as inadequate among GDBA members, and a new agreement with a higher wage was demanded. Discussions for a second wage agreement did not proceed quickly enough for some, and groups of actors began organizing independent wage negotiations in cities across the country.

By the war's end in November of 1918, the country was in disorder. The Kaiser abdicated and a new socialist government was instituted. Workers' and soldiers' councils took over the running of the country. The GDBA, which had been developing stronger ties to the socialist party in the last years of the war, immediately announced its full support of the new government. In the following months and years, the union worked with the government to bring the theatre system under increased state control, which was seen as a means of ensuring high artistic quality, social protections for performers, and greater public accessibility. The pro-labor spirit which prevailed during and shortly after the revolution also allowed union actors to negotiate a contract with the DBV in 1919 that included significant worker protections.

As a whole, the war seems to have knocked actresses' issues off the political map. The two groups from which actresses had received the greatest support before the war, the actors'

union and women's groups, kept their attentions turned to other areas when the conflict ended. Union leaders, working in an increasingly close relationship with the socialist party, resumed high levels of activism after the war, but focused on issues of the most general interest such as salaries, job security, and bringing the theatre system under increased public control.

While the union had its focus diverted from actress issues, assistance from the women's groups which had supported actresses before the war was also absent. The bourgeois women's movement as a whole grew in strength and numbers in the years directly following the war, but it became increasingly conservative and less activist. The radical-liberal bourgeois feminist groups such as Women's Welfare Society, which had assisted actresses most generously before August of 1914, had been particularly weakened during the war. The controversial pacifist stance of their members had alienated them from larger German society and these groups suffered from an active campaign of repression by military authorities. In addition, the achievement of women's suffrage in 1918 seemingly removed much of the *raison d'être* for liberal women's groups. The increased conservatism of the remaining bourgeois groups resulted in a lessening of feminist activism. The collapse of the radical-liberal wing of the bourgeois women's movement along

with the refocus of the GDBA's interests to other areas left actresses without the backing of their former allies.

For the most part, actresses themselves did not return to activism after the end of the war, either with regard to actress issues or as part of more general union efforts. There were no new spokespersons who emerged to promote actress issues. Few women performers participated in activism of any kind. Early leaders of the actresses' movement remained quiet. Helene Riechers was performing at a theatre in Jena and did not resume work with the Women's Committee beyond serving as the Committee's liaison (*Vertrauensdame*) within the local GDBA branch.

Only one anonymous actress, the author of two articles in favor of a higher minimum wage, wrote in support of the union's political work. Even here, actress issues such as costumes were given minimal attention. The author (who may have been Marie Steffen-Wohlbrück, an earlier outspoken contributor to the "Women's News" column) wrote to complain about the hardship forced on performers by a continued demand for extravagant costumes: "The heaviest concern for every performer, the child of sorrow for the entire profession, has now grown gigantic -- the worry: What will I wear? Where do I get it? For now as ever,

elegance is relentlessly demanded.”²⁹² The subject of costume provision, which had for years been the rallying cry of the actresses’ movement, was now couched in gender-neutral terms. The subject of the specific hardships borne by actresses during the war was dealt with only by inference. By the close of 1918, the political winds in Germany had shifted away from liberalism, erasing much of the earlier support for women’s issues. The consideration of costuming as a problem for performers as a whole rather than the specific problem of actresses indicates an atmosphere of unwillingness during this period to deal with what might have been perceived as ‘women’s issues.’

The political work of the Women’s Committee itself in the year following the revolution was minimal. The group did at one point urge actresses to make use of their right to vote in upcoming elections. For the most part, however, what little activity there was remained centered around fund-raising for the

²⁹² Einer für viele [possibly Marie Steffen-Wohlbrück], “Die wirtschaftliche Notlage,” 379; St.-W. [possibly Marie Steffen-Wohlbrück], “Zur allgemeinen Lohnbewegung 1919,” *DNW* 48 (1919): 716-717. Both articles were written anonymously, but apparently by the same person. Identified only by the initials St.-W., the author is referred to as a woman in the editor’s comments, leading me to believe that both articles were written by Marie Steffen-Wohlbrück, who contributed three articles to the “Women’s News” column in 1909 and served as deputy representative for the Cuxhaven local at the GDBA Delegates’ Meeting in April, 1909.

