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The Theatrical Productions of Erwin Piscator in Weimar Germany: 1920-1931.

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IN WEIMAR GERMANY: 1920-1931.

The Louisiana State University and Agricultural
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THE THEATRICAL PRODUCTIONS OF ERWIN PISCATOR
IN WEIMAR GERMANY: 1920-1931

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of Speech

by
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M.A., Louisiana State University, 1968
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ABSTRACT

Between 1920 and 1931 Erwin Piscator directed thirty-two productions in Berlin which established his reputation as a director of political theater and earned him lasting fame in theatrical histories. Although several studies concerning Piscator exist, no work examines all of Piscator's productions in Weimar Berlin. This study investigates these productions in detail in an effort to gain an insight into his directorial practices during these crucial years of his career. The primary source is Piscator's autobiographical work, Das politische Theater. Other materials include data compiled in the Erwin Piscator Center of the Akademie der Künste (West Berlin), in the Theaterwissenschaftliche Institute (West Berlin), in the archives of the Volksbühne (East Berlin), in the Graduate Library of the University of Michigan (which has a complete collection of four prominent newspapers from Berlin during the twenties, Die Rote Fahne, Vorwärts, Die Vossische Zeitung and Der Berliner Tageblatt), in interviews with two personal friends of Piscator (W. Linke and Sonja Boggs-Hessdorfer), and in the published memoirs of Piscator's associates. Secondary sources also supplied valuable information, especially several dissertations from both East and West Germany, not yet published but made available through the general library of the Freie Universität (West Berlin).

Prior to Piscator's years in Weimar Berlin, he gained valuable experience in propaganda techniques with the Front Theater during

World War I (1917-1918). Subsequently he directed agitation-propaganda productions in the Proletarian Theater (1920-1921) and non-political productions in the Central Theater (1921-1922).

Especially significant is the ambivalence of his work between 1924 and 1927 when he directed productions both for the relatively conservative but well-established Volksbühne and for the radical Communist Party of Germany. Among his productions in the Volksbühne were Fahnen, in which he first used projections as an essential part of a dramatic performance, Das trunkene Schiff, his first collaboration with George Grosz, and Gewitter über Gottland, the show which precipitated a much publicized break with the organization. His productions for the German Communist Party included Revue Roter Rummel, an agit-prop show similar to those of the Proletarian Theater, and Trotz Alledem in which he first combined motion pictures with action on stage. In addition to work with these two organizations, he served as a guest director in Leopold Jessner's Staatliche Schauspielhaus where he directed Schiller's Die Räuber, radically altering the text of the script.

During the height of his fame (1927-1931) Piscator built on these experiments in the celebrated productions of his three Piscator-Bühnen, most notably Toller's Hoppla and its three story set, Rasputin, which glorified the Russian Revolution, Schwejk, best remembered for its use of the treadmill, Konjunktur, written in conjunction with Bertolt Brecht, Der Kaufmann von Berlin, possibly the most elaborate of all Piscator's productions, Paragraph 218, a play calling for a reform of the abortion laws, and Tai Yang erwacht, Piscator's first use of pantomime.

Detailed examination of each of the thirty-two shows reveals several techniques including projections, wax masks, textual alterations, interpretative readings, live music and actors planted in the auditorium. Piscator's work during these years is characterized by the social or political message of the script emphasized by interruptions in the production through mechanical as well as non-mechanical means. This study of Piscator's theatrical productions in Weimar Germany provides an insight on his theatrical practices and techniques. Thus it furnishes a detailed examination of a significant part of the total picture of German Theater during the twenties.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Erwin Piscator's life spanned sixty-seven years and three countries. In the course of that time he directed on stages in Berlin, Moscow and New York. From each of these cities a hostile government forced him eventually to flee. Nevertheless, his influence on theater history has not been so fleeting. Bertolt Brecht called Piscator "einer der grössten Theaterleute aller Zeiten" [one of the greatest theater men of all time].¹ Piscator claimed the distinction of directing epic theater before Brecht formalized and theorized that brand of theater which is now so widely associated with his name. Brecht does not deny Piscator's claim.

Only five years Brecht's senior, Piscator began his work in Berlin in 1920, while the new playwright from Augsburg first journeyed to the cultural capital of the Weimar Republic in 1922. Both men centered their theatrical activities in Berlin throughout the twenties, until the rise of the National Socialists drove them from the city.

Influences in a playwright's style are difficult to pinpoint, and often impossible to confirm. Nevertheless, Brecht points to Piscator's directorial methods as fighting "the front line battles"

¹Bertolt Brecht, Dialoge aus dem Messingkauf ["Dialogue on the Sale of Brass"] (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1963), p. 89.

in the struggle for a new concept of theater.² Some have credited Piscator explicitly with influencing Bertolt Brecht. The German stage designer Leo Kertz writes, "You cannot successfully produce Mutter Courage und ihre Kinder ["Mother Courage and Her Children"] or Der gute Mensch von Sezuan ["The Good Woman of Sezuan"] or Herr Puntilla und sein Knecht Matti ["Mr. Puntilla and His Man Matti"] (by successfully I mean theatrically effective) without knowing your Piscator."³ Nevertheless, this study does not attempt to show how Piscator influenced Brecht, but instead investigates how he slowly but consistently developed an approach to play production which centered on a political message delivered with all the aid modern technology could afford in an effort to drive his audience to a consciousness of the social injustices of the times. It is a descriptive or historical recounting of Piscator's activities as a director in theaters of Berlin between 1920 and 1931. No such recounting presently exists in English, and in German the available material represents a scattered and disjointed picture of Piscator's work. Piscator's own account of his activities in Berlin in the twenties is related in Das politische Theater, ["The Political Theater"]⁴, but his narrative omits many precise dates, lacks

²Bertolt Brecht, "Interview with an Exile" In Brecht on Theater, ed. and trans. by John Willett (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964), p.65.

³Leo Kertz, "Brecht and Piscator," Educational Theatre Journal, XX (October, 1968), 363.

⁴Das politische Theater has received three editions in German. The original edition appeared in Berlin in 1929 (Adalbert Schultz

essential background information and, of course, lacks objectivity. Moreover, Piscator's book has not yet been translated into English, leaving the information in it inaccessible to the general reader.⁵ Piscator's widow has left some first-hand accounts of Piscator's work in New York during the thirties and forties in her book, The Piscator Experiment.⁶ I. P. Stern pursues the same period of time in his thesis, "The Theatrical Activity of Erwin Piscator in the United States from 1934 to 1951."⁷ Two dissertations in English,

Verlag). In 1963, Rowohlt Verlag (Reinbek bei Hamburg) published a paperback version slightly revised by Felix Gasbarra, Piscator's co-worker and friend of long standing. Yet a third edition of Das politische Theater appeared in 1968, this time in East Berlin as one of a two volume set of Piscator's writings edited by Ludwig Hoffman of the East German Deutsche Akademie der Künste zn Berlin. Erwin Piscator, Schriften ["writings"], 2 Vols. (Berlin: Henschelverlag, 1968). The title page of the 1968 volume Das politische Theater acknowledges that it is a reprint of the 1929 edition. A comparison of the two editions reveals that even the pagination is identical, with the exception of two appendices, in one of which Piscator writes of his dissatisfaction with the 1963 volume and in the second Hoffman supplies notes on the original text. Unless otherwise noted all references to Das politische Theater will be to the 1929 edition.

⁵Although the book has not been translated into English, it has received a wide publicity in other languages. Das politische Theater (1929 edition) has been translated into Russian (1934), Spanish (1958), Italian (1960), Czechoslovakian (1969), French, (1963), Hungarian (1963) and Rumanian (1966). At the time of this writing (1972) Avon Books in New York writes that they have chosen a translator for Das politische Theater and expect publication in 1973.

⁶María Ley Piscator, The Piscator Experiment: The Political Theater (New York: James H. Heinman, 1967).

⁷I. P. Stern, "The Theatrical Activity of Erwin Piscator in the United States from 1934 to 1951" (Unpublished Master's thesis, Purdue University, 1964).

one now in progress, investigate Piscator's work after his stay in Berlin, but not with his earlier productions.⁸

Only one study exists in English which considers extensively Piscator's work in Berlin during the twenties, C. D. Innes' Erwin Piscator's Political Theater.⁹ Originally a dissertation at Oxford University, Innes' book encompasses a definition of Piscator's political theater and relates it to the artistic and literary movements of the period. In a careful analysis of Piscator's approach to total theater, Innes does not focus on the director's staging of individual productions.

Two German dissertations concentrate on Erwin Piscator's work as a director, one originating in West Germany, the second in East Germany. Klaus Schulz, the Westerner, in "Das 'politische Theater' Erwin Piscators"¹⁰ discusses the political philosophy behind Piscator's productions. Written before Piscator's death, Schulz's dissertation contains interviews with the director himself as one of its primary sources. Schulz served as Regieassistent [assistant to the director] for two months between 1951 and 1956 as part of

⁸Thomas G. Evans, "Piscator in the American Theater: 1939-1951" (Unpublished Ph.D dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1968), and Josee Duytschaever "Erwin Piscator's Productions in Germany 1951-1965," Ph.D dissertation in progress at Indiana University.

⁹C. D. Innes, Erwin Piscator's Political Theater (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 1972). Note: at the time of this writing Dr. Innes' book has not yet been published. Nevertheless, Dr. Innes made available the manuscript which proved helpful in the present study.

¹⁰Klaus Schulz, "Das 'politische Theater' Erwin Piscators" (Unpublished Ph.D dissertation, University of Göttingen, 1957).

his research for his dissertation. Unfortunately, Schulz does not indicate exactly where or when this experience occurred. In concentrating on Piscator's theories of theater, Schulz omits a precise chronology and a consecutive investigation of Piscator's productions. A later study by Joachim Fiebach considers Piscator's work in chronological order,¹¹ concentrating on the director's presentations of what the title calls "capitalistic contradictions" and "revolutionary processes" at work in German society. Fiebach's work is of value because he utilizes materials available in archives of East Germany to which a Westerner would seldom have easy access. For example, he compiles documented details of the 1920-21 police reports on the activity of Erwin Piscator's agit-prop troupe, the Proletarian Theater. Unfortunately, Fiebach ignores Piscator's personal background, including the director's services in the Front Theater during World War I, one of the more formative periods of Piscator's life.

In addition to dissertations concerned primarily with certain facets of Piscator's theatrical career, six other German studies contribute meaningful details on various aspects of the director's work. The Hoffman study, which treats various German workers' theater movements,¹² includes several previously unpublished agit-prop scripts used by Piscator. Klaus Pfützner's study

¹¹Hans Joachim Fiebach, "Die Darstellung kapitalistischer Widersprüche und revolutionärer Prozesse in Erwin Piscators Inszenierungen von 1920-1930" ["The Presentation of Capitalistic Contradictions and Revolutionary Processes in Erwin Piscator's Productions from 1920-1930"] (Unpublished Ph.D dissertation, Humbolt University of East Berlin, 1965).

¹²Ludwig Hoffmann, Deutsches Arbeitertheater,

treats Piscator's role in the socialistic theater organized by unemployed theater personnel during the depression.¹³ Marianne Mildenberger gives detailed information on Piscator's use of projections and film.¹⁴ Finally, two dissertations attempt to fit Piscator into the artistic framework of the twenties, while not focusing directly on him. Schumacher distinguishes between Piscator's approach to the theory of political theater and that of Bertolt Brecht in a chapter of Die dramatische Versuche Bertolt Brechts ["The Dramatic Experiments of Bertolt Brecht"].¹⁵ This essay centers on Piscator's handling of Marxist dialectics, however, and is only secondarily concerned with the technical details of Piscator's productions. Nevertheless, Schumacher does illuminate the life-long conflict between Piscator and the communists of East Germany, which resulted ultimately in Piscator's leaving the Communist Party and remaining in West Berlin while Brecht moved to East Berlin. Brecht and

1918-1933 ["German Workers' Theater 1918-1933"] (Berlin: Henschelverlag, 1961). A similar study concerning the workers' theater movement and Piscator's part in it, is Klaus Pfützner, "Das revolutionäre in Deutschland: 1918-1933," in Schriften zum Theaterwissenschaft, Bd. I (Berlin: Henschelverlag, 1955).

¹³Klaus Pfützner, "Ensembles und Aufführungen des sozialistischen Berufstheater in Berlin, 1929-1933" ["Ensembles and Presentation of Professional Socialistic Theater in Berlin, 1929-1933"], in Schriften zum Theaterwissenschaft, Bd. IV ["Writings on Theater Studies, Vol. IV"] (Berlin: Henschelverlag, 1966).

¹⁴Marianne Mildenberger, Film und Projektion auf die Bühne ["Film and Projection on Stage"] (Emsdetten, Westphalia: Verlag Lechte, 1961).

¹⁵Ernst Schumacher, Die dramatische Versuche Bertolt Brechts, 1918-1933 (Berlin: Rutten and Loening, 1955). Note: this is the published version of Schumacher's dissertation, originally written

Piscator constitute only two chapters in Rainer Hagen's attempt to sketch an overall view of political theater in Germany between 1918 and 1933¹⁶. In spite of the brevity of these chapters, however, the Hagen dissertation points to similarities among the works of Piscator, Brecht and Leopold Jessner, director at the Staatstheater, Berlin's only state-supported theater in the twenties. Hagen also shows how Piscator and Jessner chose many of their productions from playwrights who were part of a socio-political critical movement, Zeittheater [literally translated, Zeittheater is time theater, but perhaps the flavor of the term is better expressed by topical theater].¹⁷

None of the available studies presents a comprehensive, consecutive investigation of Piscator's work as a director who employed a variety of devices, directorial as well as technical. Ultimately the technical devices included filmed documentary sequences, animated cartoons, jazz music, and treadmills with moving scenery. The directorial devices centered on extensive textual alterations, audience participation through open discussions, and the use of

for the Karl Marx University, Leipzig, 1954. A translation of "Das politische Theater Erwin Piscators" (pp. 125-139), a subsection of Schumacher's discussion of epic theater, appears in Brecht, A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Peter Demetz (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1965), pp. 86-96.

¹⁶ Rainer Hagen, "Das politische Theater in Deutschland zwischen 1918 und 1933" ["Political Theater in Germany Between 1918 and 1933"] (Unpublished Ph.D dissertation, University of Munich, 1958).

¹⁷ C. D. Innes translates Zeittheater as topical theater throughout his book, Erwin Piscator's Political Theater. Zeittheater involved Bertolt Brecht, Ernst Toller, Friedrich Wolf, Theodore Plevier and Carl Credé, as well as the possibly less well

actors, musicians, painters and authors whose former works had involved strong criticism of the social fabric of Germany in the twenties.

Being a historical account of Piscator's theatrical activities, this study does not investigate Piscator's activities in the Communist Party of Germany, except insofar as these activities directly affected his theatrical practice. Nor does it investigate Piscator's activity outside of the theater, such as his sponsoring the Popular Association of Film Art in Berlin, a working-class film movement.

The study consists of introductory chapters covering Piscator's personal background, schooling and theatrical activities prior to his arrival in Berlin in 1920 (i.e., his work as an actor and director in the Front Theater and Königsberg). The body of the study then investigates Piscator's theatrical activities in Berlin between 1920-1931, the repertoires which he presented, the technical and directorial innovations he made and, insofar as possible, the various financial backings of his theatrical ventures.

The primary source for the study is Piscator's own account of his theatrical activity, Das politische Theater. Other sources include the various newspaper accounts of Piscator's productions, especially as collected in the Richter Collection of the Akademie

known authors, Alfons Paquet and Rudolf Leonhard. Hagen isolates themes common to all of these writers, but in concentrating on the large picture of Zeittheater he sketches Piscator's role in it only briefly.

der Künste, West Berlin, and in the collection Theater für die Republik, ["Theater for the Republic"]¹⁸ and published accounts of Piscator's associates, such as Bertolt Brecht, Leo Lania, Ernst Busch and Tilla Durieux. Maria Ley Piscator did not meet her husband until the thirties and consequently has little first-hand knowledge of his work in the twenties. Two associates of Piscator, Sonja-Boggs, actress and widow of Otto Katz, business manager of the first Piscator-Bühne, and Wassilij Linke, actor and associate of Piscator during the director's entire stay in Berlin, graciously provided some first-hand knowledge of the director's work in two interviews.

¹⁸Günther Rühle, Theater für die Republik im Spiegel der Kritik ["Theater for Republic in the Mirror of Criticism"] (Frankfurt: S. Fischer Verlag, 1967).

CHAPTER II

PISCATOR'S PERSONAL BACKGROUND:

THE YEARS BEFORE BERLIN

Erwin Friedrich Max Piscator, born in Ulm-bei-Wetzlar on 17 December 1893, was the son of Karl Piscator and Antoine Laprese Piscator.¹ Although sometimes identified as a Protestant minister,² Piscator's father seems to have been a merchant, or storekeeper.³ Possibly Karl Piscator served in both capacities during his lifetime, for the Piscator family had a strong religious heritage, including at least one Protestant theologian, Johannes Piscator (1564-1626) who taught Protestant theology at Strassburg, and published his German translation of the Bible in 1600.⁴ At the time of this publication, Johannes latinized his last name, originally Fischer to Piscator.⁵

Ulm-bei-Wetzlar, the village in which Erwin Piscator was born (not to be confused with Ulm-an-der Donau, a much larger city in the

¹W. Kosch, ed., Deutsches Theater Lexicon ["German Theater Lexicon"] (Vienna: Kleinmayer Verlag, 1960), p. 1768.

²Mexine Block, ed., Current Biography (New York: H. Wilson and Company, 1942), p. 655.

³Marie Ley Piscator, p. 294.

⁴"Piscator, Johannes," Grosses Vollständiges Universal-Lexicon ["The Large, Complete Universal-Lexicon"] XXIX (Graz: Akademische Druck-und Verlagsanstalt, 1961), 491.

⁵Deutsches Theater Lexicon, p. 1768.

southern Federal Republic state of Bavaria)⁶, is located in the western Federal Republic state of Hessen. Karl Piscator and his family lived in the small village until 1898 when Erwin was five years old. At that time they moved to Marburg-an-der-Lahn, where Erwin attended high school, and in 1913, received his Arbitur degree (roughly equivalent to graduation from a junior college).⁷

In both Marburg and Ulm the Piscator family lived in the lower economic class. A champion of the working class movement in the twenties, Piscator prided himself on his humble upbringing in his recounting of his early life. Piscator records of his dwelling: "We lived in the narrow corners of the old city, among the ordinary people, those who made a living with their hands, the workers."⁸ He gives the following details of his early education and family life:

I did not attend the Vorschule (prep school) which in those days had been set up as preparation for the higher levels of education, but instead I attended the Volksschule (public school). That was the express wish of my father. He came from a simple family which lived under a paternal rule. The family's code of conduct was Christian, insofar as was possible under the circumstances. (I have known no simpler men than my grandparents or the brother of my father, nor better Christians in their understanding, goodness, tolerance, leniency with mistakes of others, and

⁶Heinz Bernard makes such a confusion in his article, "The Theater of Erwin Piscator," Prompt, III (1963), 26.

⁷Maria Ley Piscator, p. 294.

⁸"In den engen Winkeln der alten Stadt wohnten wir zwischen Bürgern, Handwerkern Arbeitern." Erwin Piscator, Das politische Theater, p. 40.

their disinterest in the world outside of their circle, in politics and in ambition to a higher station).⁹

Erwin did not get his interest in theater from his relatives.

In fact, Karl Piscator planned for his son to become a Protestant minister.¹⁰ Erwin Piscator does not record exactly how or when his interest in theater began, but when he told his grandfather of his wish to become an actor, Piscator recalls that the elderly man replied, "You want to become an actor?!" as if I had said that I wished to be a gypsy, or a vagabond or something similar."¹¹

THE UNIVERSITY OF MUNICH

Having received little parental encouragement in his theatrical aspirations, Erwin Piscator left home following his graduation for the university in Munich, Ludwig Maximillians Universität, Germany's largest university prior to World War II. Entering in the summer months of 1913, Piscator attended lectures in art history, philosophy,

⁹"Ich war nicht in der Vorschule, die damals im Anschluss an die höheren Lehranstalten eingerichtet wurde, sondern zuerst in der Volksschule. Das war der ausdrückliche Wunsch meines Vaters, der einer einfachen, bauerlich-patriarchalisch lebenden Familie entstammte. Ihr Grundsatz war wirkliches Christentum, soweit es in diesen Verhältnissen möglich war. (Ich habe keine einfacheren Menschen und besseren Christen, was Nachsicht mit den Fehlern anderer anbelangt, Verständnis, Güte, Toleranz und jegliches Disinteressenment an der äusseren Welt, Politik, Ehrgeiz zu höheren Ämtern und dgl. kennengelernt, als meine Grosseltern und den Bruder meines Vaters.)" Erwin Piscator, Das politische Theater, p. 10.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Ibid., p. 11.

German philology, and a theater seminar conducted by Professor Artur Kutscher.¹² Artur Kutscher (1878-1960) lectured in Munich for over fifty years on theater arts. His seminar constituted Piscator's introduction to theater. Interestingly enough, Bertolt Brecht was to hear the same professor's lectures during the playwright's stay in Munich in 1918¹³. In the theoretical aspects of his lectures, Kutscher compared the theater repertory presented nightly in Munich with contemporary "modern" trends in literature, while on a more specific, practical level, the theater professor tried to show to his students the amalgamation of all the arts in a theater production.¹⁴

Erwin Piscator seems to have first participated actively in theater during the autumn and early winter months of 1914 at the Hoftheater, one of the many theaters in Munich. There he worked backstage as a volunteer and acted in at least three roles, possibly in connection with practical exercises for Kutscher's seminar. Piscator's first interest in the theater seems to have been acting, an interest which lasted only until 1921, after which time he devoted himself exclusively to directing. The three known roles Piscator played at the Hoftheater were all small. Surviving cast lists show "Erwin Piskator [sic]" as having played in Die Hermanns-schlacht ["The Attack of Hermann"] (Henrich von Kleist) on 2 October

¹² Maria Ley Piscator, p. 293.

¹³ John Willett, p. 4.

¹⁴ Karl Ude, "Der Theaterprofessor: Zum Tode Artur Kutschers" ["The Theaterprofessor: On the Death of Artur Kutschen"], Welt und Wort ["World and Word"], XV (October, 1960), 301.

1914, as Astolf, the son of Herman; in Die gelehrten Frauen [Molière's Les femme savantes, "The Learned Ladies"] on 16 December 1914, as Julien, the manservant; and in Zwei Kornen ["Two Coins"], a fairy tale comedy by Alois Wohlmuth on 23 December 1914.¹⁵ A personal friend of Piscator, Wassilij Linke recalled that the director once recounted an experience during his performance as Astolf in Die Hermannsschlacht. On opening night, as Piscator stepped forward to deliver his only two lines in the play, he tripped on his own costume, a long dress-like garment, and fell on his face.¹⁶ Apparently, Piscator's fall did not put an end to his acting career, but acting was to play a small role in his life. As director, Piscator insisted on a rigorous program of calisthenics for his actors, amusing, considering Piscator's early bit of clumsiness.

WORLD WAR I AND THE FRONT THEATER

Piscator remained in Munich only until January of 1915. World War I had begun in the autumn of 1914, and the young theater student volunteered for the German Army on 2 January 1915.¹⁷ His military service he regretted but never forgot, for it showed him a side of life of which he was unaware. The military moved quickly

¹⁵ These three cast lists are preserved in the archives of the Akademie der Künste, Piscator Mappe, in West Berlin.

¹⁶ Personal interview with the writer, at the Akademie der Künste, West Berlin, December, 1969.

¹⁷ Das politische Theater reprinted a page of Piscator's military passbook. Erwin Piscator, Das politische Theater, p. 15.

and by April 1915 the seventeen-year-old found himself in the trenches near Ypres, Belgium.

After the initial successes of the Belgium invasion and the march toward Paris, the German Army bogged down throughout the winter months of 1914-1915. An attempt to break through to Paris came on 22 April 1915. Intense fighting developed at Ypres, where Piscator was stationed, for here the Germans first used chlorine gas, destroying the French line. British and Canadian guns prevented the Germans from advancing. Piscator contributed to the lack of advance, for when given the order to move out of his trench, he balked, scared. The event seems to have made a profound impression on him, for he repeated the story several times later in his life:

I was barely seventeen. It was my first contact with reality: the war.

We had moved out into Ypres. The Germans were beginning their Spring offensive of 1915. It was the first time gas was used. The English and the German guns both pounded against the comfortless grey skies. Our company was practically destroyed to the last man. We had to have replacements. We were continually shuttled from the supporting trenches to the front lines. As the first grenades fell the order was given to go over the top, advance, and dig in. While the others succeeded in advancing I did not. The commanding officer ran up to me shouting, "For God's sake, get going!" "I can't!" I answered. In a querulous tone he demanded to know what I had been before the war. I replied, "An actor."

Before all those exploding grenades the word "actor" which I had difficulty in stammering--this profession for which I had been fighting--my idea of the theater, which had been for me the highest and most important goal I could strive for, seemed to stupid, so ridiculous, so false and so inadequate to the situation I was in that I was less afraid of the grenades coming toward me than I was ashamed of having chosen such a profession.¹⁸

¹⁸Erwin Piscator, "Objective Acting," in Actors on Acting, ed. by T. Cole and H. Chinoy (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey; Prentice Hall, 1965), pp. 285-286.

The traumatic scene during the war must have played a large part in forming not only Piscator's strong anti-war feelings but also his opinion on the aim and purpose of theater. This scared youth later developed a reputation for directing shows that dealt fearlessly with contemporary social and political problems in the least fictitious forms possible in a reaction to what he called "Art." While directing the Proletarian Theater, Piscator

banned that word "art" radically from our programs. Our "pieces" were calls to action with which we wanted to come to grips with actual occurrences; we wanted to "talk politics."¹⁹

As late as 1927 a newspaper cartoon caricatured Piscator pushing a muse-like figure labelled "Kunst" [art] off a cliff.²⁰ Piscator turned permanently against theater as entertainment and "Kunst als Selbstzweck" [art for art's sake].²¹ Part of the reason for his hatred of art may well be grounded in his own reaction experienced in the trenches of World War I.