Committee's maternity, Children's Home, costume, and general assistance charity work.²⁹³

The number of women participating in the governance of the GDBA as delegates for the national meeting or as local branch officers remained very low. However, one important advance for actresses was made in the period directly following the war: a woman was appointed and then elected to serve on the GDBA Central Board for the first time in 1919. When naming Grete IIm, President Rickelt and Vice-President Wallauer declared their satisfaction at finally seeing a woman hold a board seat.²⁹⁴

The Standard Contract of 1919

In deference to the new socialist government's ordinance of December 23, 1918, calling upon employer and employee groups to reach common work agreements to govern their industries, the DBV offered to start discussion of a joint contract with the actors' union. The GDBA immediately accepted the offer, and negotiations by a group of nine participants from

²⁹³ Frauenkomitee, "Kolleginnen!" *DNW* 47 (31 December 1918): 451.

²⁹⁴ "Verhandlungen zwischen Bühnen-Verein und Genossenschaft," *DNW* 48 (15 January 1919): 2; "Die Vertreterversammlung 1919 der Genossenschaft Deutscher Bühnengehörigen," *DNW* 48 (30 April 1919): 195.

each organization began in January of 1919. Committees to discuss actor training and a jointly operated employment office were established at the same time. Contract negotiations came to a speedy conclusion, the results of which were published in *Der neue Weg* on February 15, 1919.²⁹⁵ The contract applied only to soloist performers, both acting and singing, and upon approval by the organizations' larger memberships was to be valid for five years.

No women were involved in negotiations and the Women's Committee remained entirely silent in public with regard to actresses' issues during the period of negotiations. Still, the resulting contract contained a number of important improvements for women performers. In fact, the new contract went beyond the earlier National Theatre Law draft, satisfying some of the demands the Women's Committee had made for

²⁹⁵ "Vereinbarungen zwischen der Genossenschaft Deutscher Bühnenangehörigen und dem Deutschen Bühnenverein auf wirtschaftlichem, vertraglichem und künstlerischem Gebiet," *DNW* 48 (15 February 1919): 53-56; Adolf Eiermann, "Die soziale Lage des Solopersonals der südwestdeutschen Bühnen" (Ph.D. diss., Ruprecht-Karls-Universität zu Heidelberg, 1921), 11. The contract was also published in the *Deutsches Bühnen-Jahrbuch* (1920) and reviewed in Wenzel Goldbaum and Gerhard Jacoby, *Rechte und Pflichten der Bühnen- und Filmschauspieler* (Berlin: Franz Vahlen, 1922). The contract was divided into two parts, the *Tarifvertrag* (governing the contract's sphere of influence) and the *Normalvertrag* (delineating the specific working conditions).

modifications to the Theatre Law in improving the legal position of women performers in the workplace.

The change in costume policy provided the most substantial new benefit to actresses. With a few specific exceptions, the standard contract required employers to provide all costumes, historic and modern, along with wigs, jewelry and other accoutrements for all performers at all salary levels. The new policy accommodated earlier criticism of imprecision in the costume paragraph of the National Theatre Law draft. It supplemented the unspecific phrase that described that part of the wardrobe for which the performer would be responsible -- "such things as the ensemble member owns for his daily use" -- with a concise list of clothing items which members of an ensemble would be expected to supply. Actresses were required to provide their own underclothing, tights, two street dresses, one evening gown, one ball gown, one *négligé*, a summer and a winter cloak, as well as shoes hats and gloves to accompany these outfits. The costumes required of the men performers were roughly equivalent in number and quality. The management would be responsible for any other costumes and for the laundering of all costumes, including those provided by the performer.