Evidently Piscator's commanding officer did not discipline the recruit severely, for Piscator continued serving in the trenches for two years,²² at the same time publishing anti-war verses.

¹⁹"Wir verbannten das Wort 'Kunst' radikal aus unserem Program, unsere 'Stücke' waren Aufrufe, mit denen wir in das aktuelle Geschehen eingreifen, 'Politik treiben' wollten." Erwin Piscator, Das politische Theater, p. 36.

²⁰The cartoon is reprinted in Erwin Piscator, Das politische Theater, p. 156.

²¹Ibid., p. 33.

²²Ibid., p. 16.

anti-war sentiment which quickly was becoming a strong drive in the director's life. Later Piscator advocated revolution, but never approved of war. Nonetheless, Piscator had little to do with art and much to do with war throughout 1915 and 1916. His fortune changed, however, sometime in 1916 or early 1917, when he applied for and received a transfer to a newly organized Front Theater situated at Kortrijk, some fifteen miles from Ypres.

The idea of a Front Theater, a theater for the troops on the front lines, originated with Fritz Grünwald who opened a German theater on the Westfront on 16 February 1916.²⁷ Traveling frequently, Grünwald's small ensemble encouraged its audiences to organize their own troupes in an effort to enlarge the endeavor. Evidently, Piscator responded to just such an appeal, as did many others. When the war finally ended the German Army listed forty-four army theaters, thirty-three division theaters, twenty-nine formation theaters (including regiment theaters, battalion theaters and brigade theaters) and fifty-four Front Theaters. The latter were so called because they belonged to no definite formation.

Among these fifty-four Front Theater troupes was the troupe to which Piscator belonged at Kortrijk. Playing to soldiers stationed in Sumy, Trostianitz, Achtyrka, Lepedin, Stuja, Nowo-Bjeltiza,

²⁷ Hermann Pözzgen, Das deutsche Front Theater ["The German Front Theater"] (Frankfurt: Frankfurter Societäts-Druckerei, 1935), p 11. Note: Hermann Pözzgen researched the Front Theater originally for a dissertation at the University of Cologne in 1935. He based his study on German military documents.

²⁸ ibid., p. 63.

Shortly after his induction, Piscator's thirteen-line poem "Denke an seine Bleisoldaten" ["Think About His Tin Soldiers"] appeared in Die Aktion, ["The Undertaking"] a literary weekly from Berlin, edited by Franz Pfemfert.²³

The thirty-six year old editor seems to have been Piscator's first contact with artistic impulses then stirring in Germany. Die Aktion began publication in 1911 introducing literature and woodcuts which announced in Germany the arrival of Expressionism,²⁴ and, as Germany moved into the events of World War I, anti-war sentiments. Whether Piscator and Pfemfert met before the publication of the young man's verses is unknown. Possibly Piscator submitted his verses by mail. Pfemfert evidently liked them, for poems by Piscator appeared in Die Aktion in March, April, and October 1915, and in July 1916.²⁵ These poems deal with death, especially death in war.²⁶

Piscator did not write much poetry in his later life, and these early verses may be taken as one more indication of the

²³Erwin Piscator, "Denke an seine Bleisoldaten ["Think About His Tin Soldiers"], Die Aktion, V (20 March 1915), 163.

²⁴Fritz Martini, Deutsche Literaturgeschichte ["German Literary History"] (Stuttgart: Alfred Kröner Verlag, 1965), p. 531.

²⁵Erwin Piscator, "Einst" ["Once"], Die Aktion, V (3 April 1915), 183; "Über" ["Over"] Ibid., V (17 April 1915) 204; "Rot" ["Red"] Ibid., V (15 May 1915), 252; "Einer ist tot" ["One is Dead"] Ibid., V (9 October 1915), 523; "Die Mutter zweier Söhne, welche starben" ["The Mother of Two Sons Who Die"], Ibid., VI (8 July 1916), 392.

²⁶The remaining two poems give no indication of the cause of the deaths which they describe.

Mienna, Gorodnya, and Dobrutsch as well as Kortrijk, the troupe covered a small area some thirty miles by five miles in southwest Belgium.²⁹ Erwin Piscator acted, playing mostly in young bon vivant and comedy roles.³⁰ At first the company consisted of men only, and Piscator occasionally played female roles.³¹ Not impressed by the repertory of light comedies (e.g., Im weissen Rössl ["At the White Horse Inn"] and Charlies Tante ["Charlie's Aunt"], Piscator complained: "Here, art was used as entertainment."³² Faced with the slaughter of war, the young poet-actor found light comedy poor fare on the battle front, and subsequently handled few comic scripts. Piscator was to direct only one show which could be labelled light comedy during his stay in Berlin.³³

Piscator's experiences in the Front Theater may have taught the young man at least one directorial lesson. Along with every theatrical performance the German military demanded that a "vaterländische Unterricht" [fatherland lesson] attempt to inspire patriotism in the soldiers by means of songs, lectures, discussions and slide

²⁹ Ibid., p. 76.

³⁰ Erwin Piscator, Das politische Theater, p. 16.

³¹ Mr. W. Linke in a personal interview, December 1969.

³² "Hier wurde 'Kunst' zur Aufmunterung gebraucht." Erwin Piscator, Das politische Theater, p. 17.

³³ That show was Hilfe, ein Kind ist von Himmel gefallen, ["Help, a Child Has Fallen From Heaven"] which premièred on 3 May 1925 at the Volksbühne in Berlin.

projections.³⁴ The subject of these lessons varied, but in every case the theatrical event was used to educate an audience. Later Piscator incorporated many of the techniques of the fatherland lessons (songs, discussions, lectures, and projections) into his own theatrical productions for much the same reason--to educate his audience. Because the practices of this military organization parallel Piscator's own practices in several aspects, the Front Theater deserves closer investigation.

The German military order describing the "Richtlinien für die Veranstaltung von Theateraufführungen" [directions for the organization of theater presentations] sound similar to an itemized list of the elements of an agit-prop or epic theater presentation:

For the fatherland lessons: Lesson evenings are to be given as far as possible once a week in resting places and hospitals. They are to be composed of recitations, solo and communal singing, couplets, instrumental music, artistic presentations, lectures with slides, and a small play. Participants are to be taken from the division itself as much as possible.³⁵

The military order prescribes the stage to be a platform two feet off the floor, twenty four feet wide, eighteen feet deep and with a proscenium opening fifteen feet high (a false proscenium, constructed with flats). The order recommends simple lighting consisting of mere strip lights hanging over the stage. The main curtain was to be

³⁴Förzgen, p. 15.

³⁵"Für vaterländischen Unterricht: in Ruhestellung möglichst jede Woche, auch in Lazaretten, Unterhaltungsabende mit Rezitationen, Sologeinsamer Gesang, Couplets, Instrumentalmusik, artistische Darstellungen, Lichtbildervorträge, kleine Theaterstücke. Kräfte hierzu möglichst aus den Divisionen gewinnen." Förzgen, p. 15.

white, on a roller if possible, to be used as a screen for projections when necessary. Allowances were made for only two spotlights, which in actuality were to be film projectors. In front of the stage and to the left (house left presumably) a smaller platform with a place for a piano and possibly several musicians was prescribed.³⁶ Unfortunately no scripts for the fatherland lessons were available.

The description of the stage and the organization of the evenings' entertainment suggest many of the technical devices Piscator was to use later, especially the use of films and slides, music, and discussions while, on a larger scale, the military's attempt to educate its soldiers through these lessons parallels Piscator's later attempt to educate the proletariat. One important difference did exist however. Piscator did not separate play from lesson in his productions, but amalgamated both into one, teaching his audience with these devices (film, song, lectures) as an integral part of the production.

Apart from his introductions to didactic entertainment, the Front Theater was also responsible for introducing Piscator to a man who was to help him in Berlin, Wieland Herzfelde, a friend of the director of Piscator's troupe, Eduard Büsing. As editor of the Milik Verlag publishing house, Herzfelde later often supplied Piscator with scripts of new plays with revolutionary overtones.

³⁶ Förzgen, pp. 41-42.

More immediately, however, Herzfelde introduced Piscator to the artist George Grosz, who later worked extensively with Piscator as set designer. Only correspondents during the war (Piscator recalls sending a Belgian tea mixture to Grosz in Berlin),³⁷ the two men met for the first time in 1919, and remained lifelong friends.

The early, formative period of Piscator's career, his service in the Front Theater, came to a sudden close with the German surrender on 11 November 1918. The Front Theater disbanded, as did the entire German Army, and Piscator returned to his home in Marburg.

Piscator may have arrived in Marburg sometime in December, 1918. Dates are uncertain for the next year of Piscator's life, which he spent wandering from the front to Marburg, to Berlin, to Königsberg, and finally back to Berlin where he settled for ten years. In his home town, Piscator found all of the familiar places and things as he had left them, but felt a sense of security lacking: "der Boden der bürgerlichen Sicherheit darunter war weggessunken" [the ground of middle class security had sunken away].³⁸ Piscator writes that while in the army, he had heard of the Russian Revolution of November, 1917, reports which whetted his curiosity, causing him to leave Marburg for Berlin, "Hochburg des Bolschewismus" [the capital of Bolshevism], as he termed the city.³⁹

³⁷Erwin Piscator, "Vorwort" ["Foreword"] in George Grosz Katalogue, Akademie der Künste (Berlin: n.p., 1962), p. 7.

³⁸Erwin Piscator, Das politische Theater, p. 21.

³⁹Ibid.

Piscator arrived in Berlin in January of 1919. The metropolis of Germany was the scene of several bloody riots during the month, riots which resulted in Piscator's introduction to the Communist Party. Left wing radicals, notably the Spartakusbund under the leadership of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, were demanding socialistic reforms in the newly formed German government under Friedrich Ebert, Reichspräsident. On January 8 fighting erupted in Berlin between the revolutionists and soldiers.⁴⁰ On the following day Liebknecht and Luxemburg went into hiding. Presumably, Piscator entered Berlin on, or shortly before, 8 January, for he describes a speech by Liebknecht and the beginning of the street fighting.⁴¹

Piscator remained in Berlin throughout the January revolution. Gustav Noske, a general under orders from the German President Friedrich Ebert, put down the revolution brutally and quickly, killing many hundreds of people. The Citizen's Guard, Noske's emergency defense force, tracked down and murdered Liebknecht and Luxemburg on 15 January, without even a mock trial. Berlin remained tense even after the death of the two agitators, soon regarded as martyrs. These executions appear to be responsible in large part for Piscator's joining the Spartakusbund, Liebknecht and Luxemburg's militant vanguard of the German Communist Party (the *Kommunistische Partei*

⁴⁰ Rudolf Coper, The Failure of a Revolution (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 1955), p. 229.

⁴¹ Erwin Piscator, Das politische Theater, p. 22.

Deutschlands, hereafter referred to as the KPD).⁴² Thus began for Piscator an association with the Communist Party which was not to end officially until the director left Moscow in 1936.

During January 1919, Piscator not only affiliated himself with the communists, but also with a Dadaist group as well. Dadaism, a literary and artistic movement began in a large part as a revolt against the loss of life in World War I, in 1916 in Zurich, at the Cabaret Voltaire under the direction of Tristan Tzara,⁴³ Hugo Ball⁴⁴ and Richard Huelsenbeck,⁴⁵ the German publisher. Wieland Herzfelde, Piscator's acquaintance from the Front Theater, introduced the new arrival to several artists and poets who were in Berlin, among them George Grosz, Walter Mehring, Franz Jung and Richard Huelsenbeck himself, all of whom were experimenting with Dadaist forms of art.⁴⁶

⁴²The Spartikusbund formed the bulk of the KPD on 1 January 1919. On that day the German government recognized the KPD, an amalgamation of several left wing organizations, as a political party.

⁴³Tristan Tzara (1896-1963) was a Roumanian poet who edited the periodical Dada while in Zurich. In 1919 he went to Paris and associated himself with Surrealism. Das Bertelsmann Lexikon, (Gutersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1966), VII, 466.

⁴⁴"Dadaism," Der grosse Brockhaus ["The Large Brockhaus"] (Wiesbaden; Eberhard Brockhaus, 1952-1957), II, 8.

⁴⁵Richard Huelsenbeck (1892-) was a doctor, psychoanalyst, and author of the essay "En Avant Dada" (1918) as well as a publisher. Ibid., V. 527.

⁴⁶George Grosz (1893-1959) was a painter, satirist, and illustrator for Simplicissimus (a political-cultural satiric magazine, somewhat analogous to England's Punch). Grosz served as scenic artist for Piscator as well as several other directors in the twenties.

Walter Mehring (1896-) wrote plays (Piscator directed his Kaufman von Berlin, ["The Merchant of Berlin"] 1929) but was more popularly known as a songwriter and poet of anarchism and vagrancy in the twenties.

Franz Jung (1888-1963) contributed plays and poems to Aktion,

Piscator was not impressed by Dadaists' view of art as useless and he writes "Ich hätte wohl Kunst schon hier in den Dienst der Politik gestellt, wenn ich nur gewusst hätte, auf welche Weise" [I would have set art in the service of politics this early (1919) if I had only known how to go about it].⁴⁷ Nothing came immediately of Piscator's association with the Dadaists. The benefits of associating with this group flowered only after Piscator began to work actively in Berlin's theater circuit.

Piscator left Berlin possibly as late as December, 1919, and moved to Königsberg, a metropolis east of Berlin. Why Piscator left Berlin and exactly when he left remain unknown. One possible explanation may be that the tense political situation in Berlin did not improve after January, especially for those with communist sympathies. The riots of early January resulted in workers' strikes which were not settled until late February. In March, the riots flared up again, with more than 3,000 people perishing in Berlin.⁴⁸ After the March riots, Noske put the city under virtual marshal law, declaring that any person found with arms and fighting against government troops was to be shot instantly. Piscator may have left Berlin sometime in spring of 1919 because of the dangers involved in openly supporting the rebellion. In Königsberg, the young man established a theater group, *Das Tribunal*, which produced shows over a three month period.

the pacifist, i.e., expressionist, journal to which Piscator also contributed. Piscator later directed two of Jung's plays.

⁴⁷ Erwin Piscator, *Das politische Theater*, p. 37.

⁴⁸ Coper, p. 246.

KÖNIGSBERG

Das Tribunal, a Kammerspielbühne [chamber theater] produced five plays before an "honorable bankruptcy"⁴⁹ forced it to close in March 1920. Piscator and Oskar L. Spaun (about whom nothing else is known) directed the first show, Strindberg's Gespenssternsonate, ["Ghost Sonata"] which opened on 10 January 1920.⁵⁰ Piscator also acted in the company of twelve, playing the student.⁵¹ After the Strindberg play, Das Tribunal offered Tod und Teufel ["Death and Devil"] by Frank Wedekind, opening on 20 January. Ten days later, Das Tribunal offered a second Wedekind play, Schloss Wetterstein, ["Wetterstein Castle"]. The last play produced by Das Tribunal, Georg Kaiser's Der Centaur, ["The Centaur"] opened on 17 February 1920.⁵² Very little is known of Piscator's venture in Königsberg. Das Tribunal seems to have attempted little or no experimentation in its productions, and the venture failed financially within three months.

Das Tribunal came to an end in late winter shortly after Piscator took a local newspaper critic to task in a program note because of an unfavorable review.⁵³ Piscator's criticism drew not only the

⁴⁹ Maria Ley Piscator, p. 69.

⁵⁰ Ludwig Hoffman, "Inszenierungsverzeichnis" ["Index of Productions"] in Erwin Piscator: Schriften II, 376.

⁵¹ Erwin Piscator, Das politische Theater, p. 37.

⁵² "Inszenierungsverzeichnis," p. 376.

⁵³ Erwin Piscator, Das politische Theater, p. 25. Although Maria Ley Piscator wrote that Das Tribunal went bankrupt, Piscator himself claims that his venture in Königsberg closed "honorably." Not

wrath of the press in Königsberg, but also that of the local citizenry. The date of the fatal program note as well as the date on which Piscator left Königsberg is uncertain, but both were probably in March 1920. Following the failure of *Das Tribunal*, Piscator forsook "legitimate theater" and took to the streets of Berlin with agit-prop.

Another undated yet important event occurred during that season in Königsberg: Piscator married Hildegard Jurczyk. Born in Königsberg, and seven years younger than Piscator (she was twenty at the time of their marriage), Hildegard attended the Oberlyzeum [high school] in her native Königsberg in order to become a school teacher, according to the wishes of her parents.⁵⁴ She took acting lessons secretly, however, and following her marriage to Piscator devoted the next three years to acting with him and for him.

During his short season with *Das Tribunal*, Piscator made an important acquaintance, Leopold Jessner, then forty-seven years old and director of the Neues Schauspielhaus in Königsberg for the previous four years. Although Leopold Jessner left his native town

only in Das politische Theater does the director emphasize that *Das Tribunal* did not go bankrupt, but also in a letter to Die deutsche Bühne ["The German Stage"]. Protesting an earlier notice of bankruptcy, Piscator wrote that *Das Tribunal* terminated productions for financial reasons, but had not declared bankruptcy. "Das Tribunal ist nicht zusammen gebrochen, sondern wurde freiwillig unter Lösung sämtlicher geschäftlichen Beziehungen auf rechtlicher Grundlage von der Leitung geschlossen." Die deutsche Bühne, XII (19 March 1920), 313. Since Piscator was soon to begin producing in Berlin, the director seemed to have reasons for wanting his name cleared of bankruptcy associations.

⁵⁴ Hildegard Plievier, "Lebenslauf" ["Vita"] in Gelber Mond über der Steppe ["Golden Moon Over The Steppe"] (Lesering: Im Bertelsmann Lesering, 1961), p. 207.

the same season Piscator arrived, the younger director met the older through his brother, Fritz Jessner, who played some undetermined role in the operation of Das Tribunal.⁵⁵ A successful director (in 1919 named as Intendant [managing director] of the Staatliche Schauspielhaus), Leopold Jessner directed several shows which could be labeled political theater. His own first show at the Staatliche Schauspielhaus, William Tell, depicted a rebel living under martial law in his native occupied country. The picture resembled the situation of the socialists under the martial law of Noske during the previous spring and summer. Jessner muted the patriotic overtones of Schiller's play by cutting a famous line about the fatherland, and "converted the play into a call for revolution against tyranny."⁵⁶ Gessler, the villain of William Tell appeared dressed in a glittering uniform, dripping with medals, the very type of a German general. One historian writes, "The most obtuse among the spectators could not fail to guess the political message of the play before him."⁵⁷ The play spawned a near riot in the theater. The stage manager brought down the curtain twice during the course of the opening performance, house lights were turned on and disruptive members of the audience thrown out. Eight years later Jessner defended the political productions of Erwin Piscator as the younger director came under harsh

⁵⁵W. Linke in an interview at the Akademie der Künste, December 1969.

⁵⁶Peter Gay, Weimar Culture (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), p. 111.

⁵⁷ibid. Jessner is probably best known today for his use of expressionistic set designs, especially his use of stairs (Jessner-Treppe), rather than for his political productions.

fire from critics and the established theater backers of the Volksbühne for his political interpretation of Gewitter über Gottland ["Storm over Gottland"]. Between 1919 and 1923, however, Piscator remained only an acquaintance of Leopold Jessner, yet a close friend of Fritz, the brother.

Piscator's experiences in Königsberg did not dampen his interest in theater. Piscator's return to Berlin in the spring of 1920 marked the beginning of a nine-year stay which was to climax with his managing and directing at two theaters simultaneously. All that preceded had been merely Piscator's introduction to theater: his studies under Kutscher in Munich, his experiences in the Front Theater, and at the Tribunal in Königsberg. From this introduction, Piscator obtained valuable experiences in propaganda techniques, especially the use of projections and live musical accompaniment, as well as experiences in the logistics of a road show operating under minimal conditions. When Piscator returned to Berlin in 1920 he began the Proletarian Theater, a theatrical venture which was to bring together many leftist artists who remained friends of Piscator throughout his stay in Berlin.

CHAPTER III

THE PROLETARIAN THEATER

(1920-1921)

From Königsberg Erwin Piscator moved to Berlin where he founded an agit-prop troupe named the Proletarian Theater. It lasted only six months, October 1920 to April 1921, but in that relatively short period of time Piscator managed to stage seven shows under the most limited conditions. A mixed company of both professional and amateur actors strove for the "Propagierung des Klassenkampfgedankens" [propagandizing of the idea of the class struggle] through plays which recommended to their proletarian audience revolution as the means to reform the social structure.¹ The Proletarian Theater represented no innovation in German theater history, in fact it may be considered one theatrical venture in a long line of precedents which stretches back to before Piscator was born.

The concept of a theater striving to cultivate the masses toward social reform formed one of the bases of the Freie Bühne ["Free Stage"] founded by Otto Brahm in Berlin in 1889. Following successes of the Freie Bühne, socialist groups organized a "people's theater," the Freie Volksbühne (1890), a subscription organization which produced Sunday matinées. The Freie Volksbühne announced its

¹Erwin Piscator, Das politische Theater, p. 36.

aim as "Die Kunst dem Volke! Eroberung des Theaters für die Masse durch ihre eigene Kraft" [Art for the people! Conquest of the theater for the masses through their own power]². Mainly supported by the Socialist party, the Volksbühne grew rapidly, enlarging its audience base, which by the turn of the century belonged more to the center-of-the-road than to the left.³

If success turned the Volksbühne toward the bourgeois element in German society, the workers had other organizations for productions of socially relevant drama, most notably the proletarische Laienspielvereine [proletarian amateur theater clubs]. Simply organized and often short-lived, these numerous clubs traced their origins back to the mid-nineteenth century.⁴ In 1913 this amateur theatrical effort was organized into the Dachverband deutscher Arbeiter-Theater Bünde [League of German Workers' Theater Clubs]⁵. But in spite of their long tradition and their working-class base, by 1919 these amateur clubs had changed from using scripts promoting revolutionary ideals to scripts of light farce and operettas designed only to entertain. One scholar claims that the repertory of these amateur groups was indistinguishable from that of the bourgeois theater.⁶

²"Aus den Anfängen der Berliner Volksbühnenbewegung" ["From the Beginnings of Berlin's Volksbühne-Movement"], Blätter der Volksbühne ["Leaves of the Volksbühne"] (May, June, 1925), p. 4.

³Fiebach, p. 55.

⁴Ibid., p. 54.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Hoffmann, p. 30.

The end of World War I and the rise of the KPD, a much more militant political party than the socialists, marked a change in the tenor of workers' theatrical presentations. The first attempt to use theater to comment on the political situation directed at the masses caused a furor. The play was Ernst Toller's Die Wandlung ["The Transformation"] directed by Karl Heinz Martin, which opened on 30 September 1919, a première which the theater historian Günther Rühle lists as one of the three nights of the 1919-1920 season which serve as "Schlüsselpremieren" [key-premieres] for the events of the coming decade.⁷ Because Martin and Piscator were professional associates and personal friends from 1920 until Piscator left Germany in 1931 Martin's career and especially his celebrated production of Die Wandlung deserve attention.

Karl Heinz Martin began his theatrical career as an actor, then as a director in the Hamburg Schauspielhaus. After moving to Berlin in the summer of 1919, the thirty-two year old director founded a theater organization, Die Tribüne, which announced "wir werden nicht spielen, sondern Ernst machen" [we will not play, but rather be serious].⁸ Martin employed professional actors, bringing at least

⁷Günther Rühle, p. 156. The other two premières were director Leopold Jessner's Wilhelm Tell (12 December 1919) and director Richard Weichert's Der Sohn ["The Son"] (18 January 1918 in Mannheim). The latter show, Walter Hasenclever's expressionistic "family drama" depicted the revolution of a son against his father. Writing of Weichert's production, the playwright Carl Zuckmayer referred to the play as "Bahnbrechend" [forging new paths] (quoted in Günther Rühle, p. 106.). Ernst Deutsch starred as the son in Weichert's production, and played in Die Wandlung eighteen months later.

⁸The phrase was quoted in Günther Rühle, p. 133.

one with him from Hamburg, Fritz Körtner. Also associated with Die Tribüne were Rudolf Leonhard, expressionist poet and anti-war dramatist, and Ernst Deutsch, a young actor who had made a name for himself by playing the revolutionary son in Hasenclever's Der Sohn.⁹ Both actors, Körtner and Deutsch, remained on Berlin stages throughout the twenties and the playwright, Leonhard, eventually had his play, Segel am Horizont ["Ship Ahoy"], directed by Piscator (March, 1925). Karl Heinz Martin had an eye for new talent.

Die Wandlung came from a then relatively unknown playwright, Ernst Toller, who in 1919 was serving a prison term for his part in the 1918 revolution in Bavaria. Only twenty-six years old at the time of Martin's production, Toller had served in World War I, but became thoroughly disillusioned with the international conflict, and subsequently an active communist. Because of the première of Die Wandlung, the young revolutionary became a "Heiliger der Revolution" [saint of the revolution].¹⁰

Marrin's production emphasized the script's lengthy speeches which urged the audience to overthrow the existing government. The stage was bare, with the exception of some ramps and a podium, from which the audience was addressed. A few hand properties completed the technical aspects. No curtain and only general lighting added to the stark presentation. Recognizing no illusion of a fourth wall, the actors addressed the audience directly and played some scenes

⁹Rudolf Leonhard, "Über die Anfänge des politischen Theater" ["On the Beginnings of Political Theater"], Theaterstadt Berlin ["Theater City, Berlin"], Herbert Ihring, ed. (Berlin: Verlag Bruno Henschel, 1948), p. 160.

¹⁰Günther Rühle, p. 156.

in the auditorium, which consisted of only three hundred seats.¹¹ The German theater historian Hans Knudsen believed that the absence of decoration was deliberate in an attempt to focus attention on the meaning of the play,¹² a characteristic of the expressionist movement. Two months following Die Wandlung, the director Leopold Jessner directed his William Tell with only stairs for decoration.

Martin abandoned Die Tribüne shortly after his production of Die Wandlung in order to organize the Bund für proletarische Kultur [Union for Proletarian Culture], but also known as the first Proletarian Theater.