As this change in costume provision was the most far-reaching reform provided in the new contract for actresses, it is

not surprising that it should have also been the most controversial measure. Manager Oskar Lange referred to the issue as “the weightiest of all of the [union’s] demands.” Unlike the rest of the contract, which was set to go into effect as of May 1, 1919, enactment of the new costume policy was delayed until the beginning of the season in 1921.²⁹⁶ Even with this concession, when the DBV membership was presented with the negotiated contract for approval on March 13, 1919, the costume paragraph met considerable resistance and, of all the contract issues, aroused the most heated debate. A number of managers balked openly at assuming the expense of costume provision, particularly of actresses’ modern costumes, and argued for additional delays or alterations. However, the GDBA had made it clear that this point was non-negotiable and that managers’ failure to approve it would threaten the collapse of the entire standard contract effort.

The fact that this paragraph would be of benefit predominantly to actresses was generally recognized in the debate and was a substantial basis for the measure’s support. The decisive argument in favor of the costume provision’s passage

²⁹⁶ One other measure in the contract was delayed to a degree. The reliance on a joint panel to decide contract disputes (*Schiedsgericht*) had to wait until the panel could be established in October of 1919. “Vereinbarungen,” 54; “Bekanntmachung,” *DNW* 48 (15 October 1919): 535.

seems to have been that if theatres could not afford to pay for costumes, then actresses could not not be expected to afford them either. Manager Treu argued further that DBV members “must finally make good on a moral debt. The women ensemble members have had to suffer for too long. We are morally obligated to accept this paragraph as it stands.”²⁹⁷

To placate members, DBV President Graf von Hülsen presented a plan to establish a Costume Provision Center (*Kostümlieferungszentrale*) to be maintained along the lines of a consumers’ co-operative society as a means of assisting managers of small, private theatres with the added expense of costuming. Hülsen also announced the creation of a fund to assist theatres which landed in financial difficulties as a result of the new costume policy.²⁹⁸ Following the announcement of these safeguards, the costume measure was passed by the DBV membership.

The treatment of pregnancy was another area in which actresses gained important new protections. Pregnancy was no

²⁹⁷ “Protokoll der 52. ordentlichen Hauptversammlung des Deutschen Bühnen-Vereins am Donnerstag, 13. März, vormittags 10 Uhr, im Schillersaal des Schillertheaters, Charlottenburg, Bismarckstr. 110,” *Deutsche Bühne* 11 (1919): 264.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 261-267; “Die Hauptversammlung des Deutschen Bühnenvereins,” *DNW* 48 (15 March 1919): 112-113.

longer allowed as grounds for dismissal. Furthermore, the new contract entitled pregnant actresses, regardless of marital status, to paid maternity leave for four weeks at full salary and six additional weeks at half salary (with an upper limit of 50 Marks/day). Marriage was also removed as a grounds for dismissal. In addition, the times between rehearsals and performances were regulated, a goal which the Women's Committee had promoted in early years so as to allow actresses the ability to tend their households and spend time with their families on a more regular basis.²⁹⁹ The agreement disallowed any changes to individual contracts that would be to the detriment of the performer.

By April 19, 1919, the full memberships of both the DBV and the GDBA had approved the contract. The situations of non-union actresses were advanced considerably, as well, when the government declared the standard contract as generally

²⁹⁹ Goldbaum and Jacoby assert that actresses also had the right to indisposition time, but do not specify the legal basis for this interpretation. It was not included in the 1919 contract. Goldbaum and Jacoby, *Rechte und Pflichten*, 23.

binding for the theatre industry, as of October 15, 1919.³⁰⁰ The government's declaration extended the legal and economic protections of the new contract to all actresses regardless of union affiliation, essentially giving the contract the outreach of legislative regulation. The new contract was valid only in Germany, but similar standards were soon adopted in Austria and Switzerland.³⁰¹

Additional theatre industry reforms were negotiated in the autumn of 1919. A joint committee of GDBA and DBV members (on which Grete Ilm served as a deputy member) was established in May to address employment issues not fully worked out in the contract. In October this group produced a set of standard house rules to be used in conjunction with the new contract. The new rules contained no special conditions for women members, and it eliminated the earlier fines for inappropriate wardrobe and hair which previously had been used to punish frugal self-costuming among actresses. Those fines which

³⁰⁰ The government did not approve, however, that part of the agreement which established an exclusivity policy between the DBV and GDBA, under which members of each organization were required to work solely with members of each other's organizations. GDBA Präsidium, "Das Bühentarifabkommen für allgemein verbindlich erklärt," *DNW* 48 (15 October 1919): 533-535; Eiermann, "Die soziale Lage," 11.

³⁰¹ Rübél, *Geschichte der Genossenschaft*, 180.

continued to be allowed were to be assessed at each theatre by a rules committee made up of three to five elected ensemble members and were limited to no more than three days' wages. Also in October, although the DBV continued to refuse the GDBA's demand to repay wages that had been cut during the war, it agreed to establish a fund, paid for through an increase in ticket prices for the best seats, to help theatre employees who had been seriously hurt economically by the war, as well as to create a new office, the Social Contributions Office (*Sozialabgabebüro*), to distribute the funds. A provisional joint court of arbitration to rule on contract disputes and a jointly operated employment office, designed to eliminate the need for agents, were established in the autumn of 1919 as well.³⁰²

Chapter Summary

The actresses' movement had already shown some signs of slowing down before the onset of World War I, but it was the war which instigated its widespread collapse. This breakdown was perhaps not immediately apparent. The cessation of political activity in the areas of actress issues might very well have been

³⁰² Ibid., "Bekanntmachung," *DNW* 48 (31 May 1919): 255;
 "Normal Hausordnung," *DNW* 48 (31 October 1919) 574-575;
 "Bekanntmachung," *DNW* 48 (31 October 1919): 574;
 "Bekanntmachung," *DNW* 48 (15 October 1919): 535.

considered a pause at a time when organizations of all kinds turned to patriotic work. As the Women's Committee redirected its focus toward self-help initiatives, the group demonstrated a surge of activity in the first months of the war. However, levels of activity decreased noticeably as the war continued, and the Committee became less and less visible. Because the Committee had grown to be the driving force behind the actresses' movement since its formation in 1910, the lull in its activities in turn resulted in a disruption of the movement as a whole.

Few people in Germany in 1914 expected the war to last as long as it did. It is possible to speculate that if the war had ended within a year, that the Women's Committee might well have recovered and managed to return the attention of the union, women's groups and legislators to actress reforms. It eventually became clear that the hold placed on actresses' political activism at the outbreak of the war would not be lifted.

The sudden shift in the Committee's membership in 1914 and the loss of Helene Riechers left the movement from the very outset of the war without strong leadership to put voice to actresses' political concerns. During the war, no individual voices emerged from the Committee to replace the loss of Riechers. This vacuum, along with the policy of domestic peace and the preoccupation of former supporters, the actors' union, and liberal

bourgeois women's groups with other issues brought agitation among actresses to a standstill almost immediately following the start of war. With the GDBA's shelving of the National Theatre Law project, the main focus of actresses' political reform efforts of recent years was eliminated. Women performers themselves, as they faced new threats of wage cuts and virtually unlimited managerial powers of dismissal, were probably far less concerned with the reforms related to gender discrimination pursued earlier. The "Women's News" column was forgotten, the Women's Committee was politically deactivated, and the GDBA Costume Center, though still functioning, appears to have seriously depleted its financial resources. In addition to the depletion of the union's Costume Center, assistance available to struggling actresses by way of the costume collection operated by the Coordinating Office for Germany's Female Stage Personnel disappeared.