The first Proletarian Theater (Piscator's was to be the second) claimed to be the first scenic instrument of proletarian culture.¹³ Originally, Martin intended the group to be a traveling, agit-prop company, but it staged the only performance of its first production, Herbert Craz's Die Freiheit ["The Freedom"] on 14 December 1919 in the Berlin Philharmonic Hall and never went anywhere thereafter. No reason can be given for the short life of Martin's Proletarian Theater, since the audience for Die Freiheit's performance was large.¹⁴ Perhaps continuing support failed to come forth. Perhaps, too, opposition from some of the proletarians themselves brought about the early death of the Proletarian Theater. Reviewing

¹¹Hans Knudsen, Deutsche Theatergeschichte ["German Theater History"] (Stuttgart: Alfred Kroner Verlag, 1959), p. 434.

¹²Ibid., p. 344.

¹³"erstes szenisches Instrument des Proletkults." Quoted in Günther Rühle, p. 198.

¹⁴Ibid.

the performance of Die Freiheit, the German communist party newspaper, Die Rote Fahne ["The Red Banner"], condemned the production for lacking militancy:

The mistake of the League for Proletarian Culture is that it appears with a pretension of making revolution through its activity and of being able to lead the endeavors of the proletariat's fight for peace.¹⁵

Martin's production of Die Wandlung and his subsequent first Proletarian Theater preceded Piscator's Proletarian Theater by ten months. Martin's work resembled that of Piscator probably more than any other director in Berlin, for both men sought to bring drama to the proletariat in an effort to develop a class consciousness among the workers.

Whether Piscator saw Die Freiheit, or whether he read Die Rote Fahne's condemnation is doubtful. Nevertheless, Piscator seems to have followed the critic's advice, for he attempted a more militant position with the second Proletarian Theater.

Upon his return to Berlin, probably sometime in March 1920, Piscator called upon Karl Heinz Martin and asked his support and endorsement in continuing the work of a proletarian theater.¹⁶ Since

¹⁵"Der Fehler des Bundes für proletarische Kultur liegt darin, dass er mit der Praetention auftritt, durch seine Tätigkeit Revolution zu machen, durch seine Bestrebungen den Befriedigungskampf des Proletariats führen zu können." "Proletarisches Theater," Die Rote Fahne (Berlin) 19 December 1919, reprinted in Klaus Kandler, Drama und Klassenkampf ["Drama and Class Struggle"] (Berlin: Aufbau Verlag, 1970), p. 418.

¹⁶Rudolf Leonhard, "Über die Anfänge des politischen Theaters in Deutschland," p. 166.

Martin had originally started the proletarian theater movement in Berlin, Piscator's visit and offer to carry on Martin's work may have appeared a bit brash. Evidently the young man appeared capable of carrying out Martin's original idea, for Piscator received the older man's promise of support. Rudolf Leonhard, Martin's personal friend and co-worker on Die Tribüne describes Piscator in those days almost as though the youth rode a white charger:

It would have been all over with the proletarian and political theater in Berlin had not one day an almost gymnastic young man come to Berlin and to me and told how he had a theater in Königsberg, the Tribunal, after the model of our Tribüne. He had led his theater to a distinguished and honorable failure and now wanted to continue his endeavors in Berlin.¹⁷

Martin gave his approval but did not actually direct any of the productions of the second Proletarian Theater.

After winning Martin's support, Piscator sought to raise a subscription audience. Martin had not attempted the formation of such an audience, one fact which may have accounted for his failure to find sustaining support for his theater. Piscator requested the aid of several workers' organizations. Among those responding to the young director's request were the educational section of the Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany, the Communist Workers'

¹⁷"Es wäre mit dem proletarischen und politischen Theater in Berlin ausgewesen, wenn nicht eines Tages ein gradezu gymnasienhaft junger Mensch nach Berlin und auch zu mir gekommen wäre und erzählt hätte, er habe in Königsberg ein Theater, das "Tribunal," nach dem Muster unsrer Tribüne zu einer hervorragenden und ehrenvollen Pleite geführt und er wolle und werde nun in Berlin weitermachen." *Ibid.* Although Piscator was a small man, he was often likened to a gymnast and described as athletic.

Party, the Free Worker's Union, the General Workers' Union, the Workers' Hiking League and Friends of Nature, and the International League of the War's Victims.¹⁸ The common ground of these groups was their working class membership. All of these organizations announced their mutual support of Piscator's theater on 3 September 1920, calling themselves the Committee of Revolutionary Workers of Greater Berlin for Proletarian Theater.¹⁹ The ticket price favored organized labor, offering an advance ticket costing 3.20 marks for one performance to members of the workers' unions. At the box office, the organized workers paid 3.50 marks. Non-unionized workers gained entrance for 5.50 marks (if they bought the ticket in advance) and 6 marks at the box office, while the unemployed paid only one mark.²⁰ The members of the mutual association of unions for Proletarian Theater who handled both advance ticket sales and publicity brought:

¹⁸"Bildungsausschuss der unabhängige sozialdemokratische Partei" [the Educational Section of the Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany]; "Kommunistischen Arbeiter Partei" [Communist Workers' Party]; "Freie Arbeiter Union" [Free Worker's Union]; "Allgemeine Arbeiter Union" [General Workers' Union]; "Arbeiter-Wanderbund u. Naturfreunde" [Workers' Hiking League and Friends of Nature]; and "Internationale Bund der Kriegsoffer" [International League of War Victims].

¹⁹"Ausschuss der revolutionären Arbeiter grossBerlins für proletarisches Theater." "Zur Unterstützung des Proletarischen Theaters" ["For the Support of Proletarian Theater"] Die Freiheit ["The Freedom"], Berlin, 3 September 1920.

²⁰"Ausschuss der revolutionären Arbeiter," advertisement in Die Rote Fahne (Berlin), 4 December 1920, reprinted in Erwin Piscator, Das politische Theater, p. 40.

in an audience which numbered between five and six thousand members.²¹ Although this is not a large number compared with the Volksbühne's subscription list of over 100,000,²² it did insure Piscator of a sustaining interest in his venture.

Obviously aware of the interest in proletarian theater which its young party members excited, the KPD sent a deputy, Sullivan Gumpert, to "advise" the young group on 7 September, only three days following the announcement of the subscription audience's existence.²³ The delegation of Gumpert seems to have been the only contribution of KPD made to Piscator's theater, for the party provided no direct support or subsidy for Piscator's Proletarian Theater throughout its five productions. Nor did the KPD give even official verbal approval of the young director's venture. The deputy proved to be valuable, not only because of his advice, but also because as editor of the periodical Der Gegner ["The Opponent"] he devoted at least one "Sondernummer" [special issue] of his magazine to the Proletarian Theater.²⁴

Not only the KPD noticed the workers' interest in the Proletarian Theater, but also the Berlin city police kept a wary eye on Piscator's agitation and eventually crushed it. Unfortunately for

²¹ Ibid., p. 42.

²² Hagen, p. 139.

²³ Klaus Pfitzner, "Das revolutionäre Arbeitertheater in Deutschland: 1918-1933" ["The Revolutionary Worker's Theater in Germany: 1918-1933"] in Schriften Zum Theaterwissenschaft, I (Berlin: Henschelverlag, 1953), 397.

²⁴ Der Gegner, I (October, 1920).

Piscator, the police had a powerful weapon, paragraph thirty-two of the National Trade Regulations, which stipulated that all professional theaters needed a Koncession [permit to operate]. The chief of police issued the Koncessionen for Berlin, but only after consultation with the Bühnengenossenschaft [the union of stage personnel, i.e., actors, directors, and technicians] and with the Bühnenverein [the producers' union].²⁵ Erwin Piscator appealed twice for a Koncession in August 1920.²⁶ He received the permit sometime in September, but only after certain conditions were met. Because of the supposed bankruptcy of the Königsberg experiment, the Bühnengenossenschaft demanded assurances of the feasibility of a Proletarian Theater which Piscator secured by supplying authorities with a letter from Karl Heinz Martin who declared his association with the project.²⁷ In addition, the chairman of the drive for a subscription audience testified to the numbers of the still-growing membership lists, and finally Piscator put up an undisclosed sum of money as a Geldkaution [down payment against the possibility of bankruptcy].²⁸ The hassle Piscator encountered in September concerned only the financial feasibility of the venture, and had nothing

²⁵"Reichsgewerbeordnung" [National Trade Regulations], Fiebach, p. 82.

²⁶Fiebach, p. 58, taken from the Berlin police records Akte 4447, p. 7.

²⁷Fiebach, p. 81. According to Piscator's application for a Koncession, professional actors were to play as the backbone of the Proletarian Theater. Piscator listed Ernst Deutsch, Fritz Kortner, Max Malen, Herman Greid, Emil Walkotte, and Hildegard Piscator as his permanent company, all of whom belonged to the Bühnengenossenschaft. Fiebach, p. 54.

²⁸Fiebach, p. 81.

overtly to do with the politics of the Proletarian Theater. That concern changed within a month.

As the Proletarian Theater approached its first production, Der Gegner brought out its special October issue, devoted to the new theater troupe. In it, Erwin Piscator wrote "Über Grundlagen und Aufgaben des proletarischen Theaters" ["About the Fundamentals and Tasks of the Proletarian Theater"].²⁹ Piscator's essay is his first published statement on his concept of theater, and his most extensive exposition of his intent with Proletarian Theater. He minced no words concerning the revolution which he hoped to incite: "a conscious stress and propagandizing of the idea of class struggle: the Proletarian Theater wants to be of use to the movement toward revolution."³⁰

Opening Piscator's article, this paragraph suggests why the chief of police reconsidered the permit which he granted Piscator shortly after publication of Piscator's essay. Sending copies of Der Gegner to the Bühnengenossenschaft as well as the Bühnenverein, he asked them to approve a repeal of the permit. On 27 October the president of the Bühnenverein responded, saying that he saw no reason to repeal the permit, a position later taken by the Bühnengenossenschaft.³¹ The police chief assigned observers to the

²⁹ Der Gegner, I (October 1920), 90 ff. The entire article is reprinted in Hoffmann, p. 77 ff.

³⁰ Ibid., "bewusste Betonung und Propagierung des Klassenkampfgedankens: Das proletarische Theater will der revolutionären Bewegung dienstbar sein."

³¹ Fiebach, p. 82.

the Proletarian Theater which was at the time presenting its first production, three one-act plays, which had opened on Thursday, 14 October, about the time the police chief must have been mailing copies of Der Gegner to his associates.³²

THE THREE ONE-ACTS

The opening production of the Proletarian Theater celebrated the third anniversary of the revolution in which Kerensky proclaimed Russia a republic and paved the way for Lenin's November revolution, and the communist takeover. At least one of the plays, Russlands Tag, ["Russia's Day"] dealt directly with the plight of the communist state, being written especially for the Proletarian Theater. Of the three one-acts, only the text of Russlands Tag seems to have survived, although all three plots can be summarized.

Apparently never published, the first play, Der Krüppel ['The Cripple'] by Karl August Wittfogel,³³ describes a day of street begging by a disabled German veteran of World War I. A cross section

³²The police chief, a man named Richter preserved his observers' reports which gave valuable information on Piscator's productions. These reports are still in police files in East Berlin.

³³Karl August Wittfogel was a playwright and strong supporter of the movement to develop workers' art. His essay "Grenzen und Aufgaben der revolutionären Bühnenkunst" ["Borders and Tasks of Revolutionary Stage Art"] in the afterword to "Die Mutter und Der Flüchtling" ["The Mother and The Fugitive"] gives his opinions on revolutionary theater, which parallel Piscator's thoughts. Although Wittfogel's plays were published by Wieland Herzfelde's Malik Verlag, no evidence was found for a publication of Der Krüppel. Perhaps Piscator came upon Wittfogel's manuscript through Herzfelde, or perhaps Piscator knew Wittfogel personally.

of the city's population, men, women, and police officers ignore the cripple. Finally, an unidentified passerby tells the cripple that he should get a job and earn some money. The suggestion provokes the cripple to scream his reaction: he could not get work because of the wounds he received fighting for those who now recommend he go to work.³⁴

The second and third one-acts originated from two writer-refugees from Hungary. An unsuccessful Hungarian communist revolution in March of 1919 had been crushed the following month by Admiral Miklor Horthy, who set in motion a right wing counter-revolution which the communists named the white terror because of its severity. Between May and September 1919 the white terrorists executed 20,000 persons and imprisoned 70,000 in concentration camps as 10,000 refugees fled over Hungary's borders.³⁵ As part of this wave of refugees, Andor Gabor and Lajos Barta, found their way to Berlin, where they involved themselves with Piscator's Proletarian Theater. Gabor's play, Vor den Toren [the ambiguous title may be translated "Before the Fools" or "Before the Gates"] describes one aspect of the white terror in Hungary. Set in a concentration camp, the scene revolves around a prison guard who can hear from his post the cries of the imprisoned. A passing shepherd asks the guard why he does not help his countrymen. A childhood companion argues the same

³⁴Plot summary comes from Gertrude Alexander, "Proletarisches Theater," Die Rote Fahne (Berlin), 17 October 1920.

³⁵Hoffmann, p. 59.

point with the guard, who remains nevertheless at his post. Then a woman enters, fleeing the captain of the guard. She explains that in jealous lust the captain has shot her husband. This incident causes the guard to reverse his stand. When the captain appears, the guard kills him and then frees the prisoners.³⁶

Russlands Tag closed the evening's program. Written in just five days, and at Piscator's request, the script has survived. The German theater historian, Günther Rühle, labels Russlands Tag the first agit-prop production in the Weimar Republic.³⁷ Although the program of the Proletarian Theater lists the author of the last show as the Kollektive, that is, the collective work of the entire company, actually Lajos Barta authored the play. Barta explains that he wished for anonymity at the time, because he feared the Hungarian white terror. Forty-one years old and a practiced Hungarian playwright when he arrived in Berlin, Barta brought Piscator three finished scripts at their first meeting, about 1 October 1920. Piscator requested a special play, however, whose theme would be support for communist Russia.³⁸ Piscator and Barta's attempt to

³⁶The plot summary comes from Fiebach, p. 61, who bases his summary on the police report, Akte 5639, p. 20.

³⁷Günther Rühle, p. 201.

³⁸Lajos Barta tells of his association with the Proletarian Theater in Wieland Herzfelde's article "Nicht nur Bücher haben ihre Geschichte," Neue Deutsche Literatur ["New German Literature"], VI (January, 1958), 155-156.

arouse popular support for Soviet Russia appears to have been based on a fear that the capitalist countries would support a counterrevolution in Russia, for France and England had supported Admiral Horthy's actions in Hungary. Berlin had experienced a form of white terror under Noske's martial law in 1919, and in the minds of many the fear of a repeat of such action on yet a broader base may have been very real. Russlands Tag began with cries of "Help, the white terror" shrieked in darkness. Light appeared on corpses hanging from a scaffold, as more cries of help sounded. The scene changed, and showed actors personifying through their costuming the various forces of capitalistic society, such as world capital, world diplomacy, religion, and the military.³⁹ Under the leadership of world capital, the forces conspire to crush the masses by supporting an attack on the revolutionary Russians and then upon communists throughout the world. Once plans are made, the scene changes and a German worker sits on a stone, reading a book on socialism. Two of his fellow workers pass him on their way to deliver their arms "in the name of world order." A fantasy scene reveals ghosts of those murdered by the white terror. The spirits speak to the German worker, encouraging him not to let Russia be attacked. Moved by these apparitions, the worker leaves his books and encourages his fellow workers to keep their weapons and unite.

³⁹ A picture of Russland's Tag in performance shows these actors. The picture is included in the appendix.

The play ends with cries of "fight" as a trumpeter in a Russian uniform advances, blows a fanfare and the workers intone the communist anthem, the Internationale, encouraging the audience to sing along.⁴⁰

Piscator's selection of these three scripts, the first which he presented during his eleven-year stay in Berlin, indicates the director's concern for immediate political problems. All three plays concern actual political events, notably disabled war veterans (Der Krüppel), the Hungarian counterrevolution (Vor den Toren), and the proposal to support a counterrevolution in Russia (Russlands Tag). These problems were of concern to working-class Berliners. Although no figures were available on maimed war veterans, such invalids frequently appear in George Grosz's paintings which suggests how often they might have been encountered on the streets of Berlin.⁴¹ The excess of the Hungarian white terror was only one year old at the time of Piscator's production and the issue may have posed an immediate threat to many. Russlands Tag expressed parallel sentiments with the 1920 movement "Hände weg von Sowjet Russland" [Hands off Soviet Russia] which the KPD headed to prevent the German military from giving weapons to Russian counterrevolutionaries.⁴² The representation of the German workers delivering up their arms in

⁴⁰The plot summary and the stage directions were gleaned from "Russlands Tag," reprinted in Hoffmann, pp. 67-77.

⁴¹Gay, p. 110.

⁴²Fiebach, p. 61

the play must be metaphoric of the actions of the whole German nation. Clearly, Piscator's theater dealt with contemporary political issues in its first production. Not every production by Piscator was to show his political leanings so clearly.

In all probability the slim finances of the Proletarian Theater held back its director, but Piscator may also have considered the locations in which he was to play. Information on the technical aspects of Piscator's first show in Berlin indicates the minimal facilities available for the production.

Never accorded the luxury of a permanent home, the Proletarian Theater presented the three one-acts in Klems Festsaal,⁴³ a workers' assembly hall in Hasenheide, a street just east of Tempelhof Field, now the main airport for West Berlin. In 1920, however, only a small airport existed and the district including Hasenheide, Neukölln, ranked as one of the older and poorest sections of the city, a workers' quarter.⁴⁴ The street Hasenheide, as well as Templehof, contained public soccer fields (Sportplätze), a park and open playing fields (Freigeländer).⁴⁵ Obviously, Hasenheide encompassed a workers' living and recreational area. Piscator took his theater directly to the audience to which it professed to cater. Locating his première performance in such a section of the city, Piscator

⁴³The street address was Hasenheide 13 according to advertisements in Die Rote Fahne (Berlin).

⁴⁴Hans Brenner, ed., Probleme der neuen Stadt Berlin ["Problems of the New City of Berlin"], (Berlin: Deutscher Kommunal Verlag, 1926), p. 501.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 400.

anticipated Brecht's yearning for the theater to house a public such as the sporting public, where the audience would puff at cigars as if watching a boxing match.⁴⁶ From the available descriptions, Klems Festsaal resembled a gymnasium more than a theater. Piscator describes the smell of stale beer and men's latrines, the faded flags and bunting remaining from the last Bock-beer festival, and the audience composed of men in their shirt-sleeves and women holding their babies in their arms.⁴⁷ Like his audience and his locations, Piscator's production was impoverished.

A small platform, which Piscator called "a small stage, which hardly deserved that name,"⁴⁸ had a front curtain, while black drapes masked the wings and the back wall.⁴⁹ On either side of the stage stood two nearly life-size pictures of the workers' heroes, Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht which remained lighted throughout the performance.⁵⁰ For at least one of the shows, Der Krüppel, a backdrop of a city street drawn in forced perspective hung upstage of the action.⁵¹ One scene of Russlands Tag, the scene in which the

⁴⁶Bertolt Brecht, "Emphasis on Sport," in Willett, p. 6.

⁴⁷Erwin Piscator, Das politische Theater, p. 40

⁴⁸"Mit ihren kleinen Bühnen, die den Namen kaum noch verdienen," Ibid.

⁴⁹Fiebach, p. 76. Fiebach cites his source as Police Akte 5639 p. 19.

⁵⁰Berta Lask, "Erinnerungen an Piscators proletarisches Theater" ["Memories of Erwin Piscator's Proletarian Theater"], Die Rote Fahne (Berlin), 25 January 1925.

⁵¹A picture of a scene from Der Krüppel and a scene from Russlands Tag are included in Erwin Piscator, Das politische Theater,

characterizations of the forces of capitalism plot their overthrow of communism, played before a map of Europe.⁵² The actors referred to this map in the course of the scene, as they conspired. At least one scholar has pointed to Piscator's use of the map as the first "pedagogisches Moment" in the young director's development.⁵³ In all probability the director used the map for the characters to clarify or simplify the details of the conspiracy.

Costuming consisted of realistic city dress, the policemen of Der Krüppel wearing their easily recognizable uniform from two years previous when Wilhelm was still Kaiser (especially obvious is the spiked helmet).⁵⁴ Music opened the production, a selection from Hebbel's "Requiem."⁵⁵ No description of the lighting instruments is available, but the police observer described a completely darkened house and a refined, half-dark, varicolored lighting of the stage.⁵⁶ This report suggests that Piscator used a dimmer for his instruments, and attempted colored lighting. The stage directions for Russlands Tag call for several blackouts as well as some area lighting, indicating that Piscator had some main control of his lights.

facing p. 32.

⁵²See the picture of Russlands Tag in the Appendix.

⁵³Mildenberger, p. 146.

⁵⁴See the picture of Der Krüppel in performance which is included in the Appendix.

⁵⁵Fiebach, p. 77. Fiebach quotes as his source Akte 5639, p. 19.

⁵⁶"raffinierte halbdunkle, verschiedenfarbige Beleuchtung der Bühne." Fiebach, p. 13, quoting police Akte 5639, p. 19.

The Proletarian Theater performed in a very informal manner indulging in at least one interruption during the performance of Der Krüppel on opening night. The problem concerned a backdrop, a perspective of a city street corner, for which John Heartfield, brother of Wieland Herzfelde, was responsible.⁵⁷ Neither Heartfield nor the backdrop had arrived at Klems Festsaal by the time the curtain was to go up on the première (7:00 p.m.), so Piscator proceeded without the scenery. Halfway through the first act, Heartfield appeared at the back of the hall, struggling with the rolled backdrop. The scenic painter called to Piscator, who played the cripple,⁵⁸ to stop the show and hang the drop. Suddenly a cripple no longer, Piscator stepped to the front of the stage and explained to Heartfield that the performance could not have waited all night. A discussion followed in which Piscator tried to calm the artist so that the play could proceed, but with no success, and amidst sporadic laughter from the audience. Piscator then asked his house whether the backdrop should be hung. After the audience voted to see the scenery, the main curtain closed while stage hands rigged Heartfield's work.⁵⁹ In recalling this incident, Piscator seems to have

⁵⁷ John Heartfield anglicized his last name, originally Herzfelde, following World War I as an anti-German protest. George Grosz, originally Georg Grosz, anglicized his first name at the same time.

⁵⁸ The extent of Piscator's acting career is not known, but it appears to have been minimal. Piscator is the actor sitting in the picture of Der Krüppel included in the Appendix.

⁵⁹ This incident is described in at least two places. Piscator describes it in the 1963 edition of Das politische Theater, pp. 48-49, and Wieland Herzfelde recalls it in "Russlands Tag, Eine Art Vorspiel," Neue Deutsche Literatur V (11 November 1952), 11.

enjoyed Heartfield's intrusion, and appreciated the break of any illusion which his performance might have created. Writing in 1963, Piscator goes so far as to call Heartfield the founder of Epic Theater.⁶⁰ Perhaps the claim is slightly overstated, but the intrusion, the break in the action of a play, became a device Piscator often employed. No intrusion by a scene designer ever took place again, but interruptions of a play's plot by films, songs, and discussions occurred frequently in Piscator's later shows.

Apparently the remainder of the evening proceeded without incident, for no further comments on the technical aspects of the show are available. Since the Proletarian Theater invited no reporters of bourgeois newspapers, reviews of the production were limited.⁶¹ An unfavorable review in the KPD newspaper, Die Rote Fahne, appeared two days after the opening. The critic Gertrud Alexander,⁶² describes the characterizations as bad caricatures.⁶³ The article mentions no actors by name since the program for the production did not identify the actors.⁶⁴ The critic describes the scene changes as taking

⁶⁰Erwin Piscator, Das politische Theater (1963), pp. 48-49.

⁶¹Jürgen Rühle, Theater und Revolution ["Theater and Revolution"] (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1963), p. 132.

⁶²Although the review was unsigned, Klaus Kändler identifies the reviewer as Gertrud Alexander through a comparison of her style of writing. Klaus Kändler, p. 419.

⁶³"schlechte Karikaturen" Gertrud Alexander, "Proletarisches Theater," Die Rote Fahne (Berlin), 17 October 1920.

⁶⁴Program reprint in Hoffmann, pp. 82-83.

place in long, dark pauses, and the final effect, the communal singing of the Internationale, as a failure. The audience joined in only meagerly, and then only at the end of the song.⁶⁵

The effect of the review of Die Rote Fahne on the members of the Proletarian Theater is unknown. Reminiscing, Piscator claimed lack of support from even the communist press was responsible at least in part for the downfall of the Proletarian Theater.⁶⁶ But that downfall would not occur for some six months hence.

At the end of October the Proletarian Theater continued to produce their three one-acts, playing nine times in a total of four assembly halls, traveling a great many times across Berlin. The troupe played in Hasenheide on Thursday, the fourteenth, and Friday, the fifteenth of October. On Saturday (16 October) it played at Engelufer 15, about a mile and a half from Hasenheide. The following Wednesday (20 October) it played in the Pharusaal at Müllerstrasse 142 in Wedding, a northern district of Berlin, about eight miles from Hasenheide. On Thursday they moved back to Hasenheide for a performance. On Friday, they performed in the Moabiter Gesellschaftshaus (Wickefstrasse 24) in Moabit, about five miles from Hasenheide. The following week saw a triple play across Berlin: Wednesday (27 October) in Wedding, Thursday (28 October) in Hasenheide, and Friday (29 October) in Moabit. Although the first three performances began at 7:00 p.m., thereafter the plays started at

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Erwin Piscator, Das politische Theater, p. 44.

7:30 p.m.⁶⁷ Police reports estimated attendance figures at Piscator's performances as between 250 and 600 persons.⁶⁸ Both *Wedding and Moabit*, like *Neukölln*, housed the poorest inhabitants of the city. In 1927 critics accused Piscator of forgetting the masses when the director opened his own theater in the heart of fashionable west end of Berlin, Nollendorflplatz. No such accusation could be made about the Proletarian Theater, however, for the rest of their productions followed the same pattern as the first, playing in the poorer sections of the city.