The reemergence of the actresses' movement after the war was prevented by a number of factors. In destabilizing the working lives of actresses through lost jobs, relocations and wage cuts, the war made it more difficult for actresses to focus on earlier goals related to gender discrimination. The war exacerbated the already existing problem of short career spans for women in theatre and drove many women (who may have been

active in or sympathetic to the movement) from theatre to other lines of work.

Perhaps the greatest obstacle barring a resumption of the actresses' movement was Germany's retreat from liberalism during and after the war. Social movements of all kinds (including those most closely linked to actresses -- the women's and labor movements) were forced to adapt to the increasing political conservatism of the times. Organized actresses were disabled by changes in the political tenor of the times, in which the support for the examination of women's issues was weakened.³⁰³

The permanent dissolution of the actresses' movement was sealed by its success. The inclusion of reforms in the areas of costume provision, pregnancy, and marriage in the 1919 standard contract marked an important milestone of progress for actresses. The success, however, was by no means complete. Actresses did not get all that they had demanded. Costume provision was still partial and no reforms in the areas of indisposition time were made. Still, the fact that a number of actress activists' most important goals were met by the new contract was an important victory and, at the same time, a mark of the end of the actresses'

³⁰³ For more about the connection between liberalism and the women's movement in Germany, see Richard J. Evans, *The Feminist Movement in Germany, 1894-1933* (Beverly Hills: SAGE Publications, 1976).

movement.

Conclusion

The period between 1899 and 1919 was a time of upheaval in Germany. The years following World War I were particularly revolutionary, with fundamental changes “in such things as dress, social behavior, attitudes toward work and leisure, family relationships and the privileges of young people, religious faith, and the relations between the sexes.”³⁰⁴ German theatre was deeply affected in numerous ways by this cultural revolution. Included among the many changes taking place in the contemporary theatre system was a shift in the positions of women performers. Between 1899 and 1919, actresses obtained stronger legal protections, financial compensation for their work closer to that of their male peers, and greater access to political structures that governed their lives. The social status of actresses also underwent a significant shift. Actresses were increasingly recognized as professional women in need of fair working conditions, whereas before they had been treated with a paradoxical mixture of adulation and contempt.

The shape of the actresses' movement was closely linked to that of other social movements of the day. It emerged at a time when liberal political ideas of socialism and feminism were³⁰⁴ Craig, *Germany, 1866-1945*, 476.

flourishing in Germany. In fact, it was the promotion of actresses' rights by members of labor and women's groups, along with individual theatre managers, that provided the spark for the movement's beginnings in the 1890s. However, the financial, legal, political, and social vulnerability specific to actresses kept them from participating in political activism in sizeable numbers until much later.

Actresses first began to participate in the burgeoning effort to protest and improve the working situations of women performers in 1899 with the creation of the Coordinating Office for Germany's Female Stage Personnel. The costume distribution service provided by this group was important in that it represented the first organized attempt to counter gender discrimination suffered widely by actresses in the contemporary German theatre system. The Coordinating Office offered the first organized assistance, both symbolic and practical, to working actresses.

The political activism of actresses' remained limited for the next ten years. While the establishment of the Coordinating Office was followed by an intense debate over the subject of costume provision between 1899 and 1903, few women performers participated in protest efforts. Those who did remained, for the most part, anonymous.

Actresses got off to a late start compared to groups involved in other social movements of their day. It wasn't until 1909 that a sizeable number of actresses declared themselves publicly in favor of reforms that would affect the economic, legal, and social conditions of women working in the theatre. Actresses first demonstrated political activism on a large scale on March 23, 1909, when Hedwig Wangel gave her lecture on the subject of gender discrimination in the theatre workplace. Close to one third of the actresses employed in Berlin that season signed the petition that circulated after the meeting. In the next few years, actress activism thrived.