Information on Piscator's first production offers several insights on Piscator's early direction of his career. Piscator used original and as yet unpublished scripts which dealt clearly and unmistakably with contemporary political problems. The director requested that one play, Russlands Tag, be written especially for the Proletarian Theater's program, and gave the author the political theme to be expounded. The technical aspects of Piscator's theater lagged behind the political. Primitively staged, the presentations appeared realistic only in the costuming. Controlled and colored lighting served to support the theatricality of the show. Picture placards paid tribute to Luxemburg and Liebknecht. Evidently, the director did not disapprove of interruptions in the course of the show, and encouraged group singing of the Internationale at the end

⁶⁷Piscator's schedule was gleaned from advertisements appearing in Die Rote Fahne (Berlin) from 13 October 1920 to 30 October 1920.

⁶⁸Fiebach, p. 80. These figures represent the attendance range throughout several productions of the Proletarian Theater. Nevertheless even assuming the lower figure for the first productions, the

of the performance. Traveling to three of the poorer sections of greater Berlin, Nuekölln, Wedding and Moabit and using makeshift stages in recreation halls, the Proletarian Theater brought its shows to the workers. Later, the workers might have to journey to the Volksbühne or to Nollendorfplatz, fashionable districts, to see Piscator's plays. No seeker of fashion in 1921, however, Piscator played to an audience of men in shirtsleeves and women with their babies. The pattern set by the first production of the Proletarian Theater was not to change appreciably throughout its seven-month existence.

DIE FEINDE

Advertisements for the second production of the Proletarian Theater, Die Feinde ["The Enemies"] by Maxim Gorki, appeared first in Die Rote Fahne on 30 October, but rehearsals may have begun much earlier,⁶⁹ for the program of the three one-acts had announced the preparation of Gorki's play as early as 14 October.⁷⁰ Die Feinde opened on 10 November.

Maxim Gorki finished Die Feinde in 1906, at the age of 38. His sixth play, it did not attract the attention or the admiration of his second work, The Lower Depths (1902). Nor was the playwright's subject the same. Die Feinde depicts misunderstanding and corruption in the management of a factory of a provincial Russian town. In

house for the three one-acts was far from empty.

⁶⁹ Die Rote Fahne (Berlin), 30 October 1921.

⁷⁰ Program is reprinted in Hoffmann, pp. 81-84.

opposition to the management, the workers appear open and simple. The conflict revolves around a murder, and subsequent investigation.

The first of Die Feinde's three acts discloses the garden of Zakhar Bardin, the owner of a factory in a provincial town. Here the Bardin family receives the news that Mikhail, a business partner, has been shot during a confrontation with restless workers. . Fearing a riot, Zakhar sends for the military. Act two, set in the same garden later in the day, shows the Bardin family reacting to the crisis. Periodically throughout the act various individual workers enter the scene, who by their simplicity, openness and unity contrast markedly with the dissention, deceit and complexity of the Bardin group. Act three introduces the soldiers and the associate district attorney, Nikolai, brother of the murdered Mikhail. Set in the living room of the Bardin house, the action depicts the assumption of the complete control by the authorities. The Bardins find that they cannot oust their official guests, nor even mute the soldiers' rudeness. For the workers, improper searches, false arrests and brutal questioning follow Nikolay's arrival. Finally, the murderer surrenders of his own accord. Freed, the group of workers which Nikolay had arrested tells the obnoxious attorney that his harsh measures have engendered unionism within the provincial town. Thus the play ends with the workers united, their cause upheld, the authorities pictured as blundering and powerful, and the owners split with dissent and helpless.⁷¹

⁷¹An English version of Enemies is available in Seven Plays of Maxim Gorki, translated by Alexander Bakshy (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1945), pp. 143-201.

For his second production Piscator chose a well-known, popular playwright to follow his program of original dramas. Although Wittfogel, Gabor and Barta were experienced playwrights, they certainly did not command the attention of Gorki. As might be expected, the Russian's play dealt more with Russian problems than German ones. Nevertheless, certain aspects of the play seem to reinforce the political theses of the three one-acts, most notably the dangers of a military take-over, and the necessity for the workers to form a united front. The inability of the managing class to take any significant action seems to be a new political statement of the Proletarian Theater.

Gertrud Alexander, reviewer for Die Rote Fahne, called Die Feinde "sicher ein Fortschritt" [certainly a step forward].⁷² She admired the troupe's effort to make the presentation possible in spite of their primitive resources, and at the same time pointed out the group's weaknesses.

Although the program does not identify the cast members, Gertrud Alexander suggests that Mrs. Piscator played Nadya (the idealistic niece) and praised her as the only performer who brought life and breath to her role. Apart from Nadya, Alexander refers to the acting as a burlesque, and, as concerns the general's part, "not taken earnestly enough."⁷³ How extensively Piscator worked with the

⁷²Gertrud Alexander, "Proletarisches Theater," Die Rote Fahne (Berlin), 23 November 1920.

⁷³"nicht ernst genug genommen". [not taken earnestly enough] Ibid.

actors is impossible to state. In his essay in Der Gegner, Piscator does not address himself directly to acting. He does write, however, that the Proletarian Theater should strive for "simplicity in expression and construction."⁷⁴ Piscator may have attempted a simplicity with his ensemble, not striving for any great subtlety of characterization, even in plays such as Gorki's which might have allowed a subtle interpretation. Piscator may not have been capable of coaching actors at this early stage of his career, since Alexander reports that many of the actors did not seem to understand their roles, a fault which she lays on the director.⁷⁵

In addition to observations on the acting, Alexander noted Piscator's alteration of the text. Piscator altered some lines of the character Tatyana in a rather long (fifteen lines) monologue, when she tells Yakov, her husband, how she feels when on stage.⁷⁶ Here, Piscator substituted a description of proletarian art and its aims. Alexander writes that the substitution was obvious immediately, being out of character for the middle-class character. Whether Piscator wrote the alteration, or whether one of the ensemble's members was responsible is impossible to say. Nevertheless, Piscator

⁷⁴"Einfachheit in Ausdruck und Aufbau." [simplicity in expression and construction.] Erwin Piscator, "Über Grundlagen und Aufgaben des proletarischen Theaters," reprinted in Klaus Kändler, p. 420.

⁷⁵"Es erkannten nicht alle den Sinn ihrer Rolle, was zum Teil auf die Regie fällt" [not everyone knew the meaning of their role, a fault at least in part of the direction]. Die Rote Fahne (Berlin), 23 November 1920.

⁷⁶Gorki, pp. 175-176.

obviously approved both the altering of the text and the specific alteration used, i.e., one that was out of character, in a sense, an interruption of the play. In his essay in Der Gegner Piscator suggested the relationship which an author should have to a director: "Even he (the author) must quit being the autocratic person he once was."⁷⁷ In Das politische Theater Piscator asserted that the director should cease being a "servant of the work," and recommend that directors alter scripts to update them or to make them more relevant to the audience which would be watching them.⁷⁸

Unfortunately, information on mechanical devices which have been used in Die Feinde is lacking.

The company traveled much the same route as with the three one-acts, opening on Wednesday 10 November in Wedding (the Pharusaaale in the Müllerstrasse 142) and playing in the same location for the following two Wednesdays (17 and 24 November). Fridays (12, 19 and 26) the Proletarian Theater played in Moabit (the Moabiter Gesellschaftshaus, Wiciefstrasse 24). A seventh production appeared at Hasenheide, Klems Festsaaale on Thursday, 25 November. The curtain rose at 7:30 p.m. on all performances, with the exception of one matinée at 2:30 on Wednesday, 17 November in Wedding.⁷⁹

⁷⁷"Auch er (der Author) muss aufhören die autokratische Person von ehemdem zu sein". Erwin Piscator, in Klaus Kändler, p. 420.

⁷⁸Erwin Piscator, Das politische Theater (1963), p. 88.

⁷⁹This schedule of performances was gleaned from advertisements appearing in Die Rote Fahne (Berlin) between 8 November and 26 November 1920.

PRINZ HAGEN

Advertisements for the third production of the Proletarian Theater, Prinz Hagen ["Prince Hagen"] by Upton Sinclair, began appearing in Die Rote Fahne on Sunday, 27 November. Prinz Hagen opened on 5 December. Appearing in the midst of the run of Prinz Hagen is a matinée of Die Feinde in the Grosser Saal [main room] of the Berlin Philharmonic on Sunday, 12 December at 3:00 p.m. How Piscator acquired this large hall for his performance is unknown. Karl Heinz Martin had used the same room for his production of Craz's Die Freiheit, the one production of the first Proletarian Theater. Perhaps Martin helped Piscator obtain the room for a performance by the second Proletarian Theater. Details on the facilities are not available. Piscator's show may have played in the Philharmonic Hall in the same simple style in which it played the smaller houses.

Piscator's second endeavor with the Proletarian Theater indicates the director continued to be interested in plays with political overtones, although the political references in Die Feinde are not as concrete as those in the three one-acts. Technically, the production style continued to be simple as Piscator used textual alterations for the first time.

Lacking specific political references and indulging in a realm of fantasy, the third production of the Proletarian Theater, Prinz Hagen, does not resemble the previous productions. Written early (1909) in Upton Sinclair's career, Prinz Hagen followed the author's socially conscious novel, The Jungle, but was not as forceful as the earlier work. The first of the four acts begins as a youth,

Gerald Isman, is visited by the dwarf Mimi, one of the Nibelungs, who convinces Gerald to visit a mythical kingdom.

Once in Nibelheim, Gerald meets its ruler who explains that he desires Gerald to tutor the unruly heir to the throne, Prince Hagen. No dwarf himself, Hagen's ancestry was three-fourths "earth-man." Gerald offers to take him to the earth-world and enroll him in a school. The scene ends in a surge of Wagnerian music which, according to the stage directions, has accompanied the whole scene. (The stage directions cite even the act and scene numbers of the desired themes from Das Rheingold.)

Act two occurs two years later. Hagen appears under the alias of Steve O'Hagen, not a student in a boarding school but a radical from the Bowery in New York. Although Hagen had been encouraging unionism among the poor of the Bowery, he falls in love with Estelle, Gerald's sister, which causes him to forget the plight of the inhabitants of the Bowery and return to Nibelheim for money.

Act three portrays Hagen in almost complete charge of New York; he has used his money to buy and sell stocks, deliberately causing a panic on the stock exchange in an effort to force Gerald's father to consent to a marriage between Estelle and himself. Isman realizes that he must agree.

Act four shows Hagen in control of almost the entire country. The common people, who once supported him, are against him, for the market fluctuations have thrown many out of work. Hagen finds his economic successes empty, however, for Estelle refuses to marry him. Adding to his problems, the Congress of the United States passes a

law confiscating Hagen's fortunes. The people rise in arms to storm Hagen's house, but the fray ends as the millionaire dissolves back to Nibelheim.⁸⁰ Whatever Piscator's reason for choosing this script, it is not as politically orientated as the previous scripts of the Proletarian Theater and the reviewer for Die Rote Fahne recognized that fact. Identified only as "Friesland," the reviewer of the KPD's newspaper labeled the production a severe disappointment and admits that it was physically impossible for him to stay until the end of the performance.⁸¹ He describes the performers as bloodless shadows, the embodiment of some idea or another, speaking so that the audience could not understand them. So great was his disappointment that he suggested the proletariat give up the idea of their own theater and attempt to work within the realm of the established Volksbühne.

Yet another critic, writing for Vorwärts, claimed that a full house followed the production with energy and excitement, but without ever interrupting the production with applause. Seeming to make excuses for the production, the reviewer wrote that wick such poor

⁸⁰The plot summary of Prinz Hagen was gleaned from Upton Sinclair, Plays of Protest (New York: M. Kennerley, 1912), pp. 157-226.

⁸¹"Es war körperlich unmöglich, der Vorstellung bis zum Schluss beizuwohnen." [It was physically impossible to remain until the end of the performance.] Friesland, "Proletarisches Theater. Prinz Hagen von Sinclair" Die Rote Fahne (Berlin), 23 December 1920.

facilities at its disposal, the Proletarian Theater could hardly have grown to the heavy task which the script demanded.⁸²

The reviewer for Vorwärts concerns himself mostly with a description of the plot of the play while Die Rote Fahne concentrates on panning the idea of Proletarian Theater. Neither of the two available reviews describe technical aspects of the show. Piscator himself supplies the information which is available. A sketch from Das politische Theater indicates that the dissolve from the wooded area of act one scene one to the king's chamber of scene two may have been accomplished by a scrim. A tent and six tree trunks decorate the downstage area while dimly visible behind a scrim are a throne and an entrance way, supposedly to Nibelheim's treasure caverns.⁸³

Little is known of the third production of the Proletarian Theater, and still less is known of the following two productions of the group, for the Berlin police department forced the Proletarian Theater underground during the run of Prinz Hagan. According to

82, ". . .dt," (The reviewer identified himself only as ". . .dt." Possibly he was Conrad Schmidt, a theatrical reviewer on the staff of Vorwärts during this time) "Upton Sinclair: Prinz von Hagen," Vorwärts (Berlin), 6 December 1920.

83. Erwin Piscator, Das politische Theater, p. 41. Although the set for Prinz Hagan may have been highly romanticized, Piscator attributes the scene design to Ladislaus Moholy-Nagy, "a Hungarian artist who was later to attend the Bauhaus school of design (1925) and subsequently (1929) decorate Berlin's stages with sets which announced the establishment of constructivism in the Berlin theater." Henning Rischbieter ed. Bühnen und Bilderkunst im XX. Jahrhundert ["Stage and Pictorial Art in the Twentieth Century"] (Velber bei Hannover: Friedrich Verlag, 1968), p. 140. Rischbieter's comment about the establishment of constructivism on the Berlin stage refers to Moholy-Nagy's designs for Hoffman's Erzählungen ["Tales"] in the Krolloper Berlin 1929 and for Der Kaufmann von Berlin in the second Piscator-Bühne 1930.

advertisements in Die Rote Fahne, Sinclair's show opened on Sunday, 5 December, at Hasenheide, and played three additional performances (9 December, Pharusaaale; 15 December, Moabiter Gesellschaftsthaus; and 19 December in the Beethovensaal of the Philharmonic Hall). Subsequent advertisements announced that the Proletarian Theater was to sponsor a program for revolutionary Christmas songs on 26 December. Following those Christmas program advertisements no further advertisements for Proletarian Theater appeared in Die Rote Fahne. The police chief, Richter, had acted.

The Berlin police department had received several complaints about the activities of the Proletarian Theater from right wing sources such as Tägliche Rundschau, a Berlin newspaper (whose theater reviewer Karl Strecker held strong nationalistic sympathies).⁸⁴ On 3 November the Tägliche Rundschau published an article, "What the Prussian Minister of the Interior Does Not Prohibit," containing some of the more inflammatory statements from Piscator's essay in Der Gegner.⁸⁵ On 13 November the office of the "State Secretary for Public Order" sent a letter to the police department recommending Piscator's Koncession not be renewed (Piscator had to renew his permit monthly).⁸⁶ Apparently these and other criticisms moved

⁸⁴Günther Rühle, p. 1176.

⁸⁵"Was der preussische Minister des Innern alles nicht verbietet." Fiebach cites as his source for this article documents in the files of the Berlin police department, Akte 4447, pp. 15-127.

⁸⁶"Staatskommissar für öffentliche Ordnung." Fiebach, p. 81. Fiebach cites as his source police Akte 4447, pp. 15-127. Supposedly this folder contains the story of the protest the police received and

Richter to action. On 23 December 1920 the chief of police refused to extend the Koncession, indicating the critique which appeared in Die Rote Fahne that same day, the review of Prinz Hagen, as proof that the Proletarian Theater was not an artistic enterprise. He allowed it to continue to operate, but forbade it to advertise or sell tickets publicly. Although the Proletarian Theater continued, it managed to stage only two more productions, both by Franz Jung.

WIE LANGE NOCH

Thirty-three years old, Franz Jung did not participate with Erwin Piscator's Proletarian Theater, since he was in jail earlier on charges of political subversion. Both plays reflect Jung's pre-occupation with jails and his desire to see the German people rise in revolution. Little is known of Piscator's production of Jung's two plays, although plot summaries are available, since both plays were published by Herzfelde's Malik Verlag the same year as their production.

One of the plays, Wie lange noch bürgerliche Gerechtigkeit? ["How Much Longer, Middle Class Justice?"] concerns a worker, Paul, jailed on a charge of theft, who hopes to see the revolution rise and release him and his fellow workers from jail. A one-act play composed of eight scenes, it opens before a fence which surrounds a factory. Here a mugging takes place and then the scene darkens, changing to Paul's prison cell. As Paul explains to his cell partner

the action they took. Unfortunately, the folder was not available for this study.

that all his friends who had promised to support him before his imprisonment have deserted him, prison guards put a third man, Karl, into the cell.

The scene changes to Karl's house, where his wife and daughter discuss marriage plans for the latter, with seemingly no regard for the plight of Karl. The daughter plans to marry a secret police, "Sipo," officer, who comes to visit her during the scene. The visit of the "Sipo" officer serves as a transition point for a flash-back to the circumstances surrounding Karl's arrest, including false testimony against Karl by a secret police officer.

The scene darkens and then lights reveal Paul at a lectern. In what is apparently a second flashback, Paul lectures on communism and the need for the workers to unite. Questions are posed from his audience, all of which he answers.

The action then returns to the prison cell. In an attempt to make conversation, the prison guard tells Paul of a workers' riot which has broken out, and is just barely audible. Paul realizes that his work, his lectures, may have had an effect after all. The noise of the riot swells and seems to approach the prison as the play ends.

Piscator's use of this script represents a return to plays written by contemporary authors concerned with current problems. The play stresses the need of the workers to unite, much the same sentiment as Russlands Tag. Further, the play suggests that the middle class citizen, represented by Karl, should support the workers and their cause because even middle class citizens are subjected to harsh police measures. The play ends with the suggestion that a

revolt is underway, and at least Paul suspects that it has a chance to succeed.

Jung's concern with justice and prison cells may reflect his own position, being incarcerated at the time he wrote the plays, but it may also be an indication of a more broadly based sentiment that the justice department of the Weimar Republic treated leftist sympathizers much more severely than right-wing sympathizers. One historian, Peter Gay, points out statistics verifying that sentiment:

Between 1918 and 1922, assassinations traced to left-wing elements numbered twenty-two; of these, seventeen were rigorously punished, ten with the death penalty. Right wing extremists, on the other hand, found the courts sympathetic; of the 354 murders committed by them, only one was rigorously punished, and not even that by the death penalty. The average prison sentences handed out to these political murderers reflect the same bias: fifteen years for the left, four months for the right.⁸⁷

In directing Jung's Wie lange noch, Piscator turned to an existing political problem and proposed revolution as the solution. The exact dates and places of performance are unknown. A notice in Die Rote Fahne, "Resolution des proletarischen Theaters," appeared on 25 February and mentions that at a performance of Wie lange noch members of the Proletarian Theater voted formally to urge the police chief to grant a Koncession to Piscator. Evidently, Wie lange noch played in February and possibly January and March 1921.

DIE KANAHER

The fifth and last production of the Proletarian Theater, Die Kanaker, appeared first in print together with Wie lange noch as a

⁸⁷Gay, p. 20.

single volume in 1921 with the Malik Verlag's series of revolutionary stage plays. Since Piscator's friend, Wieland Herzfelde served as editor of the Malik Verlag, the director may have learned of both Die Kanaker and Wie lange noch before they were off the presses. Die Kanaker was to be the last production of the Proletarian Theater. Closely resembling Russlands Tag, it was another indication of Piscator's concern for political scripts.

A note in the program of Die Kanaker explained the title: a Kanaker was a term south sea islanders used to indicate a cannibal who ate any member of his own tribe whom he felt he had cause to fear.⁸⁸ Jung applied the metaphor to the working class: whoever turned in a fellow worker to the authorities for conspiracy or whoever failed to support the workers' movements, was murdering one of his own class members. Jung's four-act play demonstrates this message, but not in the dramatic form which the Proletarian Theater had seen in the plays of Gorki or Sinclair, for ideas unified the various scenes of Die Kanaker rather than a cause-and-effect series of events.

The show begins on an engaging prologue: the audience discovers a couple kissing as the curtain opens. Embarrassed, the man realizes he is before the public and tries to leave, but his partner wants to pursue her lovemaking ignoring the audience. The male wins eventually, as they move backstage, supposedly to continue.

⁸⁸" . . .rn," (The reviewer identified himself only as ". . .rn.") "Die Kanaker," Die Rote Fahne (Berlin), 13 April 1921.

A naturalistic, almost ad lib dialogue used by the couple continues, as two men, one tall and skinny and one short and fat, discuss modern-day working conditions, referring almost comically to machines as well as laborers as commodities which could be bought and sold. A series of explosions ends the discussion.

Scene two of act one reveals a woman hurt by the explosion of a machine at a factory. The workers assemble to protest poor working conditions. The manager calls for military intervention and shots are heard ringing out among the cries of the workers.

Following this scene, the end of act one, the stage directions call for three chimes, indicating intermission. Immediately thereafter, the stage directions indicate that an orchestra is to begin a military march, but loudly and discordantly, like circus music.⁸⁹

Should clapping start during this intermission a man at the back of the hall is to yell "yeah, that's just like 'em. Even when somebody from our side is taken away they start clapping."⁹⁰ The discordant, loud, martial music continues for five minutes until the gong signals the beginning of act two.

Act two reveals two gentlemen, one a recognizable impersonation of the English sociologist, H. G. Wells, and the other the communist

⁸⁹"Wilder Marsch mit grossen Instrumenten. Wie Zirkusmusik, aber nicht so sentimental." Franz Jung, "Die Kanaker" und "Wie lange noch?" Zwei Schauspiele ["Two Plays"] (Berlin: Malik Verlag, 1921), p. 25.

⁹⁰"So sind se [sic]; wenn unsereiner abgeführt wird, dann klatschen se [sic] noch." quoted in Die Rote Fahne (Berlin), 13 April 1921.

leader, Lenin, discussing the advantages of their varying theories of socialism. Scene two takes place in the living quarters of four workers and their families, all living in the same house. As they discuss their economic plight a fight erupts as each accuses the other of making life unbearable. When the brawl reaches a crescendo, the soldiers arrive to arrest the combatants, and the scene ends in pandemonium and darkness.

The music begins again, but still discordantly. Jung describes the music as cafe or cinema music, and insists that it be disharmonious. "They should not forget the music for a minute."⁹¹

In the third scene of act two Paul Beller mann, the owner of a small cafe agrees to give his daughter in marriage to Arthur, a young secret police officer. A crowd of workers gathers outside the cafe and begins to throw stones in retaliation for Beller mann's helping the police to arrest strikers. Soon the crowd riots, breaking into the cafe, demolishing it and capturing the Beller matts, whom they put in a wagon and taunt as the scene ends.

The first scene of act three appears to follow the riot scene immediately, for no intermission is marked in the text. A man and a woman, bespectacled and semi-formally attired, address the audience concerning the vengeance of the workers on those who stand in their way, the Beller matts.

Following this discussion, the second scene of act three depicts the police arresting several youths who have destroyed a dilapidated

⁹¹"Mann darf nicht einen Augenblick vergessen, dass zur Musik agiert wird." Franz Jung, Zwei Schauspiele, p. 31.

company shed which belonged to a factory. As the police and their captives leave, the factory manager and foreman from act one, scene two, walk on stage shouting congratulations to the police. No other characters appear twice in Die Kanaker. The manager congratulates the foreman on helping to keep the workers in line as the play ends.

The play urges the workers to unite. Although never specifically labeled as such, the foreman of 1.2, the fighting workers of 2.2, and the Bellermanns of 3.2 are all Kanakers who deliver fellow workers to the police. In using a script urging the working class to unite in the face of a common enemy, specifically the police forces of the Weimar Republic (both the regular police force, the secret police force and the military forces used to preserve law and order), Piscator chose a play with direct political statements.

The script of Die Kanaker requires that Piscator employ several episodic devices which advance the play's political message. The script breaks down into four episodes each of which relates a story (1.2, the foreman's story; 2.2, the workers' fight; 2.3, the Bellermann's plight; and 3.2, the senseless imprisonment of the youths), and three discussions which resemble lectures in dialogue form and suggest an outlook on the episodes which preceded or followed the discussion (1.1, the tall, skinny and the short, fat man; 2.1, Lenin and Wells; and 3.1 the bespectacled man and woman).

The play attempted continually to break down the aesthetic distance between the audience and the actors by suggesting to the audience that what they witnessed was real. The reviewer of Die

Rote Fahne wrote that the prologue of the play, the kissing scene, created uncertainty in the minds of the audience as to whether the scene was staged or whether the opening curtain caught two stage helpers who thought that they were unobserved.⁹² This atmosphere of uncertainty of what was staged and what was real continued with the man in the rear of the hall chiding the audience for clapping during intermission. The reviewer of Die Rote Fahne wrote that the border between play and reality vanished continually.⁹³ Often he felt that he was in a lecture hall and felt an urge to speak out.⁹⁴ The music, according to the stage directions, was designed to agitate the spectators, possibly even provoke them to speak above the din it created. In Die Kanaker Piscator used various staging techniques but did not originate them. Franz Jung's stage directions are explicit, and the available reviews indicate that Piscator followed those directions.

Apart from the overall episodic approach, two specific aspects of Die Kanaker recur in Piscator's later work. The impersonation of real people, Lenin and Wells, both alive at the time, marked a first for Piscator which he repeated. Leon Trotsky, the Russian

⁹²" . . .rn" (The reviewer identified himself only as ". . .rn"), "Die Kanaker", Die Rote Fahne (Berlin), 13 April 1921.

⁹³"Die Gernze zwischen Spiel und Wirklichkeit verwisch sich dauernd." Ibid.

⁹⁴"Du weisst oft nicht, ob du im Theater oder in einer Versammlung bist, du meinst, du müsstest eingreifen und helfen, du müsstest Zwischenrufe machen." [Often you don't know if you are in a theater or at an assembly. You think you have to join in and help, or that you should call out interjections]. Ibid.

Czar Alexander II, and the German Kaiser William II are some of the notable historical figures whose impersonation Piscator directed later, even using wax masks to make the disguise more recognizable.

A second feature of Die Kanaker which recurred in Piscator's later work was a lack of sentimentality. Piscator seldom selected plays with any romantic element at all. The proposal scene in Die Kanaker ended in a riot. Few other love plots occurred in any production of the Proletarian Theater. This aversion for the sentimentally romantic seems to have affected the composition of Piscator's acting company, for it was always heavily male.⁹⁵ The absence of a feminine tenderness or the rejection of such tenderness is characteristic of Piscator's productions.

No final coup de grace finished Piscator's Proletarian Theater. A combination of several factors led to its closing in April 1921. Piscator writes that the failure to obtain a Koncession together with the initial lack of support from Die Rote Fahne accounts in part for the failure of the venture. In addition, the proletariat was economically too weak to support the theatrical endeavor. Although the halls were filled often, the expenses exceeded the box office intake.⁹⁶ Already familiar with bankruptcy from Königsberg,

⁹⁵The only actress Piscator listed in the September Koncession for the Proletarian Theater was his wife, Hildegard Piscator. (Fiebach, p. 18). In 1927 at the pinnacle of his career in Berlin, when Piscator applied for a Koncession for the Theater am Nollendorfplatz, he listed in his company thirty-five males and only eleven females. "Theater am Nollendorfplatz," Deutsches Bühnen-Jahrbuch ["German Stage Yearbook"], XXXIX (1928), 262.

⁹⁶Erwin Piscator, Das politische Theater, p. 43.

Piscator ended his second theatrical venture in debt. The last performance of the Proletarian Theater took place on 21 April 1921.⁹⁷

The political effect of Piscator's theater on the population of Neukölln, Wedding and Moabit may never be determined. Available records indicate a house always three-quarters to two-thirds full. Piscator's Proletarian Theater inspired at least two similar ventures, one in Leipzig and one in Nuremberg, both active in the spring of 1921 but neither involving Piscator.⁹⁸ Closer to home, the professional theater in Berlin seems to have been affected little if at all by the existence of Piscator's Proletarian Theater, or by its demise.

The Proletarian Theater propounded mainly that the German workers had to gain a class consciousness and unite as their Russian fellows had done or the workers would be crushed individually. Secondary points include the unfairness of the courts of the Weimar Republic, the imminence of a reign of white terror, the speed and ease of a possible military take-over, the misuse of power by the police, opposition to German arms delivery to Russian counterrevolutionaries and the pathos of the maimed veterans of the World War.

The Proletarian Theater provided Piscator with an opportunity to explore his talents as a director and to experiment with various scripts and their effects on a working class audience. As his own

⁹⁷ Gunther Rühle, p. 201.

⁹⁸ Die Freiheit (Berlin), 31 March 1921.

producer, Piscator discovered early Koncessionen and subscription audiences, elements with which he would have to come to grips continually throughout his career. Producing and directing, Piscator showed himself to be enterprising, energetic and enthusiastic. The Proletarian Theater introduced Piscator to the Berlin theatrical scene as a leftist, or socialist, not bound by a theater building or conventional approaches to theater, yet continuing the work of his predecessors, especially Karl Heinz Martin, in theater for the proletariat.

CHAPTER IV
FROM CENTRAL THEATER TO VOLKSBUHNE: 1921-1924

Following the close of the Proletarian Theater in April 1921, Piscator did not engage in a subsequent theatrical venture until autumn of 1922. What the young director did during the intervening eighteen months is unknown. Political unrest continued to plague the Weimar Republic during this period. Communist uprisings took place in central Germany (Mansfeld, Halle, Meresburg) and in the large port city of Hamburg between 21 March and 1 April 1921. The government sent troops into these areas to stop the rioting. In October 1921 right-wing advocates murdered Matthias Erzberger, the Centralist, peace-advocating politician who had espoused the terms of the Versailles Treaty. The two murderers fled to Hungary where the German government left them unmolested; and associates were not prosecuted at home.

New elections in the spring of 1922 returned Joseph Wirth, another Centralist, to the chancellorship. His major new appointment was the foreign minister, Walther Rathenau, who was killed by right-wing assassins in June 1922. Two of the assassins shot themselves; a third, though, sentenced to fifteen years, served only seven. In November, Wirth resigned and subsequent elections installed Wilhelm Cuno, right-wing shipping magnate, as head of the government. Piscator embarked on his third theatrical venture with Germany in a state of political turmoil.

Sometime during the summer of 1922, Piscator formed a partnership with two other theater men and leased Berlin's Central Theater. Richard Gorter, a producer, and Hans Josè Rehfisch, a lawyer turned dramatist, joined Piscator, who retained a subscription audience of four to five thousand members from his Proletarian Theater. The union appeared promising, for the Central Theater possessed an additional number of regular customers.

A conventional theater of about 800 seats, the Central Theater bore little resemblance to the Proletarian Theater.¹ Located in the Alte Jakobstrasse,² the theater belonged to a section of the city now called Kreuzberg, a district bordered by Neuköln (the Proletarian Theater's most frequently played location) and by the Stadt-Mitte, or central city, the aristocratic old section of Berlin housing the museums and municipal offices. Although near the center of the city, Kreuzberg was not near the heart of the theater district, the west end of Berlin, specifically the Kurfürstendamstrasse. The drama critic Herbert Ihering calls the Central Theater "a peripheral theater, although it stands in the center of town."³ The location,

¹A sketch of the house of the Central Theater has been preserved in the archives of the Akademie der Künste.

²The theater was destroyed in World War II. The Waldeck Park now occupies the site, near the "Checkpoint Charlie" crossing in the Berlin Wall.

³"peripherie Theater, obwohl es im Zentrum liegt." Herbert Ihering, "Die Zeit wird kommen: Centraltheater," Börsen Courier (Berlin), 18 November 1922.

like the partnership of the directors, appeared promising, able to attract both the central city audience and at least part of the subscription membership of the Proletarian Theater.

The management of the Central Theater announced its purpose as the formation of a reformed Volksbühne, a theater like the founders of the Volksbühne had originally planned, one which would offer art for the people, not for the connoisseurs.⁴ The new venture received critical support half-way through its season from Herbert Ihering who wrote that the repertory of the Volksbühne was educated while that of the Central Theater was exciting.⁵ In the same month Alfred Klaar, theater critic for the Vossische Zeitung since 1901, wrote that in the midst of a season of sensationalism, the Central Theater offered "something meaningful."⁶ A reviewer of the staff of Die Rote Fahne, the communist daily which had dealt so harshly with the productions of the Proletarian Theater, praised the new effort. "What Erwin Piscator as director offers here outranks everything else which the bourgeois theater has to offer."⁷

⁴MJ(Monty Jacobs), "Eröffnung des Centraltheaters" ["The Opening of the Central Theater"] Vossische Zeitung (Berlin), 30 September 1922.

⁵Der Spielplan des neuen Volksbühne ist gebildet, der des Centraltheaters falls er nicht von seinem Wege abirrt, packend." Herbert Ihering, "Die Macht der Finsternis; Centraltheater," Börsen-Courier (Berlin) 21 January 1923.

⁶"Die neue Schauspielstätte der Herren Rehfish, Gorter und Piscator betätigt inmitten Sensationsgetriebes, des sich der meisten Bühnen bemächtigt hat, einen ausgesprochenen Zug zum Bedeutenden." A.K. (Alfred Klaar), "Die Macht der Finsternis, Tolstoi im Centraltheater," Vossische Zeitung (Berlin), 20 January 1923.

⁷"Was hier Erwin Piscator in der Regie bot, ragte über alles

One of three directors at the Central Theater, Piscator mounted only three shows which embodied the major runs during the 1922-23 season.⁸ Piscator remembers the season as "a move back from the line which had been reached" by the Proletarian Theater.⁹ At the Central Theater, Piscator worked with a realistic style similar to that of Gorki's Die Feinde and Sinclair's Prinz Hagen instead of the political style with which he was to be associated as in Die Kanaker and the three one-acts. Piscator remembers the productions as attempts at realism of period and locale: realistic scenery, costumes, properties and acting.¹⁰ The scripts he chose enabled him to employ such a style.

DIE KLEINBÜRGER

The Central Theater began its season on 29 September 1922 with Piscator's production of Die Kleinbürger ["The Petty Bourgeois"], Maxim Gorki's first play. Written in 1901, Die Kleinbürger offers a bitter picture of middle-class life, ending with a call to class

sonst in den bürgerlichen Theatern geboten hinaus." "Gorki's 'Kleinbürger,' Zentrale Theater," Die Rote Fahne (Berlin), 3 October 1922.

⁸Piscator's dating is inaccurate. In Das politische Theater the director labels his season at the Central Theater as the 1923-24 season, p. 46-47. Newspaper reviews confirm the season as 1922-23, however. Mrs. Piscator makes a similar mistake in her book, The Piscator Experiment, pp. 71-72.

⁹"Zurückgehen hinter die schon einmal erreichte Linie." Erwin Piscator, Das politische Theater (1963), p. 55.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 47

unity and action. The elder Bessemenov (age 58) and his wife Akoulina (age 52) are resigned to their class, that of a lower middle-class ship painter. On the other hand the young railroad worker Nil (27 years old), Bessemenov's foster son, possesses the energy and drive to attack the class system in an effort to destroy it. Nil refuses a profitable marriage in favor of Polyta, a poor girl of his own choice. In between Nil and Bessemenov stand the son and daughter of Bessemenov, whose youth inclines them to Nil's revolutionary political ideals, while their family association impels them in the opposite direction. Instead of reconciling their differences, the family polarizes and stagnates in the fight to raise the proletariat's way of life.

DIE ZEIT WIRD KOMMEN

In his second production, Piscator switched from a Russian to a French playwright, selecting Romain Rolland's Die Zeit wird kommen ["The Time Will Come," in the original, Le temps viendra (1902)]. Concerned with the Boer War in South Africa, the play pictures the horrors of war: concentration camps, displaced children, and the economic profit some people make from the killing of others. Lord Clifford, English general, attempting to quell the rebellion, pursues his orders heedless of human suffering. A six-year-old child, David, finally kills Clifford in an accidental shooting. Clifford's successor, General Graham, takes command, and orders the six-year-old into prison. Graham warns the South African populace that he will be even stricter than Clifford. The script ends with a soldier

quoting scripture, "The time will come when all men will know the truth and will beat their swords into plowshares."¹¹

DIE MACHT DER FINSTERNIS

Piscator returned to the Russians in selecting his third play, Tolstoy's Die Macht der Finsternis ["The Power of Darkness"]. In brutally realistic scenes, Tolstoy pictures adultery leading to multiple murder among a Russian family of farmers. Nikita, having had an affair with Anissja, his boss's wife, becomes a partner in the wife's murder of her husband. Once married to Anissja, Nikita has an affair with his step-daughter, by whom he has a child. In retaliation for this new affair, Anissja forces Nikita to kill the infant and give the stepdaughter in marriage. Basically a sensitive peasant, Nikita balks before blessing the couple at the wedding feast and confesses to the assembled crowd the lurid crimes to which he has been a part.

In selecting these three scripts, Piscator turned away from contemporary German events and playwrights, and selected scripts with vague political overtones. In the Central Theater Piscator did not interrupt the action on stage as he had often done in the Proletarian Theater with lecture sequences or with remarks from actors planted among the audience.

¹¹Die Zeit wird kommen, da alle Menschen um die Wahrheit wissen werden, da sie Pflugscharen schmieden werden aus den Schwertern." Michaeas iv. 3. Romain Rolland, Die Zeit wird kommen, trans. by Stephen Zweig (Leipzig: E. P. Tal Verlag, 1919) p. 94.

Overly cautious, he may have tried to please both the left (the KPD) and yet attract the bourgeois elements in Berlin in order to keep his houses large. Also financial problems undoubtedly hindered experimentation. The year 1923 brought Germany one of the worst periods of inflation which modern economic history records. In January 1923 a French-Belgian contingent occupied Germany's industrial center, the Ruhr region, in retaliation for Germany's failure to pay World War I reparations. Production came to a standstill as bloody clashes erupted between the occupying troops and the natives. The occupation, together with other factors, began the strain on the mark which in April erupted into one of the longest, severest inflations in Germany's economic history. The value of the mark slipped daily as on 17 April 1923, 21.21 marks bought one U.S. dollar, while on 18 April, 25.00 marks and on 19 April 29.50 marks. The decline only increased thereafter. In May, one dollar cost 47.67 marks and in June, 109.99.¹² Available figures present wildly differing accounts of the price of goods and services. Perhaps a significant measure for this study is the fact that the issue of Berliner Tageblatt which reviewed Piscator's Die Macht der Finsternis cost ninety marks.¹³

¹²Institute für Marxismus-Leninismus, Geschichte der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung: Chronik ["History of the German Workers' Movement: A Chronical"], Volume II, 1917-1945 (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1966), 143.

¹³Retained in paper in the graduate library of the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

The inflation aided but also hindered the theatrical venture of Piscator, Gorter, and Rehfisch at the Central Theater. The decline in the value of the mark enabled Piscator and his cohorts to pay the lease on the building easily. In September they had signed a one year lease for three million marks, of which they paid one million immediately. The other two million they paid in two months time by ripping out some heating pipes in the building and selling them on the street.

But the inflation also hurt the Central Theater, for the subscription audience encompassed for the most part lower economic classes who found it impossible to renew at the end of the season. The Central Theater gave its last performance under Piscator, Gorter and Rehfisch on 31 May 1923. Piscator's shows enjoyed longer runs than the other productions. Die Kleinbürger played 36 times, Die Zeit wird kommen played 26 performances and Die Macht der Finsternis played 20 times.¹⁵ No information was available on the productions of Rehfisch and Gorter.

Thus Piscator ended his third theatrical venture in the spring of 1923. He engaged in no recorded theatrical activity again until the following spring. What he did do is uncertain. Germany experienced widespread strikes and passive resistance to the French occupation and inflation. In August the KPD organized a general strike

¹⁴ Erwin Piscator, Das politische Theater, p. 46.

¹⁵ The statistics for the lengths of runs at the Central Theater were taken from Die deutschen Bühnenspiellpläne ["German Theaters' Play Schedules"] (Berlin), a monthly listing of all theaters and their offerings published in Berlin by Oesterheld & Company. The only available copy of this valuable reference is in the Deutsche Staatsbibliothek in East Berlin.

in Berlin attempting to bring down the government in hopes that a new election would increase the communist influence. On 12 August Chancellor Cuno resigned. Reichpresident Ebert appointed various governments, none of which achieved stability until late in 1923. The right and left struggled for power. On 8 November 1923 Adolf Hitler staged his abortive Putsch in Munich. On the left hand, the power of the KPD grew slowly: the communist vote in the general elections in May 1924 (six months after Hitler's Putsch) rose from 500,000 (1920) to 3,700,000, giving the KPD 62 delegates in the Reichstag.¹⁶ The figures may be deceiving, for the Centralists and the Social Democrats retained control of the government. Nevertheless, communist strength was growing and, as the mark began to stabilize and inflation subsided, Germany entered what the historian Peter Gay labels the "Golden Twenties," a period of relative economic and political security lasting between December 1923 (the stabilizing of the mark) and October 1929 (the beginning of the great depression).

FAHNEN

The last show Piscator directed for the Central Theater, Die Macht der Finsternis, closed on 27 February 1923. Then followed sixteen months of apparent inactivity in theatrical endeavors for Piscator. His production of Fahnen ["Banners"] in the Volksbühne in May 1924 marked the end of this period of inactivity and inaugurated a relatively stable period of theatrical employment. Piscator

¹⁶Erich Eyck, A History of the Weimar Republic, Vol. I, trans. by H. P. Hanson (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1962), 299.

directed three shows in 1924, seven shows in 1925, seven shows in 1926 prior to the opening of his own theater in 1927.

The period of time beginning with Fahnen (May 1924) and ending with Gewitter über Gottland ["Storm over Gottland"] (March 1927) encompasses the productions in which Piscator experimented on a significantly more opulent level than he had done previously. The reason for this new opulence of productions probably lies in new financial arrangements. Whereas Piscator had had a personal financial investment in all the previous ventures in which he participated, between 1924 and 1927 he worked as a free-lance director for established groups which paid a fee for his services. Most prominent among the organizations employing Piscator was the Berliner Volksbühne, for which he directed nine productions. Other organizations included the KPD (three productions) and the Munich Kammerspiel Theater (three productions). Piscator's years of association with the Volksbühne may rank as some of the most significant in his career because the firmly established, well equipped and financed theater offered the director extensive technical facilities as well as professional actors and technicians, enabling him to experiment on a larger and more elaborate scale than he had previously.

The Volksbühne's tradition stretched back indirectly to Otto Brahm's Freie Bühne in 1889: at first only a Sunday matinée subscription audience organization, the Volksbühne had grown steadily. Renting theaters for matinée presentations, then leasing houses for an entire season, the Volksbühne completed construction on its own theater, the Haus am Bülowplatz in 1914, by which time the

subscription membership numbered over 70,000 members.¹⁷ The economic bases of its organization well founded, the Volksbühne spared little in designing and equipping its first permanent home. In recalling the theater as it was in 1924, Piscator termed it the most modern theater in Berlin.¹⁸

Seating 2,000 persons, the Haus am Bülowplatz housed a proscenium opening approximately 33 feet by 24 feet.¹⁹ The main curtain and a linen scrim occupied the first two of the 31 fly lines. The fly loft rose 111 feet (38 meters) above the stage. The main playing area, a circular revolving stage, 57 feet (19.20 meters) in diameter, could be raised and lowered mechanically in whole or in half, or could be raked to a desired angle, as well as rotate in any of these positions. A permanent white plaster dome (Kuppelhorizont) backed

¹⁷ Martin Hürlimann, ed., Das Atlantisbuch des Theaters ["The Atlantis Book of Theaters"] (Zürich: Atlantis Verlag 1966), p. 690.

¹⁸ Das politische Theater (1963), p. 61. The description of the Haus am Bülowplatz was found in the article "Hinter den Kulissen des Theaters am Bülowplatz" ["Behind the Scenes of the Theater am Bülowplatz"] Blätter der Volksbühne ["Leaves of the Volksbühne"] (Berlin), November-December 1924, pp. 8-12. A collection of these bi-monthly pamphlets exists in the archives of the Volksbühne and was generously supplied for use in this study by Mrs. Brigitte Spiegel, archivist of the Volksbühne. Since World War II, the Volksbühne's address has changed. Partially destroyed during the war, the building was restored on its former location, but the East German government changed the name of the street from Bülowplatz to Luxemburgplatz, in honor of Rosa Luxemburg, early German communist martyr.

¹⁹ Eleven meters by eight meters. The Blätter der Volksbühne (Berlin) gives all measurements in meters. For convenience, all measurements will be rounded off so that three feet equals one meter. For precision, the meter-measurements will be given in parentheses following the foot dimensions.

the playing area as a cyclorama, measuring 84 feet (28 meters) at its highest point.

The lighting facilities of the Volksbühne rivaled those of any theater in Berlin. Border lights of red, blue, yellow and white hung above the playing area and a similar arrangement of colored lights could be aimed at the center stage from the wings. Sixteen 500 watt spotlights also hung above the stage, being used for indirectly lighting the playing area, according to the "Fortuny System"—the theory of diffused lighting propounded by the Italian Mariano Fortuny, in which no spotlight shone directly onto the stage. Instead, the spotlight shone onto reflectors, which bounced their beams onto the actors' faces. Supposedly, this reflected light gave a smoother, more natural illumination. In 1924, moving away from the principles of the Fortuny system, the Volksbühne added four balcony spots, supplying what was apparently the only direct, frontal lighting of the actors' faces. Controls of the dimming units were located backstage, stage right, built into the rear of the proscenium wall. The lighting system emphasized color, control and general illumination (flood lighting). The existence of only four spotlights for frontal lighting testifies to the novelty of area lighting in 1924. The 1924-25 subscription audience of the Volksbühne numbered 150,700 members.²⁰ A large patronage could well support such a well equipped house.

The exact circumstances which led the Volksbühne to employ Piscator are unknown. The German theater historian Günther Rühle

²⁰ Blätter der Volksbühne (Berlin) January-February 1926, n.p.

emphasizes the serendipity with which Piscator and the Volksbühne came together: The Volksbühne had announced Fahnen for the 1923-24 season and subsequently could find no one to direct the show and so turned to Piscator.²¹ Piscator's availability seemed an opportune circumstance for the Volksbühne. Its season practically over, the theater was offering a play dealing with a socialist theme (the Chicago Haymarket riot). Piscator who was rapidly gaining attention as a young communist artist must have seemed a natural choice, for in addition to his productions in the Central and Proletarian Theaters, Piscator had served as secretary for the KPD committee of artists to aid starving Russians and had led a speech choir for the communist party.²²

The Volksbühne's offer to Piscator to direct in the Haus am Bülowplatz must have been flattering but the offer posed a question of conscience for the young director. As Mrs. Maria Ley Piscator phrases it, "could he (Piscator) work in a theater (the Volksbühne) that he severely condemned for failing to live up the noble purpose for which it had been created?"²³ Piscator had opposed the Volksbühne continually. His venture at the Central Theater was

²¹Günther Rühle, p. 540.

²²Fiebach, p. 136. The official name of the committee for which Piscator served as secretary was Die Künstlerkomitee für die Hungernden in Sowjetrußland.

²³Maria Ley Piscator, p. 73.

advertised as a reformed Volksbühne.²⁴ The deradicalized repertory of the Volksbühne had supplied at least part of the incentive for Karl Heinz Martin's venture, Die Tribüne, and subsequently Piscator's own Proletarian Theater.

In spite of his earlier criticisms of the Volksbühne, Piscator accepted their offer. Mrs. Piscator writes that her husband felt that he might be able to reform the organization from the inside.²⁵ Altruism may have not been Piscator's only motive. No evidence reveals that he had engaged in any theatrical activity for eighteen months and he may have been anxious to return to his profession. Strangely enough no evidence indicates that Piscator was employed in any way other than theatrical ventures between 1920 and 1931. Whatever Piscator's reasons for accepting the offer of the Volksbühne, the agreement marked the beginning of a new and important phase of the director's career.

Fahnen seems to have been the kind of script Piscator might have considered for production even if the Volksbühne had left the entire matter undecided. Written by Alfons Paquet, a journalist and a frequently published poet since 1901, Fahnen describes the Chicago Haymarket riot of 1886 and the subsequent anarchists' trial. American history may seem a strange topic for a German poet-journalist.

²⁴Monty Jacobs, "Eröffnung des Central Theaters" Vossische Zeitung (Berlin), 30 September 1922.

²⁵Maria Ley Piscator, p. 73.

Paquet traveled greatly, however, having spent several of his teenage years in London; he later covered the 1904 World's Fair in St. Louis, visiting as far westward as Denver, Colorado. His excellent command of English allowed him to publish articles in several Missouri newspapers.

In the years following the world's fair Paquet traveled to numerous countries, acquiring a reputation for writing excellent travelogues. Possibly the trip which most influenced Paquet's subsequent development was an assignment as Germany's first press agent to Moscow in 1918 following the cessation of hostilities between the two countries. A contemporary of the Russian Revolution of 1918, Paquet supported the communist philosophy, depicting sympathetically the downtrodden working class of several countries in subsequent books, poems, articles and in his first play, Fahnen.²⁶

Although Fahnen did not appear completely in print until 1923,²⁷ Paquet began work possibly as early as 1921.²⁸ Paquet classified his first play as a dramatic novel in three acts (nineteen scenes). Opening with a prologue spoken by a puppeteer who is visible to the audience, Fahnen takes its audience to Chicago in the spring of

²⁶ The biographical details of Paquet's life are from Hans Martin Elster, "Alfons Paquet: Leben u. Werk" ["Alfons Paquet: Life and Works"], in Alfons Paquet, Gesammelte Werke ["Collected Works"] (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlag Anstalt, 1970), pp. 5-15.

²⁷ Alfons Paquet, Fahnen, ein dramatischer Roman ["Banners, a Dramatic Novel"] (Munich: Drei Masken Verlag, 1923).

²⁸ Fiebach, p. 126. The verse prologue to the play appeared in the periodical Das blaue Heft ["The Blue Notebook"] as early as 1922. Das Blaue Heft, III (1922), 398-402.

1886. Represented by puppets whom the puppeteer walks across a little stage, the main characters of the show include Cyrus McClure, an industrialist; Spies, editor of the workers' newspaper Fahnen; Lingg, a worker who experiments with explosives; Judge Gary, who presides at the trial following the riot; and Nina van Zandt, a woman at first only curious about, but finally completely engaged in the workers' plight.

Following the prologue, Fahnen consists of 3 acts divided into nineteen relatively short scenes. Fahnen is the show which Piscator says he advertised as "epic theater" before Brecht used the term.²⁹ Although Piscator never defined what he meant by "epic," Brecht later popularized the term, using it to indicate a broad sweep of events with a mixture of narrative and dramatic techniques,³⁰ qualities certainly characteristic of Fahnen and later Piscator productions. The dramatic episodes advance in short, choppy sequences.

Act one, scene one takes place before Cyrus McClure's factory where the police, in an attempt to disperse a group of workers, kill one of the workers. In scene two, Nina van Zandt questions Spies, editor of the workers' newspaper, Fahnen, about the possibility of

²⁹ According to one Brecht historian, the playwright first used the term epic theater in July 1926 in an interview with the reporter Bernard Buillemin for Die literarische Welt ["The Literary World"]. The playwrights exact words: "Ich bin für episches Theater." [I am for epic theater]. Werner Hecht Brechts Weg zum epischen Theater ["Brecht's Path to Epic Theater"] (Berlin: Henschelverlag, 1962), p. 56. Piscator claims Fahnen was advertised as epic theater. Erwin Piscator, Das politische Theater, p. 57.

³⁰ Oscar G. Brockett, History of the Theater (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1968), p. 597.

murder causing a revolution. Spies denies anything of a revolution and attempts to quiet a mob which gathers outside the newspaper office. Scene three discloses several men in the home of a worker, Seliger (whose name in German means holy or pious) discussing the recent lay-offs and the difficulty in finding work. Scene four takes place in the office of Cyrus McClure where the industrialist reveals to a police officer his eagerness to settle this recent labor unrest. Scene five depicts two workers in Chicago's Lincoln Park, discussing the advantages of anarchism. Scene six takes place in the Haymarket Square, where Parsons, a Baptist preacher and a worker, speaking on the rights of the workers, attracts a crowd. When a contingent of police arrives a bomb explodes and the police begin firing into the crowd.