The Wangel lecture was the first of a number of major actress organization events. The actresses' movement reached its peak of activity in 1909 and 1910. This was the time during which actresses took part in the greatest numbers. They participated widely in efforts to bring about workplace reforms by attending meetings, contributing articles to the "Women's News" column, and organizing petitions. Important actress spokespersons, such as Helene Riechers, Irene Pangoff, Anna Rubner, Rosa Bertens, and Irene Triesch, emerged to lead the movement and, in 1910, the Women's Committee was established. In their new confidence, organized actresses began to expand their list of demands for workplace reforms and insisted on their

inclusion in the proposed National Theatre Law.

The activist period of the actresses' movement was shortlived. Not only did it get off to a comparatively late start, but then, like other liberal political movements, it was cut short by the onset of war in 1914. Even before the summer of 1914, the actresses' movement had showed some signs of waning force. In 1911, the number of actresses involved in protest activity waned as the Women's Committee assumed command of the movement. Unsolicited contributions to "Women's News" dwindled and the column essentially became a mouthpiece for the Committee. Large actress meetings were no longer held. Actresses appeared content to sit back and allow Helene Riechers to speak for them. The departure of Armin Osterrieth, who had actively fostered the creation of the movement, from the position of editor for *Der neue Weg* was likely a factor in the diminished activity.

The war effectively dissolved the actresses' movement. It firmly diverted the already drifting attentions of actresses and their allies, such as the GDBA and liberal bourgeois women's groups, exacerbated the already problematic instability of the acting profession for women, and halted efforts to pass the National Theatre Law. After the war, actresses reverted to the near-complete silence that had been their refuge before 1909. Once again they relied on others to represent their interests

during negotiations for the 1919 standard contract.

The final guarantee of the decrease of the actresses' movement in 1919 was the fact that the biggest goals of the movement for the reform of working conditions for actresses had been achieved. The impetus for the continued existence of the movement was nullified by its own success in the areas of costume provision, marriage, and pregnancy.

Between 1899 and 1919, a number of reform efforts were (to varying degrees) successful in improving the economic, legal, and political positions of actresses. The first reforms addressed the problem of actresses' wardrobe expenses. The Coordinating Office for Germany's Female Stage Personnel started a costume collection service in 1899 which helped hundreds of actresses to cover their work-related expenses. Independently operated costume distribution centers established shortly afterward in other major German cities further improved actresses' financial positions. In 1903, the GDBA negotiated a deal with the DBV in which managers agreed to provide historic costumes for actresses in lower income categories at some theatres starting in 1907.

Women members of the actors' union gradually gained increased access to the organization's system of governance. In 1901, women were given the right to hold elected office in local

union branches. In 1905, the actor's union approved a motion declaring its intention to grant full passive suffrage to women members so that they could serve in all union positions. The necessary statutory changes were made in 1906 and the first woman member attended the GDBA's annual meeting as a National Delegate in 1908. In 1919, Grete Ilm became the first woman to serve on the union's Central Board.

The establishment of the Women's Committee in 1910 and its subsequent incorporation into the GDBA provided actresses' with an official body to represent their interests both inside the union and in negotiations with the national government. The Women's Committee was granted two seats on the panel discussing possible changes to the proposed National Theatre Law drafted by the German Interior Ministry in 1912. Between 1912 and 1914, the Women's Committee represented actresses' concerns regarding the subject of age declaration on insurance cards in discussions with the National Insurance Office, the Bundesrat, and the National Interior Ministry.

The Women's Committee organized a number of self-help initiatives to benefit women members of the GDBA. It established its own Costume Center in 1912, from which costumes could be sent to any city in which a member worked, even beyond Germany's borders. The Committee established an Assistance Fund

and a Maternity Care Fund for union actresses in financial need. The Committee's plans for a Children's Home to help actor parents with child care were realized in 1918.

The national standard contract negotiated in 1919 was the most far-reaching achievement of the actresses' movement, and, at the same time, a mark of its end. As in the case of the liberal-radical wing of the bourgeois women's movement with the achievement of women's suffrage, the success of the contract for actresses marked the removal of the *raison d'être* for a movement that had been already seriously weakened by the war.

The new contract was widely regarded as the final solution of the costume problem, which had long been the rallying point for the actresses' movement. The GDBA Costume Center lost its meaningfulness after enactment of the costume paragraph and was dismantled as of 1922. Costume provision was removed from the list published in *Deutsches Bühnen-Jahrbuch* of issues of concern to women performers in which the Women's Protection Office sought improvements.

Important goals for the actresses' movement in the areas of the treatment of marriage and pregnancy were also attained in the contract. The Women's Committee, renamed the Women's Protection Office (*Frauenschutzstelle*) in 1920, continued to assist in the area of child care by overseeing the Children's

Home in Rothenburg until 1928, when the institution was disbanded.³⁰⁵ The attainment of a number of its highest goals, along with a general decrease in interest in feminist endeavors in the Germany of the teens and twenties, led to the effective end of the actresses' movement.

The Women's Protection Office faded away. None of the actresses who had worked on the Women's Committee or written articles in *Der neue Weg* in support of actress reforms worked with the new Women's Protection Office beyond acting as local *Vertrauensdamen*. The Women's Protection Office did continue to operate as a branch of the GDBA until the dismantling of the union under Hitler in 1935,³⁰⁶ but it never again demonstrated the political activism characteristic of the institution before World War I.

At the same time that a number of changes were effected as a result of the actresses' movement, other issues remained ignored or unsatisfactorily resolved in 1919. An employer's access to an actress's date of birth, sexual harassment, and days of rest during periods of menstruation were all issues that had been raised by actress activists, but had been the subject

³⁰⁵ Rübél, *Geschichte der Genossenschaft*, 197.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 241.

of little or no action. These, however, were areas that had remained comparatively low within the priorities of the actresses' movement and were not enough to prompt its reemergence.

A more important issue which had not been fully addressed by 1919 was Julius Bab's concern for eliminating what he considered to be the source of all of the working problems which actresses' had been forced to battle against -- social prejudice against actresses and the tendency of society to view them primarily as sexual objects.³⁰⁷ In solving such working problems for women performers as costume provision and job security during maternity and marriage, theatre industry leaders, according to Bab's view, had assuaged only the symptoms of a deeper problem -- the prevalent social prejudice against women who earned their living by displaying themselves publicly on the stage. I would argue, however, that in improving the economic, legal, and political situations of women performers, the actresses' movement went beyond the simple relief of symptoms of prejudice against actresses. The movement also instigated wider recognition of actresses as working women and fostered the greater acceptance of actresses in contemporary German society. The impetus to effect actress reforms, first in the attempted passage of the National Theatre Law and later with the negotiated ³⁰⁷ Ibid., 68-70.

national standard contract, demonstrate the changed status of actresses in German society.

The story of the actresses' movement overall is one of mixed fortunes. Although the achievement of the national standard contract is a measure of the success of the actresses' movement, at the same time, it is also an indication of its failure since the movement was essentially defunct at its writing. While on the verge of success, actresses returned to nineteenth-century habits of standing back and allowing male union leaders to represent women's interests. The fact that actresses remained silent in 1919 indicates how seriously women performers had been hurt by the war and that the socio-economic vulnerability and apathy felt among actresses in 1899 were still strong factors in repressing their political participation twenty years later. A shift in the political atmosphere of Germany as a whole away from feminist concerns also must have been responsible to a degree for actresses' reversion to silence.

Actresses apparently did not feel comfortable enough politically to return to active participation in the process of enacting reforms in 1919, yet it is clear that the protest work of actresses in pre-war years had finally reached its fruition in the creation of the national standard contract. Through their earlier activism, actresses played a vital role in affecting reforms of the

working situations of women performers and, in doing so, helped to raise the professional standing and social acceptance of actresses in Germany.

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