Act two is set in the Desplaines Street police station, where the police question and jail various workers as well as Spies, ignoring the rights the accused have under the law. A group of pleased businessmen commend police officer Shaak for the way he is performing his duty. Act two, scene two occurs in a room in which a suspect, Seliger, has been hiding since the bomb incident a week earlier. His wife convinces him that he can lie his way through the police questioning. Act two, scene three takes place in jail, where Lingg receives from his girl friend a small golden apple, filled with explosives. Act two, scene four switches to a park in which workers of Chicago are picnicking. With the layoff over, the workers are unconcerned as one worker passes among them collecting for those imprisoned on charges stemming from the bombing. Act two, scene

five set in a local pub depicts armed workers plotting a revolution. One of their number, however, announcing that he is a police officer, arrests them all. Act two, scene six dramatizes the trial of the accused anarchists in the court of Judge Gary who demonstrates clearly his prejudice against the accused by his procedural rulings. The sudden appearance and testimony of Rev. Parsons who had left town earlier, does not sway the jury from a verdict of guilty, in spite of the fact that the defense proved none of the six accused could have thrown the bomb. They are all sentenced to death.

Act three opens in the upper-class Citizens' Club of Chicago. Nina van Zandt warns the factory owner, Cyrus McClure, that she is collecting names on a petition to the governor to pardon the men. Act three, scene two is set in the governor's executive mansion where Nina presents the petition with 140,000 signatures, which the governor ignores, saying that the condemned must pay for their deeds. Act three, scene three depicts the police not allowing the wives of the prisoners to visit their husbands. Act three, scene four and five are both set within the walls of Cook County jail where the workers calmly await their death, with the exception of Lingg who has committed suicide. Act three, scene six depicts Shaak reporting that workers' riots were breaking out all over Chicago. In act three, scene seven the men are hanged. Act three, scene eight, set in Waldheim Cemetery, shows the funeral procession. The final oration for the death of a worker, Dietzgen, laments the loss of freedom rather than the loss of the four men as the curtain closes.

Several themes familiar to Piscator's productions occur in this script, such as the necessity of the workers to unite, especially as demonstrated by the failure of the workers to contribute at the picnic of act two, scene four. The harsh depiction of Judge Gary, the magistrate before whom the anarchists were tried in act two, scene six, recalls earlier productions in the Proletarian Theater which charged that the administration of justice in the Weimar Republic was unfair.

Many parallels between the 1880 Chicago unrest and the 1920 Berlin unrest existed, but Piscator's production did not point up these parallels. Piscator attempted to depict as fully as possible the history of the American early social struggles and the motivating forces behind them,³¹ resulting in historical drama. Fahnen ranks as Piscator's first venture into historical drama, a style of playwriting which he would stage sporadically until his death in 1966. Fahnen seems a natural outgrowth of the journalistic style of Paquet's early training.

Paquet composed his drama around historical facts and historical personages. A review of the main facts of the Haymarket Riot of 1886 and subsequent anarchists' trials reveal that Paquet added very few

³¹" . . . diese materialistischen Triebkräfte zu erfassen und Fühlbar zu machen." [. . . (the production of Fahnen attempts) to grasp the materialistic forces (at work in the society) and to make them perceptible]. Erwin Piscator, Das politische Theater, p. 57. Parenthetical insertions not in the original.

imaginary persons to the drama. Cyrus McClure resembles Cyrus H. McCormick whose Harvesting Machine Company strike and the police-shooting during it precipitated the Haymarket incident. An actual August Spies (his first name is never given in the play) edited a revolutionary workers' German newspaper in Chicago called not Fahnen but Die Arbeiterzeitung. Almost all the persons involved in the Haymarket incident were naturalized Americans of German birth.³² Nina van Zandt was a close friend of Spies in reality as well as the play. Histories of the incident label the police captain, Michael J. Schaak, a fanatic in his handling of the incident and his subsequent brutal investigation.³³ A gentleman named Albert R. Parsons addressed the assemblage as the police arrived and Louis Lingg was known to experiment with explosives and committed suicide in the manner described in the play. A later governor of Illinois, John P. Altgeld, described Judge Joseph E. Gary as handling the case "with malicious ferocity."³⁴ Parsons made a dramatic surrender in the courtroom at the time of the trial. A petition of over 140,000

³² Many of the inflammatory speeches of those turbulent weeks had been delivered in German, including the ones on the night of the bomb-throwing. All placards announcing assemblies, such as the assembly in the Haymarket, were printed in both German and English.

³³ The two primary sources used for the comparison of Fahnen with the historical facts of the Haymarket incident were Bessie L. Pierce, A History of Chicago (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1957) and Henry David, The History of the Haymarket Affair (New York: Russell & Russell, 1958).

³⁴ Quoted from Governor Altgeld's pardon message of 26 June 1893, reprinted in part in David, p. 495.

names begged Governor Oglesby for clemency for the condemned men, and the prisoners' self-composure before execution was accurately depicted in the play.

The insertions in Fahnen which seem to have no historical bases include Nina's conversation with Spies in the editor's office (act one, scene two), the reporter Wilkinson who appears throughout the play, the workers discussing anarchy one night in Lincoln Park, Mrs. Seliger persuading her husband to surrender to the police, Lingg obtaining the explosive from his girl friend, Nina van Zandt interrupting Cyrus McCormick at a banquet, the police's interdiction against wives visiting the condemned prisoners and riots breaking out across Chicago.

Piscator made at least one historically speculative statement in his staging of the play, possibly the greatest fiction in the production. A sentence projected on a screen shortly after the bomb has been thrown announced to the audience, "Die Polizei warf selbst die Bomben" [The police themselves threw the bombs].³⁵ Historian Henry David considers the question of who threw the bomb (only one bomb was thrown, in spite of Piscator's use of the plural) at length in his study The History of the Haymarket Affair,³⁶ and concludes that the guilty party has never been identified. David writes that some persons have suggested the police may have thrown the bomb

³⁵Quoted in Monty Jacobs, Vossische Zeitung (Berlin), 27 May 1924.

³⁶David, pp. 508-528.

themselves, but he dismisses the proposition as highly unlikely and definitely unfounded.³⁷ With the exception of these few fictions, the play seems to have deserved the appellation which Fiebach attaches to it; "Konkret-Historisch."³⁸

Fahnen is characteristic of plays Piscator directed in that it had no individual hero. As the reviewer Leo Lania observed, "Dies Stück hat keine 'Helden'". [This play has no heroes].³⁹ The East German scholar Alfred Klein states the approach somewhat fuller: "Every individual situation is to be considered only in connection with the fate and historic mission of the masses."⁴⁰

As director, Piscator approved of plays with class heroes in place of individual heroes. Writing in 1929 Piscator described the idea of "Ich-Kunst" [literally, ego-art], and called for an impersonal, factual relationship between an author and his characters.⁴¹ He

³⁷Ibid., p. 516.

³⁸Fiebach, p. 124.

³⁹Leo Lania, Wiener Arbeiterzeitung, ["Vienna Workers' Newspaper"] (Vienna), 2 June 1924, quoted in Erwin Piscator, Das politische Theater, p. 55.

⁴⁰"Jede individuelle Situation ist nur im Zusammenhang mit dem Schicksal und dem geschichtlichen Auftrag der Massen zu begreifen." Alfred Klein, "Zur Entwicklung der sozialistischen Literatur in Deutschland," Neue deutsche Literatur X (1962), 28.

⁴¹"Die Zeiten der Ich-Kunst sind vorbei. Eine unpersönliche, sachliche Beziehung zwischen dem Autor und seinen Figuren ermöglicht erst die Klarlegung ihrer geistigen Struktur, ihrer Bedeutung, ihres Wertes." Erwin Piscator, Das politische Theater, p. 147.

wrote further than an author should not present an individual with a personal or private fate.⁴²

The plot summary taken from the published version of Fahnen provides some insight into Piscator's production of the play. Unfortunately, the prompt book (Regiebuch) from the production is not available. It is apparent, however, that Piscator made additions to Paquet's cast, for the published version of the play lists a dramatis personae of thirty-three characters, while the program for the Volksbühne lists fifty-six characters, most of them by name.⁴³ Whether Piscator gave to any of these twenty-three additional roles additional lines is not known. Piscator wrote (in 1963) that in Fahnen he wished to depict the historical drama in its fullest perspective. He speaks of intending a broadening of the plot ["Ausweitung der Handlung"] and a clarification of its background ["Aufhellung ihrer Hintergründe"].⁴⁴ Exactly how he achieved this is not known.

In a short biography of Alfons Paquet, Hans Martin Elster mentions that author and director had "great debates" over the production, but he does not explain the issues.⁴⁵ Mrs. Piscator

⁴²"Nicht mehr das Individuum mit seinem privaten, persönlichen Schicksal," Erwin Piscator, quoted in Hecht, p. 67.

⁴³Archives of the Volksbühne.

⁴⁴Erwin Piscator, Das politische Theater (1963), p. 62.

⁴⁵Elster, in Paquet, Gesammelte Werke, p. 24.

also indicates that her husband asked for revisions in the scripts:

I have to ask for better texts from that poor creature, the author (Paquet). I have to be honest with the facts, truthful to the people who come to see these plays and want to find an answer to their own problems. I have to bring history up to date, even at the danger of presenting something unfinished or eliminating what could be effective.⁴⁶

Fahnen is not remembered for its textual debates but for its projections, one of the techniques for which the director became most noted. Evidence indicates Piscator used as many as three projection screens in Fahnen: one on the right side of the proscenium, one on the left side and one suspended above the central acting area. On these screens he flashed written commentaries or still pictures (movies were to come later in his career). The written commentaries included what appeared to be scene titles, for example, before the courtroom scene the words "Zum Tode verurteilt" [condemned to death]

⁴⁶Quoted in Maria Ley Piscator, p. 74. Piscator complained continually that playwrights were not supplying him with suitable plays. In an interview with Die Rote Fahne in 1924, Piscator states "es gibt keine Dichter, die uns das neue, das heutige Drama bringen können." [There are no poets who can provide us with new drama. The drama of today]. Erwin Piscator, "Wie wählen die Intellektuellen" ["How do the Intellectuals Vote?"], Die Rote Fahne, 29 November 1924. Three years later, he voiced a similar complaint: "Es fehlt den meisten Autoren, die uns in ihrer Gesinnung nahe stehen, an jener Schulung, die ihnen allein ermöglichen würde, auf die sozialen und ökonomischen Wurzeln jedes Geschehnisses durchzustossen." [Most of the authors who stand near us in their way of thinking lack the schooling which alone would enable them to break through to the social and economic roots of every occurrence]. Erwin Piscator, "Das politische Theater," an essay printed in 1927 and reprinted in Erwin Piscator, Schriften II, p. 29. Again in 1929, the director echoes his earlier statements: "Dichter sind dabei bis jetzt noch nicht herausgekommen." [Moreover, writers have until now, not yet appeared]. Erwin Piscator, Das politische Theater, p. 89.

appeared on the center screen.⁴⁷ In addition, projections supplied observations which an omniscient author might be able to make in a narrative, as in an unidentified scene, when a side screen carried the message "inzwischen hungert der Greis im Turm" [Meanwhile the old man is starving in the tower]. In yet another unidentified scene the projection screen announced, "Luisen Limonade ist matt" [Louise's lemonade is weak].

The prologue supplied a second use of projections. As the puppeteer described the main characters, their pictures appeared on the screen over the central acting area. Using a pointer, the puppeteer directed the audience's attention away from the puppet show and to the projection screen.

Available reviews indicate that in addition to these written comments and still pictures, the projections provided documentary notes in the form of newspaper headlines. Unfortunately, no details on the source of these headlines are available.

In his reminiscences on Fahren Piscator states that his use of projections constituted a first in theater history: the first time projections were integrated into a production as an integral part.⁴⁸ At the time theater reviewers objected to their use. Monty Jacobs observed that the use of the extra-dramatic material seemed to admit the dramatic weaknesses of the play.⁴⁹ Ihering called the use of

⁴⁷ Monty Jacobs, Vossische Zeitung (Berlin), 27 May 1924.

⁴⁸ Erwin Piscator, Das politische Theater (1963), p. 63.

⁴⁹ Monty Jacobs, Voissische Zeitung (Berlin), 27 May 1924.

projections a mistake, noting that the side screens distracted the audience from the dramatic action on center stage. Reviewers were unanimous, however, in declaring the audience's approval of the production with the storm of applause which followed it.⁵⁰

Besides projections, Piscator used another device in Fahnen for the first time: a two-level set. Although no photographs of the set are available the reviews and sketches of Fahnen describe it as a two-story structure which allowed the actors to play and be lit on either level separately. Built on the turntable stage, the set revolved, allowing for scene changes which the reviewers all described as rapid. The nineteen scenes of Fahnen seem to demand the rapid changes. Who supplied the idea of a multi-level set, the scene designer for the Volksbühne, Otto Suhr, or Piscator, is unknown. Piscator evidently liked the device, for he used it frequently, most notably in his production of Hoppla wir leben ["Hooray, We Live"] (September 1927), which featured a three-story set whose levels were connected by an elevator.

From what is known of Piscator's production of Fahnen the following may be summarized: In his first production at the Volksbühne, Piscator resumed directing plays with a political emphasis although not agit-prop productions as in the Proletarian Theater. Concrete political references to historical events and personages formed the essence of the script, but Piscator apparently did not try to parallel

⁵⁰ See especially "F. S-s." (The author did not identify himself), Lokal Anzeiger ["The Local Advertiser"] (Berlin), 28 May 1924.

the events with any point of local politics, a fact noted in the program of Fahnen: "In Fahnen no hymn of praise is sung to the program of any political party."⁵¹ In addition to increasing the numbers in the cast Piscator continued to use interruptions which included projected comments and documentation to assist the story. Piscator considered characters only as representatives of their class, and deemphasized their personal or private fate. Using a two-level set and turntable stage Piscator moved the large cast quickly through the lengthy play.

Opening on 26 May the show played only until 12 June, fifteen performances.⁵² In spite of its relatively short run, Fahnen began an association for Piscator with the Volksbühne which extended between 1924 and 1927 and included nine productions. Often the association was not a smooth one, and it was never an exclusive one, but the technical facilities of the Haus am Bülowplatz allowed Piscator to attempt some of his most exciting experiments. Fahnen was Piscator's ninth production in Berlin since his opening of the Proletarian Theater in 1921. Within four theatrical seasons Piscator had worked his way into one of the largest, best-equipped and best-financed theatrical organizations in Berlin. Although the circumstances surrounding the Volksbühne's invitation to Piscator are not known, the young director's response was to accept the challenge,

⁵¹The program is preserved in the archives of the Volksbühne, East Berlin.

⁵²Deutscher Bühnenspielplan (Berlin).

having behind him the experience of an agit-prop troupe (the Proletarian Theater) and of a proscaenium-theater (the Central Theater). His production of Fahnen marked him as an inventive director; capable of using the resources of a well equipped house, and brought him a new measure of attention from the Berlin public. Reviewers discussed his use of projections while audiences applauded the total effect.

Günther Rühle terms Fahnen Piscator's "Durchbruch als Regisseur" [breakthrough as a director].⁵³ Breaking into the theatrical scene in Berlin during the twenties ranks as a significant achievement, in the city known as Germany's Theater Metropol. Otto Friedrich, author of a portrait of Berlin during the twenties, once asked Professor Richard Lowenthal who had been a university student in Berlin during the Weimar Republic, "What were the elements of Berlin in the twenties?" Lowenthal answered, "First, Marxism and pacifism, then psychoanalysis, then theater."⁵⁴ Lowenthal's main interest was Marxism, the point around which his interview centered, but the professor's ranking of theater as third indicates the prominent position theater held in the lives of Berliners during the Weimar years.

Throughout the decade thirty-odd professional theaters produced plays within the city limits of Berlin. The director who stood most prominent in Germany's capital was Max Reinhardt who had been directing in Berlin since 1903, becoming most noted for his monumental

⁵³Günther Rühle, p. 541.

⁵⁴Otto Friedrich, Before the Deluge (New York; Harper and Row, 1972), p. 224.

productions of The Oresteia, Julius Caesar, and Jederman ["Everyman"]. But a sentiment expressed as "Los von Reinhardt" [Away from Reinhardt]⁵⁵ surfaced among younger directors following the war as new styles of theater began to emerge, most notably Expressionism, which sought truth in man's spiritual qualities rather than external appearances. Chief among the expressionistic directors was Leopold Jessner who began directing in 1904 in Hamburg, and subsequently accepted an invitation from the Prussian legislature in 1919 to serve as Indendant [general director] of the state-supported Staatliches Schauspielhaus, where he established a stark decorative tradition characterized by his use of unadorned stairs (Jessner-Treppe), and encouraged his actors to use a style more intellectual than the emotional approach which Reinhardt espoused. In still another tradition, Otto Falkenberg and later Erich Engel premièred Bertolt Brecht's shows which created a critical furor and consequently extensive publicity with extended runs.

Theater historians document the work of these directors and their associates, but often neglect to mention less artistic theatrical ventures which were, at the time, immensely popular with the Berlin public. Especially notable are the musical comedies. In 1928, the year Brecht premièred his celebrated Die Dreigroschenoper ["The Three Penny Opera"], the most popular hit in Berlin was a musical by Mischa Spoliansky entitled Es liegt in der Luft ["It's in

⁵⁵Günther Rühle, p. 20.

the Air"], which subsequently received no attention in theater histories.⁵⁶ In addition to musicals Berlin's vaudeville flourished during the twenties, presenting a local art form known as the "Berlin Revue," a variety of solo and chorus songs which usually featured at least one chorus of topless girl dancers. These musical revues accounted for most productions of the popular Apollo and Metropol Theaters on Friedrichstrasse, just east of the fashionable Tiergarten section.

On a more intimate scale, small and smoky caberets like The White Mouse, The Black Cat, The Catacombs, and The Tingeltangle, to name the most popular, offered a variety of off-beat theatrical entertainment hosted by an MC or Conferencier who would gibe at politicians of the day while introducing the acts. The White Mouse was different from the others since it featured Anita Berber, who performed without any clothes or costumes at all.

If not attracted by Berlin Revue or caberets, Berliners could attend the movies. The number of German movie houses increased from twenty-eight in 1913 to 245 in 1919, a large number of which were centered in Berlin, although no exact figures are available. In addition to the movies, the Berliner public could also attend sporting events, the most popular of which were six-day bicycle races and boxing matches. Georg Kaiser suggests the popularity of the bicycle

⁵⁶Friedrich, p. 277.

paces in his drama Von Morgens bis Mitternachts ["From Morn to Midnight"]. Boxing matches were a fitting evening's entertainment often for a royal prince as well as the lower economic classes.⁵⁷

The entertainment scene in Berlin during the twenties was widespread in its locations and varied in its offerings. The competition for audiences must have been fierce, forcing a young director, especially one who had a message for the lower class working man, to speak loudly in order to be heard.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 256.

CHAPTER V
PRODUCTIONS FOR THE KPD AND FOR THE VOLKSBUHNE
1924 - 1925

Piscator's production of Fahnen in the Volksbühne seems to have established the director in the eyes of especially one group, the KPD. Following Fahnen, the KPD made its first professional offer of employment to Piscator. The party commissioned him to assemble and present a series of skits in workers' districts in greater Berlin during the latter part of November as part of an effort to drum up votes for the KPD in the December election. Exactly when this offer occurred is unknown. Clearly, however, Piscator's status with the party was rising, as was his activity in it. In addition to being secretary for the KPD's committee of artists to aid the starving populace in Russia, Piscator also acted as a charter member of the Kommunistische Künstlergruppe [Communist Committee of Artists] which sometimes called itself the "Rote Gruppe" [Red Group]. According to an announcement of the "Rote Gruppe," its task was "communist propaganda through writing, pictures, and the stage."¹ George Grosz acted as chairman of the group and John Heartfield served as secretary.

¹"kommunistischen Propaganda durch Schrift, Bild und Bühnennmittel," "Kommunistische Künstlergruppe" ["Group of Communist Artists"], Die Rote Fahne (Berlin), 18 June 1924.

What might be the most tangible evidence of Piscator's rising popularity with the party appeared in Die Rote Fahne on 29 November, only a week before the elections. In an article entitled "Wie wählen die Intellektuellen" [How will the intellectuals vote?] Piscator's opinion appeared as one of the nine intellectuals and artists selected to be interviewed, including the artists Heinrich Ziller and George Grosz, as well as the poet Johannes R. Becher and the composer Edmund Meisel.²

Piscator's production for the KPD represented an unabashed attempt to influence its audience on points of local politics. The elections of December 1924 provided the KPD with a valuable opportunity to increase their vote in the German parliament. Countryside elections had been held the previous May, but with divided results. Wilhelm Marx of the Center Party became chancellor, but found the Reichstag so divided that he almost immediately called for new elections. In order to enlist votes for the KPD in the upcoming election, the party commissioned Piscator to write and produce skits for party propaganda. Together with the young author and fellow party member, Felix Gasbara, whose play, Preussische Walpurgisnacht ["Prussian Witches' Sabbath"] had been published by Heartfield's Malik Verlag in 1922 as part of its collection of revolutionary stage works, Piscator composed a series of skits which the two authors entitled Revue Roter Rummel ["Revue of Red Rumbblings"], abbreviated as RRR.

²"Wie wählen die Intellektuellen," Die Rote Fahne (Berlin), 29 June 1924.

REVUE ROTER RUMMEL

Revue Roter Rummel differed from Fahnen in many aspects. Playing in assembly halls, much like the Proletarian Theater had done, RRR provided Piscator with little ground for technical experimentation. Unlike Fahnen, RRR discussed contemporary, local events. In both RRR and Fahnen, however, characters appear as representatives of their class.

Unfortunately, no script remains from the production. RRR constitutes Piscator's first attempt at dramatic composition as well as his first collaboration with Felix Gasbara, who was to work on compiling at least three other plays with Piscator and who was to edit the 1963 revision of Das politische Theater. Possibly the manuscript of RRR never reached a completed version. Piscator indicates that he did not finish the text deliberately, in order to allow for last minute alterations.³

Die Rote Fahne reviewed RRR twice, supplying what information exists on the production. Divided into two acts composed of fourteen skits, the revue opened with an overture composed by Edmund Meisel, KPD member and accomplished Viennese musician, who became the conductor for the Piscator-Bühne in 1927-28. RRR appears to have been the director's first professional association with Meisel, whose music for RRR consisted of an arrangement of several proletarian

³"Vieles war roh zusammengewürfelt, den Text völlig unpräzise, aber das gerade erlaubte bis zum letzten Augenblick die Einschaltung der Aktualität" [Much was pieced together roughly, unpretentiously, but just that allowed the insertion of new realities right up until the last minute]. Erwin Piscator, Das politische Theater, p. 61.

rally songs [proletarische Kampflieder].

After this overture, two characters enter the hall from the rear, a proletarian and a bourgeois, arguing because the bourgeois had to pay five marks to enter while the proletarian had to pay nothing. As they take front row seats, actors impersonating various bourgeois candidates appear on stage costumed with over-exaggerated monacles, stovepipe hats, and formal black tails.

The third sketch, Das Klassengericht ["The Court of Class Judgment"], depicts a communist candidate for office whom two policemen lead to jail for "agitating" for his party, when in reality he was only campaigning. During these and subsequent skits the two initial characters, the short-term worker and the wholesale butcher, comment on each skit from their front row seats.

Although the exact order of presentations is uncertain, a projected slide show of German and Soviet life occurs early in the production. Other performances include gymnasts juggling Indian clubs while singing party songs and a strident duet between a man and his wife concerning the question of whether the man should stay home nights or should go to KPD meetings. In a skit entitled Der elastische Achtstundentag ["The Elastic Eight Hour Day"], a train conductor, exhausted from overwork, is directly responsible for a collision. Apparently the last skit before intermission, a mock boxing match, pits the various candidates for chancellor against one another: Ludendorff, Stresemann, and Wilhelm Marx. Finally, an actor wearing a wax mask of the KPD candidate Max Hölz enters the ring and knocks out all of his opponents.

Following intermission, a lengthy scene entitled Alles in Trümmern ["All in Ruins"] pictures the bourgeoisie enjoying Berlin night life at a cabaret. Among the available pleasures are half-naked girls, loud music, and heavy drinking. A war-cripple hobbles into the cabaret, begging. The management throws the veteran out, whereupon enraged proletarians storm the cabaret, wrecking it.

A slide show entitled Rache des Bourgeoisie ["Revenge of the Bourgeoisie"] recalls in pictures the 1920 riots, ending with photographs of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, who were murdered during those riots. The program concludes with the communal singing of the Internationale.

Even the brief material available indicates that RRR resembled the three one-acts and Die Kanaker of the Proletarian Theater. The reference to current political events, the use of impersonations, the singing of the Internationale, the picturing of Liebknecht and Luxemburg, and the appearance of the disabled war veteran recall aspects of the three one-acts. The arrangement of scenes not causally connected and the informal lecture hall atmosphere recalls a similar atmosphere in Die Kanaker.

A more essential similarity to Piscator's earlier productions lies in the anonymity of both characters and actors. No stars performed, no main roles existed. Volunteers from the Internationale Arbeiter-Hilfe, ["International Workers' Aid"], an organization of workers within the KPD, performed the roles. Neither their names nor the names of the roles they played have survived. The roles as well as the performers were identified only as representatives of

different classes or historic personages, "proletarian" and "bourgeoisie."

Yet another similarity between RRR and some productions of the Proletarian Theater is the atmosphere of uncertainty surrounding what was and was not staged. Certainly the anonymity of the actors contributed in large measure to this feeling of uncertainty. In addition the two men, the bourgeois and the proletarian who entered from the back of the hall and commented on each skit as the production progressed, remind one of the planted gentleman who called out a comment from the rear of the hall during Die Kanaker. Piscator seems to have repeated this technique often, thereby breaking down the imaginary barrier between stage and audience. Piscator frequently attacked "aesthetic distance" or the illusion of a "fourth wall," or any concept that some non-tangible but very real separation should exist between actors and audience. Piscator wished to involve his audience directly in the action on stage. In his essay "Bühne der Gegenwart und Zukunft" ["The Stage of the Present and the Future"] (1928) Piscator called for "the conquest of the border between stage and house, the involving of each individual spectator in the plot."⁴ Perhaps the most "audience involving" aspect of Piscator's productions, the communal singing of the Internationale, became a regular conclusion of every performance of the Piscator-Bühne.

⁴"Die Aufhebung der Grenze zwischen Bühne und Zuschauerraum, das Hineinreißen jedes einzelnen Zuschauers in die Handlung." The essay appeared originally in Die Rote Fahne (Berlin), 1 January 1928, and is reprinted in Erwin Piscator, Schriften II, p. 37.

Like the Proletarian Theater, RRR traveled, playing in assembly halls around Berlin, but RRR outdistanced the Proletarian Theater in the total number of miles traveled. The revue opened at 7:00 p.m. on Friday, 21 November 1924 in Pankow (Pankowergesellschaftshaus, Berliner Strasse 102) a district on the northernmost outskirts of Berlin. On Saturday, RRR played in Köpenick (at the Körrer Schule on Lindenstrasse) in the southeast of the city. On Monday, 24 November, the revue performed in Moabit at the same location used earlier by the Proletarian Theater (Moabiter Gesellschaftshaus, Wiciefstrasse 24). On Tuesday, the troupe played in the heart of the city at Dörings Festsaaen (Naunynstrasse 27), not far from the site of the Central Theater. On Wednesday, Piscator's company used a site in Wedding, on the north side of town, familiar to the director from the Proletarian Theater, Pharus Saalen (Müllerstrasse 142). Friday found RRR in the "Neue Welt," a large concert hall in the Bergschloss Brewery in Hasenheide, only a few blocks from Klein's Festsaal, the most frequently played location of the Proletarian Theater. RRR played daily from Monday 1 December through the eve of the election, Saturday 6 December. Its schedule consisted of stops in Friedrichshain (Prachtsaale des Ostens, Frankfurter Allee) on the east side on Monday, in Reinickendorf (the Paradies-Garten, Schönholzerstrasse 14) on the north side near Wedding on Tuesday, at the Schloss Brewery in Schöneberg (south central Berlin) on Wednesday, in Sophiensaae (Sophienstrasse) in the heart of the city near the Volksbühne on Thursday, Friday in Lichtenberg (in the Parkauer Schulaula) on the eastern outskirts of Berlin. Finally on Saturday, RRR closed in

Köpenick at the Hirschgarten.⁵ Needless to add, the troupe was highly mobile, using minimal sets, costumes, lighting and properties.

The propaganda of RRR did not produce an election victory for the KPD. Throughout Germany the communist party lost just under one million votes from the May high of 3,600,000 to 2,700,000 in December. In Berlin, the KPD also slipped, dropping from 225,000 to 216,000. A district-by-district survey shows the KPD gained in the central city area of Berlin and in Wedding, two areas in which Piscator's RRR performed. On the other hand, however, the KPD lost votes in Friedrichshain, Pankow, Beinekendorft, Neukölln and Köpenick, all districts in which RRR also appeared.

Although no concrete evidence exists that the show achieved its goals in the election, Piscator's RRR deserves to be remembered for introducing a series of proletarian political revues across Germany that lasted until Hitler came to power in 1933. The Communist Youth League produced a Rote Rummel of its own in 1925. Die roten Raketen ["The Red Rockets"] in 1927 and Roter Wedding in 1929 presented several skits similar to ones in RRR (especially notable is a mock boxing scene).

In RRR, Piscator continued the work in agitation-propaganda which he had begun in the Proletarian Theater. He gave German agit-prop a distinguishing "revue" aspect, playing on the somewhat earlier tradition of the political satires of the cabarets, an example of which he caricatured in one skit.

⁵The schedule of RRR's appearances was obtained from advertisements appearing in Die Rote Fahne (Berlin).

Piscator's political theater is perhaps exemplified better in RRR than in any previous production, using skits with concrete political references in an effort to persuade the audience on a point of immediate local politics, the coming election. Playing in assembly halls, RRR did not provide Piscator with grounds for extensive technical experiments, but the director employed music to a greater extent than in earlier productions, requiring the services of a professional composer, Edmund Meisel. Piscator used a wax mask to impersonate a living political figure, and showed slides but detailed information on them is lacking.

Directorial techniques were reminiscent of earlier productions. The uncertainty of what was staged and not staged represented the director's attempt to destroy the illusion of the "fourth wall" and to involve the audience directly in the presentation. Anonymity of actors and the absence of a hero-role in the production support Piscator's practice of de-emphasizing any individual's personal or private fate in an effort to associate every dramatic character with some aspect of the class movement.

Since Piscator did not work exclusively for any organization at this time, when the communist revue ended its run on election eve, he could devote his full energy to his second production at the Volksbühne which opened in little more than a month's time.

TWO ONE-ACTS

The details of Piscator's return to the Volksbühne are not known. Unlike his first production in the Haus am Bülowplatz, Piscator's

second venture on the well-equipped stage did not rank as one of the regular subscription offerings, but belonged rather to a group of special experimental performances given at 11:30 on Sunday mornings, not exactly prime viewing time even in Berlin.

Two one-acts comprised the program which Piscator offered the public on Sunday morning, 21 December 1924: Südseespiel ["South Sea Play"], by the German expressionist, Alfred Brust, and Unterm karabischen Mond ["Moon of the Caribbees"], by an American author very popular in Berlin, Eugene O'Neill. Whether Piscator chose the two one-acts or whether the Volksbühne selected the scripts and subsequently asked Piscator to direct is unknown. Both are set miles away from Berlin and neither has any political overtones.

The first play, Südseespiel, depicts love and hate among the members of a primitive tribe on an unnamed South Sea Island. The heroine, Tipetpak, marries Kamba, but through an adulterous affair has a child by Burubu, the village artist. The villagers decree that the illegitimate infant should be sacrificed. Secretly, Tipetpak and Burubu leave the village to seek a better life together as the villagers carry their child across the stage bound to a spit ready for sacrifice.⁶

The second play, O'Neill's Unterm karabischen Mond takes place on the British tramp steamer, Glencairn, at anchor off an unidentified island in the West Indies. Late one night four Negro women bring fruits, nuts and tobacco on board, and obtain the captain's

⁶ Alfred Brust, Spiele ["Plays"] (Munich: K. Wolff Verlag, 1920).

permission to sell their produce to the sailors. Having smuggled bottles of rum on board under the fruit, the ladies do a lively business, until the sailors get drunk enough to start a fight. By the time the first mate separates the men, one has been knifed, but not seriously. The captain orders the women off the ship, and does not pay them for either the liquor or the fruits which the sailors have consumed.

Most available reviews commented that the two one-acts seemed strange fare for the Volksbühne. Noting the "noble savages" of the islands in both plays, Julius Hart spoke of a new Rousseau movement in the arts,⁷ and Vorwärts entitled its review "Exotisches Theater in der Volksbühne."⁸ Monty Jacobs observed that a respected rule of theater operations was to play on Sunday what the public might not buy for evening performances. Jacobs then added that he felt the O'Neill play deserved to be moved to the evening repertory, but that Brust's play should not be performed either in the morning or at night.⁹

Only fifteen minutes long, Brust's play offered Piscator little opportunity for technical devices or political comment. Neither

⁷ Julius Hart, "Morgenvorstellung in der Volksbühne," ["Morning Presentation in the Volksbühne"], Der Tag (Berlin), n.d., review preserved in the archives of the Akademie der Künste, Richter Collection.

⁸ Max Hochdorf, "Exotisches Theater in der Volksbühne" ["Exotic Theater in the Volksbühne"], Vorwärts (Berlin), 22 December 1924.

⁹ Monty Jacobs, "Dramen der Tropensonne. Brust und O'Neill in der Volksbühne," ["Drama in the Tropical Sun: Brust and O'Neill in the Volksbühne"], Vossische Zeitung (Berlin), 23 December 1924.

script contained political overtones and Piscator made apparently no alterations in them. Music accompanied both shows, composed and directed by Wolfgang Zeller, about whom nothing is known. Hart's review speaks of projected scenery of South Sea Island forests.¹⁰

Both shows provided Piscator with an opportunity to practice directorial techniques before projected scenery. At least one reviewer, Julius Hart, noticed that Erwin Piscator's attention had not focused on vocal but on visual aspects of the production:

On Sunday the actors did not have a chance to say much, and had to confine themselves to a sort of film-acting. The individual disappeared in the masses, and the program did not suffice to differentiate who played what. There was more to see than to hear.¹¹

Herbert Ihering noted that Piscator's acting material was remarkably bad.¹² Only Unterm karabischen Mond enjoyed a measure of success in the repertory, receiving two performances subsequent to its matinée, one on 6 January and another on 1 February.¹³

¹⁰"Filmbilder blitzen vorüber. Man sieht eine Südseelandschaft. Nackte Wilde, Papuas, meistens zu zweien und dreien, kommen und verschwinden wieder." Julius Hart.

¹¹"Die Schauspieler hatten am Sonntag nicht viel mitzureden und mussten sich mehr auf Filmdarstellungskunst beschränken. Der einzelne verschwand in den Massen, und der Theaterzettel genügte nicht zur Unterscheidung, wer spielte und was er spielte. Zu schauen gab's mehr, als zu hören." Julius Hart.

¹²Allerdings war das schauspielerische Material denkbar schlecht," Herbert Ihering, "Brust und O'Neill: Matinee in der Volksbühne" Börsen Courier (Berlin), 22 December 1924.

¹³Deutsche Bühnenspielpfan.

WER WEINT UM JUCKENACH

Just six weeks following the Sunday matinée of the two one-acts, the director opened a three-act comedy, Wer weint um Juckenach, ["Who cries for Juckenach"] as part of the regular Volksbühne evening repertory. Berlin audiences preferred the tragi-comedy to the one-acts, for Piscator's Juckenach remained in the Volksbühne's repertory for over six months.

The author of Wer weint um Juckenach, Hans Jose Rehfisch, was Piscator's partner in the 1922-23 Central Theater venture. Two years older than Piscator, Rehfisch had studied law, becoming a Regierungsrat [administrative adviser] before he turned to various aspects of theater. In 1920 his first play premièred in Mannheim, and in 1921 his second in Düsseldorf. He continued his theatrical career as Piscator's partner, and, following the Central Theater venture, he tried his hand at directing. Berlin was slow to accept Rehfisch's scripts. Wer weint um Juckenach, his third play, premièred at the Leipziger Schauspielhaus on 23 February 1924. Not until the following year did the play appear in Berlin, sparking Herbert Ihering to remark that Rehfisch's tragi-comedy had to play in the smallest provincial cities before the Berlin producers would chance it.¹⁴

The three-act tragi-comedy related experiences of a forty-year-old physician, Juckenach, who is apparently dead when found by his house maid, Martha Nagel. Martha continues housecleaning before

¹⁴ Herbert Ihering, Börsen-Courier (Berlin), 2 February 1925, quoted in Günther Rühle, p. 611.

calling the police when, to her astonishment, Juckenach enters from his bedroom and explains that he was in a sort of coma, but that he has survived. Before he awakened, however, he dreamt that he had died and that no one had cried for him at the news of his death. Observing that Martha was more frightened by his entry than happy to see him, Juckenach decides his dream was prophetic and determines to amend his life, endearing himself to those he can. The first to receive his favors is Betty, a niece of Martha, whom Juckenach transforms from a gutter-snipe into a well dressed, proper woman. The second recipient is a local artist named Lennard, for whom Juckenach burns evidence of an attempted fraud. Lennard, on one of his visits to Juckenach's house falls in love with Betty. Only after several months lapse does Lennard and his newly wed wife learn of Juckenach's favor in destroying the evidence. Now established in a good job, Lennard is not grateful for Juckenach's action in burning the papers, and claims that he wanted no part in the crime. Exasperated, Juckenach orders the young couple out of his house. In the excitement he suffers a fatal heart attack. Martha sees her employer sink to the floor and having recognized the good he had attempted to do, cries over him.¹⁵

Wer weint um Juckenach does not deal with a local political problem of Berlin but with an individual, personal, private fate. Piscator made no apparent alterations in the script, use of music,

¹⁵ Hans José Rehfisch, Wer weint um Juckenach; Tragikomödie in drei Akten ["Who Cries Over Juckenach: A Tragicomedy in Three Acts"] (Berlin: Oesterheld, 1924).

nor projections. In short, no evidence suggests he used any technical experimentation or attempted to break the illusion of the fourth wall, for Wer weint was Piscator's first production within the confines of a box set.

Piscator seems to excuse the show in his book, where he writes that in Wer weint um Juckenach the problem dealt not with politics but with individuals.¹⁶ He explains further that a director's profession does not allow him to direct always what exactly fits his philosophy.¹⁷ Piscator's production of Wer weint stands out as one of the two non-typical productions of the political director's years in Berlin. (The other show was to follow shortly--Hilfe, ein Kind ist vom Himmel gefallen! ["Help, A Child Has Fallen From Heaven"]); Die Rote Fahne, usually a supporter of Piscator's productions, did not review Wer weint. Piscator's next production, Segel am Horizont ["Ship Ahoy"], also staged in the Volksbühne, was also far from the radically political performances of Fahnen and RRR.

SEGEL AM HORIZONT

Segel am Horizont stands as Rudolf Leonhard's second play. An earlier theatrical acquaintance of Piscator, the thirty-six-year-old Leonhard belonged to a large number of German artists and writers

¹⁶"Allerdings waren hier die Probleme nicht 'politisch', sondern 'menschlich'." Erwin Piscator, Das politische Theater, p. 80.

¹⁷"Die Art meines Berufes, meine Abhängigkeit, liessen mich natürlich nicht immer ein Spielplan durchführen, wie ich ihn aus meiner Weltanschauung heraus anstrebte," Ibid., p. 80.

who turned vociferously anti-military during World War I. His first play in 1916, Die Vorhölle ["Limbo"] decried the wholesale destruction of the war. Interested in political theater, Leonhard assisted Karl Heinz Martin in 1920 in the short-lived theatrical venture, Die Tribüne. Leonhard did not embark on his second play until 7 November 1924 when he read the following excerpt in a Berlin newspaper:

The Russian ship "Towarischtsch" has left the English port Talbot for Leningrad. It sails under the command of a Mrs. Dialtschenski, who, as the only woman on board, commands a crew of sixty men. On the trip to England the ship was led by a man, but he disappeared without a trace during the ship's halt in port. The crew then elected their female comrade as their captain.¹⁸

According to Leonhard, the newspaper account inspired him to write Towarischtsch, which is the German transliteration of the Russian word for comrade. Later, at the suggestion of the respected dramatist Georg Kaiser, Leonhard changed the title to Segel am Horizont.¹⁹

Composed of four acts divided into twenty-five scenes, Segel am Horizont takes place throughout the ship. The first act discloses

¹⁸"Das russische Schiff "Towarischtsch" hat den englischen Hafen Port Talbot auf der Reise nach Leningrad verlassen. Es steht unter dem Kommando einer Frau Dialtschenski, die als einzige Frau an eine Mannschaft von 60 Männern kommandiert. Auf der Reise nach England wurde das Schiff von einem Manne geführt, der indessen während des Aufenthalts im Hafen spurlos verschwunden ist. Die Mannschaft wählte darauf die "Kameradin" zu ihrem Oberhaupt." Quoted in Rolf Leonhard, Segel am Horizont in Dramen und Hörspiele ["Ship Ahoy" in "Drama and Radio Plays"] (Berlin: Die Schmiede Verlag, 1963), p. 60

¹⁹Ibid.

that the crew has elected a female captain, Angela Alexandrowna Dialtschenskaja, after the mysterious disappearance of their captain, her husband, in London. Once underway, the crew begins to doubt their selection. A mentally retarded sailor, Kaleb, tries to sexually assault Angela, but is restrained by the rest of the crew who express horror at Kaleb's action but spread the rumor that Angela is having an affair. No two rumors identify the same man as Angela's lover, and the action of the play discloses that Angela consistently turns away any advances that are made to her. As discontent grows among the crew, Angela calls for a council of the sailors. At the meeting the helmsman suggests that the problem could be easily resolved if Angela would marry one man on board and thus put an end to the sailors' competition for her attention. Angela counters by choosing the telegraphist, the fountainhead of much of the unrest. He refuses, and so she chooses Kaleb, who jumps overboard when he sees the crew rushing toward him to tell him the news, mistakenly thinking they are threatening him. The telegraphist radios Kaleb's death to the authorities on land. In the aftermath of sorrow over the drowning, and in the face of a police investigation once in port, the crew decides to support Angela as captain, and to help one another as comrades rather than bicker as competitors.

Available material indicates that Piscator experimented with only one technical aspect of Segel am Horizont, the set. Abandoning the box set of the preceding production, Piscator used a unit set which consisted of the entire ship constructed on the turntable stage of the Volksbühne. By setting the turntable at a rake, and rotating the

set, Piscator managed to locate all twenty-five scenes in various locals on one set. Not Piscator's first experiment with unit staging, he had staged Fahnen on a two-story set designed by Otto Suhr.

Credit for the set design may not rest solely with the director, for program credit of the setting of Segel am Horizont went to Traugott Müller, a thirty-year-old newcomer to the theatrical world who was to design many sets for Piscator. Evidently, the two artists appreciated one another, for in 1927 Piscator asked Müller to join the Piscator-Bühne as resident designer. Müller's sets offered many playing areas at multiple levels resulting in stage pictures classified as constructivistic.²⁰ According to Siegfried Nestriepke, German theater historian writing at the end of the decade, Müller ranks as one of the few innovative scene designers of the period.²¹

According to a file assembled by the Theaterwissenschaftliche Institute, the theater department of the Free University in West Berlin, Müller designed and executed eighteen sets for the professional German stage between 1925 and 1928, seven of them for Piscator. These included Die Räuber ["The Robbers"] (1924), Gewitter über Gottland ["Storm over Gottland"], Hoppla, wir leben ["Hooray, We Live"], Rasputin (all 1927), Konjunktur ["Boom"] and Marlborough zieht in den Krieg ["Marlborough Enters the War"] (both in 1928). Segel am Horizont introduced Müller's sets to Berlin's professional theater circles.

²⁰ Siegfried Nestriepke, Das Theater im Wandel der Zeiten ["Theater through the Changes of Time"] (Berlin: Deutsche Buch Gemeinschaft, 1928), p. 493.

²¹ Ibid.

Berlin newspaper reviewers received Segel am Horizont favorably, mentioning the set often. Paul Fechter saw in the set the deepest symbol of the show.²² He neglects to identify that symbol). Rolf Nürnberg commented that because the acting cast was weak, Piscator had to assist the production with the technical effects of a revolving stage.²³ At least two reviewers commented that Segel am Horizont was one play Piscator should have edited,²⁴ but apparently Piscator made no alterations in Leonhard's script.

Although the Volksbühne offered Segel am Horizont as part of its regular subscription program, the play did not seem to attract a great deal of attention and received only thirteen performances. No available review remarked on Piscator directing a second political play (Fahnen had been preceded by Wer weint). Piscator returned to politically oriented scripts in his next production, however, Haut den Lukas, a revue much like RRR in its blatant political propaganda. Lukas opened only a week after the opening of Segel am Horizont.

HAUT DEN LUKAS

Haut den Lukas ["Beat Lukas"], subtitled politische-satirische Abende ["Evenings of Political Satire"], is the second of three agit-prop revues which Piscator staged between 1924 and 1927, and the one

²²Paul Fechter, Deutscher Arbeiter Zeitung (Berlin), 16 March 1925.

²³Rolf Nürnberg, "Segel Am Horizont in der Volksbühne," 12 Uhr Blatt (Berlin), 16 March 1925.

²⁴Hermann Kienzl, "Uraufführung von Rudolf Leonhards Segel am Horizont," ["Première of Rudolf Leonhard's Ship Ahoy"], Neueste Nachrichten (Leipzig), 24 March 1925, and Dr. Th., "Volksbühne, Segel am Horizont von Rudolf Leonhard," Der Westen (Berlin), 18 March 1925.

about which the least is known. The director does not mention it in Das politische Theater, although he devotes much space to RRR and Trotz Alledem, his other two agit-prop shows.

The skits were described in advertisements as a red revue with music²⁵ directed by Erwin Piscator. No script was found for Haut den Lukas, nor any evidence of its publication. Die Rote Fahne did not review the show. Only two facts are known about Haut den Lukas: its raison d'etre, namely, to create support for the KPD candidate for Reichspräsident,²⁶ and the show's schedule of performances, which clearly indicates that at least two troupes performed under Piscator's direction.

Opening at seven in the evening in Pankow (Pankower Gesellschaftshaus, Berlinerstrasse 102) Haut den Lukas played twice at the same location: on 19 March and again on 20 March. Then followed a performance in Treptow (Niederschoneweide Lokal Kyffhäuser) on 21 March. After its second performance, the group seems to have split into two troupes offering Haut den Lukas every day for a week in two locations throughout Berlin: on 23 March in Moabit (Moabiter Gesellschaftshaus, Wickeffstrasse 24) and in Weissensee (Borussia Säle, Berliner Allee); on 24 March in Halensee (Flora Säle, Johann Georgstrasse) and in Neukölln (Erbe's Festsäle, Hasenheide); on 25 March in Berlin Mitte

²⁵Die Rote Fahne (Berlin), 17 March 1925.

²⁶In the Weimar Republic, mostly a figurehead position. The first Reichspräsident, Friedrich Ebert died on 28 February 1925. The election to fill that vacancy occurred on 29 March. No candidate held a majority, however, and the runoff elected Field Marshall von Hindenberg, who held the post until his death.

(in the Musikersäle Kaiser Wilhelmstrasse) and in Lichtenberg (Lokal Schonert, Kynaststrasse); on 26 March in Friedrichshain (at the "Königsbank" in the Grosse Frankfurter Strasse 117); on 27 March in Köpenick (Weltrestaurant Hirschgarten) and in Reinikendorf Ost (at the Kastanienwaldchen by the Bahnhof Schönholz). The last performance occurred on the eve of the election, 28 March in Friedrichshagen (at Schröders Festsalle).²⁷

Being political propaganda, Haut den Lukas represents a counterpoint to Piscator's productions at the Volksbühne during the 1924-25 season. Piscator swung freely from communist party productions such as RRR and Haut den Lukas to bourgeois productions with little or no overtones of contemporary politics or even class struggle (Wer weint, Segel am Horizont). Following no apparent pattern, Piscator's next production was Hilfe, ein Kind ist von Himmel gefallen ["Help, a Child has Fallen from Heaven"], a script with no political overtones.

HILFE, EIN KIND IST VON HIMMEL GEFALLEN

Written in 1910 by Wilhelm Schmidtbonn, Hilfe deals with a problem which Piscator described as "humanististisch" and not "politisch" [humanitarian and not political].²⁸ The first of the play's three acts takes place in the country home of the Vogelsangs, a wealthy couple who learn, to their astonishment, that Maria, their unmarried

²⁷The KPD candidate lost the election, placing last among four major parties. The above schedule was gleaned from advertisements appearing in Die Rote Fahne (Berlin) from 17 March 1925 to 28 March.

²⁸Erwin Piscator, Das politische Theater, p. 80.

daughter, has given birth to a child. The young mother explains to her bewildered parents that the father is a young robber. Fearing gossip, the elder Vogelsang considers abandoning the child, but is dissuaded.

Act two takes place at the home of the father of Maria's child. Bischof lives with his mistress, Lisa, who is pregnant by him. Maria enters with her child asking Bischof to marry her. After some hesitation, Bischof agrees in order to get money for Maria from her father.

Act three discovers a sitting room in the elegant city residence of the Vogelsangs into which Maria and Bischof, now married, enter with the child to ask for money from Mr. Vogelsang. To save embarrassment before his neighbors, Vogelsang agrees to establish the newlyweds with a small shop in America. Pleased with this arrangement, Maria announces that she is happy to leave a family so concerned with what the neighbors will think, and the curtain falls.²⁹

Piscator staged Hilfe in a realistic style,³⁰ using the second and last box setting which he employed during his early Berlin career. The play opened on 2 May 1925 under the auspices of the Volksbühne, not in the Haus am Bülowplatz, but in the Central Theater which the Volksbühne leased during the 1924-25 season to accommodate a new rise in membership. It was a theater less well equipped than the Haus am Bülowplatz, but one with which he was familiar, having himself managed it during 1922-23.

²⁹The plot summary of Hilfe gleaned from Wilhelm A. Schmidtbonn, Hilfe, ein Kind ist von Himmel gefallen (Berlin: E. Fleischel Verlag, 1910).

³⁰One reviewer remarked that Piscator had not taken the play any

In spite of this familiarity, Piscator attempted no technical experimentation with Hilfe. Available reviews give no hint of projections, music, alterations or political overtones. At least two reviewers remarked that the play was outdated in spite of a program note that the action occurred "today, in a large city."³¹ Although the reviewers praised the play only mildly,³² the audience seemed to have enjoyed the show, for it ran continually for at least sixty performances, not closing until June 30.

Perhaps the most significant aspect of the production is that the reviewers had not yet associated Piscator's name with political theater, although Piscator had been directing it in Berlin for four years previous to Hilfe. Apparently, Piscator's attempts at political theater had not made a substantial impact on Berlin theatergoers by 1925, a year in which Piscator was to direct one of his most political-ly oriented productions, Trotz Alledem.

less earnestly than the author and had staged it quite realistically [Erwin Piscator hat die drei Akte nicht minder ernst genommen als der Autor und sie ganz realistisch inszeniert]. M.L., "Hilfe! Ein Kind ist von Himmel gefallen!" Im Centraltheater," Morgenpost (Berlin), 5 May 1925.

³¹ Herbert Ihering, no title, no date, review preserved in the archives of the Akademie der Künste, West Berlin.

³² For example, the reviewer who identified himself only as "Stx." commented "Mit beschränkten Mitteln wird allerhand erreicht" [with scant means, a great variety was achieved], hardly a very distinguishing comment on a production. "Stx.", "Central Theater," Hilfe ein Kind ist von Himmel gefallen, Lokal Anzeiger (Berlin), 3 May 1925.

TROTZ ALLEDEM

Sometime in the spring of 1925 the Arbeiter Kultur Kartel [Workers' Cultural Cartel], an arm of the Social Democratic Party, commissioned Piscator to write and direct a review for presentation on 21 June in the Gosner Bergen, a resort area just outside of Berlin. At an unknown date, probably after the opening of Hilfe on 2 May, Piscator moved from Berlin to Schmöckwitz near the Gosner Bergen to prepare the location for the revue. Here, he and Felix Gasbara, a fellow party member and Piscator's co-worker during the production of RRR, began work on a scenario of events which they proposed to dramatize. Piscator described the script as picturing revolutionary high points of recent socialistic history centering on the Russian Revolution, and featuring the Spartikus uprising in Berlin in 1919 as one of its highpoints. The planned production never materialized. Leading members of the cartel, headed by Ernst Niekisch, had political misgivings about the revolutionary aspect of the scenario. While haggling with Niekisch about the content, Piscator received word from Ernst Torgler, a KPD deputy in the Reichstag who had supported Piscator's production of RRR, that the German Communist Party wanted the director to stage a revue for the opening of its tenth convention in Berlin on 12 July.³³ Piscator accepted the invitation of the KPD and returned to Berlin to compose with Felix Gasbarra Trotz Alledem ["In Spite of it All"].

³³Günther Rühle, p. 646.

Change of supporters occasioned a slight revision of scenario. Piscator and Gasbarra now focused on the history of the KPD, beginning with the outbreak of World War I and ending with the murder of Karl Liebknecht, founder of the German Communist Party. Staged in one of Berlin's largest theaters, the Grosses Schauspielhaus, rented by the KPD especially for the occasion, Trotz Alledem provided Piscator with an opportunity to reach a large and highly sympathetic audience, KPD convention delegates assembled in Berlin. By all available reports the director succeeded in producing a script which greatly excited his audience on the two occasions of its presentation.

Composed of twenty-three scenes, Trotz Alledem ranks as Piscator's second venture into directing documentary drama, the first being his production of Fahnen. Like Fahnen, Trotz Alledem revolved around historical personages and events. But Trotz Alledem depicted purely historical facts and in this case those connected with the opposition of Karl Liebknecht to World War I, his founding of the KPD, and his murder during the 1920 riots. The title of the production, Trotz Alledem ["In Spite of it All"], was one of his favorite expressions. Hoffmann-Ostwald, in his study on German workers' theater, writes that the title expressed the sentiment that the working class was engaged in a victory drive which, in spite of traitors and treachery, would not be held back.³⁴

Unfortunately, Trotz Alledem did not achieve publication, nor is any manuscript available. Nevertheless, a plot summary can be

³⁴"Sie zeigte, dass die Arbeiterklasse trotz Verrat und

sketched from information provided by the printed program which accompanied the production, and from a police report on the play found in the Institute for Marxist-Leninism in East Berlin.³⁵ Because Trotz Alledem is one of Piscator's few dramatic compositions, its plot summary is given here in detail.

The first scene, located in Potsdamer Platz, a busy intersection in Central Berlin, depicts people reacting to the news of the assassination of Archduke Francis Ferdinand. The second scene takes place three weeks later, 25 July 1914, when delegates of the Social Democratic Party of the Reichstag convene. Among the members appearing are the leading politicians of the Weimar Republic, Friedrich Ebert, Phillip Scheidemann, Otto Landsberg and Karl Liebknecht, the last of whom speaks decidedly against war. The third scene takes place on 1 August 1914 in the Kaiser's palace. Backed by the chancellor, Theobald von Bethmann-Hollweg, and the war minister, General von Falkenhayn, Kaiser Wilhelm II addresses the German people in favor of the impending conflict. The following scene depicts a caucus of the Social Democratic Party, in which seventy-eight members of the faction vote for war, while fourteen members are in opposition, lead by Liebknecht. The fifth scene re-enacts the meeting of the Reichstag on 2 September 1914, when the entire German parliament gave its overwhelming approval to the war effort in spite of Liebknecht's opposing stance.

Niederlagen in ihrem Siegeszug nicht aufzuhalten ist." Hoffmann, pp. 162-163.

³⁵Essentials of this report are reprinted in Hoffman pp. 165-173, the major source for this plot summary.

The sixth scene reveals radical workers in a munitions factory attempting to organize a strike which never materializes because the boss threatens to send the men's relatives to the front lines. In the following scene Liebknecht is arrested by two policemen for speaking against the war before a crowd of people in the Potsdamer Platz. The eighth scene reveals the Social Democratic Assembly nullifying Liebknecht's parliamentary immunity from trial so that he might be tried as a traitor. The following scene shows Liebknecht appearing before the war crimes court where he makes several impassioned pleas for peace, and then is sentenced to four years imprisonment.

Three succeeding scenes depict unrest among the workers during 1917. The thirteenth scene takes place at a street demonstration against the war and celebrates the early release of Karl Liebknecht. The following two scenes take place in the Chauseestrasse in south Berlin, where a group of policemen shoot into a crowd of demonstrators killing sixteen workers of the radical Spartikus-group. The sixteenth scene shows Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg preparing the first edition of Die Rote Fahne, the KPD newspaper. The seventeenth scene depicts Reichspräsident Ebert deciding to send troops into Berlin to quell the rioting. The following sequence switches the action back to Berlin where armed workers stand ready at their posts. Scene nineteen shows the communist leaders, Luxemburg, Liebknecht, and Ledebour, planning the defense of their sections of Berlin. The twentieth scene depicts the government's storm troopers breaking into the central police station, the last stronghold of the rebels. Then

follows the re-enactment of the arrest of Liebknecht and Luxemburg. Scene twenty-two occurs in the Eden Hotel in Berlin where government forces hold Liebknecht and Luxemburg prisoner. Jäger Runge, a soldier charged with guarding the two rebels, receives instructions for Liebknecht's murder which occurs during scene twenty-three in the Tiergarten park, where Runge takes his prisoner for a walk. After Karl Liebknecht steps out of the car, he takes only three steps before his guard shoots him fatally. The show then ends with a chorus of some fifty young men with eight red banners marching on stage chanting "Liebknecht lives."

Trotz Alledem ranks as Piscator's agit-prop production with the largest single audience and cast and the most elaborate technical attempts of any he had ever directed. Music composed and directed by Edmund Meisel, who had composed and directed the music for Revue Roter Rummel the previous year, accompanied the production. The orchestra of twenty men added to the agitation, providing music which Piscator described as ranging from a hellish rhythm akin to black jazz in some scenes, to historically accurate war songs and battle hymns in others.³⁶ John Heartfield, Piscator's co-worker on the Proletarian Theater, designed the unit set of towering levels connected by stairs and ramps, on the turntable stage. Piscator mounted the twenty-three scenes of Trotz Alledem on this one set, much as he had staged all the scenes of Segel am Horizont on the one set constructed on the Volksbühne's turntable stage. Piscator called

³⁶Erwin Piscator, Das politische Theater, p. 69

the set for Trotz Alledem a praktikable [a practical thing], for it served only as a playing area and not as stage decoration:

Here, even more than in Fahnen, is a turning away from decoration in the set. The principle of the pure practicality of the framework-structure which was the playing area dominates. There is nothing more to represent anything, to support the play itself, to clarify or to express the drama. The independence of the framework structure, built on a turntable and so a world in itself, throws off the "puppet show" atmosphere of the conventional stage. The set could stand in the center of an open room. The four-cornered picture frame consideration is no longer a disturbing limitation.³⁷

For the first time motion picture film accompanied a Piscator production (previous productions had used only projected slides). He obtained his film from government archives in Berlin, which retained the films as documents of World War I, for they showed the actual fighting in documentary, newsreel fashion. Interspliced among the twenty-three scenes of Trotz Alledem, the film served to document the action depicted on stage.³⁸ Authentic pictures of the war, the German demobilization, various troop parades and similar authentic films of the events between 1914 and 1919 composed the subject of the films. In addition, Piscator used projections, but no information is available concerning them.

³⁷"Hier noch stärker als in Fahnen eine Abwendung von Dekorativen des Bühnenbildes. Das Prinzip des reinen zweckhaften Spielgerüsts dominiert. Nichts ist mehr da, um etwas zu scheinen, um das Spiel selbst zu unterstützen, zu verdeutlichen, auszudrücken. Die Selbstständigkeit des Gerüsts, das auf einer Drehscheibe eine eigene Welt in sich ist, hebt den Guckkasten der bürgerlichen Bühne auf. Es könnte auch im freien Raum stehen. Der viereckige Bühnenausschnitt ist nur noch eine störende Beschränkung." Ibid., p. 66.

³⁸Ibid., p. 65.

In creating dialogue for at least some of the scenes, Piscator borrowed directly from recorded history, a principle of documentary drama which later in his life he followed more strictly in productions such as Die Ermittlung ["The Investigation"] by Peter Weiss and In der Sache J. Robert Oppenheimer ["In the Matter of J. Robert Oppenheimer "] by Heinar Kipphardt. A review in the Frankfurter Zeitung of 1928 identifies the scenes from the Reichstag in Trotz Alledem as coming from the stenographic text of the parliament's recorded actions.³⁹

The actors impersonating historic figures wore masks designed to resemble the person represented. The reviewer Fritz Engel mentions that the actors who played Wilhelm II, Ebert, Landsberg, Noske and Scheidmann all wore masks, but claimed the representation was not very accurate.⁴⁰

Piscator's production of Trotz Alledem sparked continual KPD enthusiasm in the Grosses Schauspielhaus on the occasion of its two performances, the opening of the KPD convention in Berlin on 12 and 13 July. Otto Steinicke, reviewer for Die Rote Fahne, described a smoldering, almost unending applause throughout the production.⁴¹

³⁹"Wie es anfang," in the Frankfurter Zeitung, 1 April 1928, quoted in Erwin Piscator, Das politische Theater, p. 69

⁴⁰Fritz Engel, Tageblatt (Berlin), 13 July 1925, quoted in Günther Rühle, p. 649.

⁴¹"Rauschender, nicht endenwollender Beifall." Otto Steinicke, Die Rote Fahne (Berlin), 13 July 1925.

Fritz Engel, reviewer for the liberal but definitely non-communist Berlin Tageblatt, described an audience given to clapping and obviously enjoying the production.⁴² Writing about the scene in 1929, Piscator seems to feel that in Trotz Alledem he achieved a new level of communication with his audience:

Everyone in the house had, for the most part, lived through this epoch; it was truly their fate, their own tragedy which played before their eyes. The theater became reality for them and soon it was no longer a stage and audience, but one large assembly hall, a great battlefield, a great demonstration. The unity achieved on this evening supplied the final argument for the agitation-power of political theater.⁴³

The audience's reception of Trotz Alledem moved Piscator to write that the masses in the house took over the direction of the show.⁴⁴

Trotz Alledem marks two innovations in Piscator's directorial practice: (1) the use of documentary motion pictures in the action of the play and (2) the use of dialogue borrowed directly from recorded history. Both innovations were so effective that Piscator continued to use them throughout his directorial career. The production also marked an important high point in Piscator's career, being the most elaborate show which he staged for the KPD. Apparently the production must have been one of some personal satisfaction

⁴²Fritz Engel, Tageblatt (Berlin), 13 July 1925.

⁴³"Sie Alle, die das Haus füllten, hatten zum grossen Teil diese Epoche aktiv miterlebt, es war wahrhaft ihr Schicksal, ihre eigene Tragödie, die sich vor ihren Augen abspielte. Das Theater war für sie zur Wirklichkeit geworden und sehr bald war es nicht mehr: Bühne gegen Zuschauerraum, sondern ein einziger grosser Versammlungssaal, eine einzige grosse Demonstration. Diese Einheit war es, die an dem Abend endgültig den Beweis erbrachte für die Agitationskraft des politischen Theaters." Erwin Piscator, Das politische Theater, pp. 69-70.

⁴⁴"Die Masse übernahm die Regie," (Berlin), Erwin Piscator, Das politische Theater, p. 69.

because Piscator wrote that it communicated very directly to its audience.

Trotz Alledem concluded Piscator's directing activities during the 1924-25 theatrical season, which was his first for the Volksbühne. During this season he directed seven shows, four for the Volksbühne, and three agit-prop productions under the sponsorship of the KPD. Piscator may have preferred the productions he directed for the KPD, but he did not turn down the opportunities which the Volksbühne offered him to expand his directorial experience and to work with elaborate equipment and professional actors. His agit-prop shows seem to be the drama that interested him most, however, especially Trotz Alledem, which he cites as the show which demonstrated to him the power of political theater to unify an audience.

CHAPTER VI
PRODUCTIONS FOR THE KPD AND THE VOLKSBÜHNE
1925-1926

Following Trotz Alledem, Piscator left Berlin for Munich, where he directed a production of Hans Johst's Die fröhliche Stadt ["The Happy City"], opening in the Kammerspiele Theater on 16 September 1925. What induced Piscator to return to Munich is unknown. According to the available information, the summer of 1925 marked his first return to Munich since his student days. The artistic director of Munich's Kammerspiele Theater, Otto Falkenberg, was a man sensitive to new movements in the German Theater. Falkenberg first recognized Bertolt Brecht's talents in Trommeln in der Nacht, ["Drums in the Night"], giving the young playwright his first professional production in September 1922. Falkenberg then introduced Brecht to Berlin by taking the Trommeln production to the Deutsches Theater in December 1922. Piscator directed only one production at Falkenberg's Kammerspiele during the 1925-26 theater season, Die fröhliche Stadt. The sixth play of a thirty-five year old author, Hans Johst, Die fröhliche Stadt consists of a series of eight scenes in which Alexander, a struggling student of theology succeeds in convincing a young girl, Marietta, that God is dead and only power governs the world. The script lacks any definite communist tendencies. (Johst later rose to be a leader in Hitler's elite SS corps.) Very little

material is available on the production or even why Piscator chose to direct it. Piscator omits it in his memoirs and its only available review came from the Völkische Beobachter, the Nazi newspaper edited by Adolf Hitler. Labeling the production lächerlich [ridiculous],¹ the reviewer mentioned that storm troopers in brown shirts appeared on stage and a jazz band accompanied the production, indicating that Piscator continued to employ some techniques which he used in Berlin. Die fröhliche Stadt received only seven performances, opening on 16 September and closing on 25 September.²

Following his Munich production, Piscator returned to Berlin, but the Volksbühne did not immediately offer the director a chance to use its facilities. Piscator's next production was under the auspices of Victor Barnowsky, one of Berlin's most successful producers who managed productions in three Berlin theaters during the 1925-26 season: Das Theater in der Königgrätzer Strasse, Das Berliner Kombdienhaus, and Die Tribüne. In the latter house Piscator directed Michael Hundertpfund, a show whose importance to Piscator centered around its leading actor Heinrich George rather than around any political overtones within the script.

¹Dr. B. . . , "Kammerspiele Erstaufführung, Die fröhliche Stadt," Völkische Beobachter (Munich), 18 September 1925.

²The schedule was gleaned from advertisements in the Völkische Beobachter (Munich).

MICHAEL HUNDERTPFUND

Written by Eugen Ortner, a free-lance author and journalist who resided in Nuremberg and Munich during most of his life, Michael Hundertpfund concerns a sailor home on leave for three weeks in the Black Forest. Ortner was known to favor Volksstücke [plays featuring local color],³ and Michael Hundertpfund is no exception. The play's stage instructions require a typical Black Forest house (the region has its own distinctive architecture), whose inhabitants wear the colorful rustic dress of the area and speak with a heavy Black Forest accent.⁴ Composed of three acts divided into thirteen scenes, the tragedy takes place over a twenty-four hour period. The play's main character, Michael, is spending his last day at home before returning to his ship in Hamburg. The youth discusses marriage with Marie, an attractive young cook with whom he has fallen in love while on leave, but both are so poor they feel they could not manage to take the vows. Michael's aging guardian, his uncle, is willing to give his house and small farm to the couple on the condition he and his wife be properly cared for. His overly religious wife forces her husband to deed his house and land to the church instead of the boy. In a rage over the apparent hopelessness of his situation, Michael kills his uncle and aunt, hides their bodies and attempts to continue life with Marie. Neighbors are suspicious, however, and when

³Lexikon der Weltliterature, p. 1004.

⁴Details of the script taken from Eugen Ortner, Michael Hundertpfund (Leipzig, Bühnenverlag die Schmiede, 1925).

they approach Michael on the subject he surrenders to the authorities. In the final scene, Marie discloses in a soliloquy that she is pregnant with Michael's child, which she vows she will protect so no one will ever know its father was a murderer.

The play revolves entirely around an individual's personal, private fate, and an available review indicates that Piscator made no attempt to fashion it into political theater. Whatever the play's commercial or artistic success, its chief significance was in bringing him into association with Heinrich George, an actor who subsequently devoted much of his time and talent to Piscator's political productions.

Ranked as one of the greatest character actors of the decade,⁵ Heinrich George associated continually with avant garde theater during his career. His first important role was in the première production of Oskah Kokoschka's expressionistic play Mörder, Hoffnung der Frauen ["Murder, the Hope of Women"] in Dresden in 1917. From Dresden he moved to the Frankfurter Schauspielhaus, a larger and more prestigious playhouse. Next he went to Salzburg where the renowned German director, Max Reinhardt, used him as Die Werke Mannons in the famous production of Jederman ["Everyman"] performed on the steps of the Salzburg Cathedral in August 1922. Moving to Munich, George played Schnapswirt in Otto Falkenberg's production of Brecht's Trommeln in der Nacht ["Drums in the Night"] in September 1922 and went to Berlin with the company in December. Once in Berlin, George played in the

⁵ Deutsches Theater Lexikon, p. 540.

Deutsches Theater, the Volksbühne and the Stadtstheater, all ranking among the metropolis' largest theaters. George performed the title role in Rehfish's Wer weint um Juckenach in January 1925. In the following season Piscator used him in Michael Hundertpfund, and subsequently as Granka Umnitsch in Sturmflut, and as Satin in Nachtasy, as well as Störtebeker in Gewitter über Gottland.

Michael Hundertpfund played only seven performances during the last weeks in January when Piscator was already in production for Sturmflut ["Storm Tide"], his first venture in the Volksbühne since his agit-prop presentation of Trotz Alledem. Sturmflut opened on 20 February, only four weeks after Michael Hundertpfund.

STURMFLUT

Piscator accomplishes a great deal during the short period of time between the opening of Michael Hundertpfund and the opening of Sturmflut. During the three-and-one-half-week preparation for Sturmflut⁶ Piscator shot moving picture sequences for the first time for specific production.

Written by Alfons Paquet, the dramatist who in Fahnen gave Piscator his first chance to use projections in a production, Sturmflut centers around a fictitious incident at the time of the Russian Revolution. As in Fahnen, Paquet called Sturmflut a dramatized novel. There are other similarities: both plays take place in large cities, both concern the struggles of a revolutionary lower economic class, and both plays demand a huge cast. But the two plays are also

⁶Erwin Piscator, Das politische Theater, p. 78.

very different. Fahnen is based on a historic incident, the Chicago Haymarket riot and subsequent trial, whereas Sturmflut is a fictitious drama in and around St. Petersburg at the time of the Russian Revolution. The story centers on Granka Ummitsch, who as revolutionary leader, bears a great resemblance to Lenin, but is never identified specifically.

The published text of Sturmflut appears to be taken from Piscator's production script, and includes a discussion of the films which accompanied the stage action. In order to understand the technical devices employed by Piscator, it is necessary to have an understanding of the sequence of scenes in some detail.

The play opens with a prologue. Mars, the god of war, recites poetry while a film, introducing the stage action of the play, depicts English battleships moving in formation accompanied by submerging submarines. As the film ends, scene one begins on the coastline where two Russian sailors reveal that out at sea the English are fighting the Germans in an attempt to break the blockade of St. Petersburg. Within the city, the Neva river is rising past the flood stage, causing the Russians to need boats for evacuation. News arrives that the English have captured the German flotilla, but are taking it back to England not to St. Petersburg. A rowboat from one of the sinking ships delivers Ssawin, an exiled Russian, and Orville, an Englishman who is seeking a Jewish financier, Gad.

A second film introduces the second scene of act one, showing the Neva flooding fishing villages, followed by a sequence showing Orville and Ssawin riding toward central St. Petersburg in an old car

past telegraph stations. The third film sequence switches the location to St. Petersburg where Granka Umnitsch, revolutionary leader, appears on a balcony giving orders over a wireless military field telephone. Then, the film returns to Orville and Ssawin in their old car. Finally, the film shows a street corner along the docks of St. Petersburg, where people are assembling. From this scene, the action switches to the stage where the same group of people that appeared in the last film sequence discusses the flooding of the Neva River. Orville and Ssawin enter for a prearranged meeting with Gad, for which the Jew promptly appears. Orville proposes that Gad, a financial power in St. Petersburg, offer one million gold rubles to buy St. Petersburg from Granka Umnitsch, the revolutionary leader who controls it. Gad will finance the purchase, for which England will repay him through Orville, the English agent who will administer the city. Orville explains that the English government hopes to send 100,000 unemployed workers from London to St. Petersburg.

A film introduces the third scene. The flooding Neva creeps into St. Petersburg itself. Out at sea, a German destroyer explodes. From the sea near the sinking ship, the Russians rescue Ostermann, a defecting German sailor. Then the film shows the outside of the admiralty building in St. Petersburg. Moving inside the admiralty to the throne room, the film establishes the location of the stage action then darkens.

Granka Umnitsch enters to meet his girl friend, Rune Lewenclau, who has flown her own airplane from Sweden into St. Petersburg. In the midst of the reunion, Ssawin enters, telling Granka that the

German ships are sailing to England, leaving no boats to help St. Petersburg. As Granka ponders the situation, Gad arrives, proposing to buy the city for one million gold rubles. Granka refuses to settle for less than five million. Stunned, Gad leaves as the revolutionaries discuss how they could use the money, and act one ends.

As in the first act, a film clipping introduces the second act. Refugees from the flooding Neva River flee before the rising waters. The camera focuses on a radio tower then goes black as the action switches to the stage, set in the control booth of the radio tower, where Granka issues a call for the workers of the world to unite and revolt against their established governments. He also promises asylum to any sailors who mutiny, especially if they bring their boats with them.

A film establishes a subsequent scene in Gad's house surrounded by tall buildings and narrow alleys of metropolitan St. Petersburg. It also establishes Gad's financial business showing rows and rows of figures on a ledger and Hebraic letters. The action switches to the stage where Gad debates with himself about spending five million rubles for St. Petersburg until Orville enters, reassures the financier, and Gad decides to invest.

Without a film sequence, action moves to the admiralty house where a large crowd of people has assembled to hear the reading of the contract and witness its signing. As Gad leaves, however, he slips and falls into the rising water, but is saved by Granka, who, as he climbs out of the water, hits his head on an overhanging balcony and is knocked unconscious. Many spectators think that

Granka is dead, but his followers take him away to care for him. As the scene ends concluding the second act, Ssawin declares that he plans to supplant the fallen leader.

Act three opens with a film showing Granka's revolutionary band living in the woods outside St. Petersburg: Rune leads a hunting party for wild game, the group feasts, and finally dances to balalaika music, at which point the action switches to the stage where the dance continues. The conversation of the group reveals that the flood within St. Petersburg has ebbed, and the people are rebuilding their homes, in part, with money received from Gad's contribution. Ssawin arrives unexpectedly, telling Rune that rumors in the city speak of Granka's death, which she denies. Ssawin leaves, claiming that St. Petersburg is ready for a revolt from Orville's harsh rule. Granka learns that Orville has broken the terms of the contract by bringing English munitions into the city. The news plus Rune's persuasion causes Granka to decide to lead a revolt in St. Petersburg. The scene ends in a montage of stage and motion pictures. The motion pictures show Granka entering St. Petersburg and leading the people in revolt. On stage a small troop of revolutionaries still at the camp in the woods receives reports on how the fighting is going.

The second scene of act three begins with a film of the Admiralty Building in St. Petersburg, which in contrast to the earlier scene is now almost empty. The camera peers out of the window over the city as Gad enters on stage. The financier has been away from St. Petersburg and chides Orville for bringing in munitions, contrary to the contract. As Orville ignores his one-time partner Ssawin arrives.

When attempts to dissuade Orville from bringing troops into St. Petersburg fail, Ssawin shoots and kills the Englishman, ending the third act.

The film which begins act four establishes Gad's house, as in the second act. On stage Gad telephones his stockbrokers in New York, London, and the rest of the world, to sell all his shares in the St. Petersburg venture. In the background, a film shows panic sweeping the stock exchanges as the results are posted of Gad's sudden selling. On stage, Granka stumbles into Gad's house, seeking an hour's sleep. The English have been routed, but counter-revolution under Ssawin and Rune split Granka's forces. Rune enters and attempts to kill Granka as he is resting, but Granka wrestles the pistol away from her. She flees as the scene ends.

The film which introduced the next and final scene of the play shows a large group of people assembling on the steps of the Winter Palace in St. Petersburg. Action on stage continues the argument in the assembly which is divided in allegiance between Granka and Ssawin. Although a large part of the crowd distrusts Granka for selling the city, the revolutionary leader wins back their sympathy by pointing out his past services for St. Petersburg. Ssawin, on the other hand, wants only power, and cannot match the eloquence of Granka. The people condemn Ssawin to prison for collaboration with Orville, the man who brought Ssawin to Russia. Rather than be jailed, Ssawin shoots himself. A film of a small airplane rising above St. Petersburg interrupts the stage action: the people on stage identify the plane as belonging to Rune. As the crowd watches, the plane

climbs, then stalls and falls burning into the sea. With both counter-revolutionaries dead, the people including the financier, Gad, unite behind Granka as the play ends.

Piscator writes that Paquet took more than a year to compose the initial script of Sturmflut, in which the author intended to unite film and stage action.⁷ Piscator's first move as director seems to have been to have Paquet rewrite the script.⁸ In the course of the preparation for this production, Piscator did not alter the script himself, but frequently requested Paquet to do so, and the author seems to have complied in all cases. Paquet writes that his close work with the show in preparation was profitable to him as an author.⁹ The published version of Sturmflut represents the final version of the script, and Paquet's first manuscript remains unavailable. Existing evidence seems to indicate that Piscator gave the show its strong identification with the Russian Revolution. He writes that, at the time, the political and social facts surrounding the Russian Revolution influenced him strongly.¹⁰ Yet Sturmflut, unlike Fahnen, remains fiction. Although Granka Umnitsch may resemble Lenin in being a revolutionary at the end of World War I, Lenin did not sell St. Petersburg, nor did he have a wife who inspired counterrevolution.

⁷ Erwin Piscator, Das politische Theater, p. 78.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Alfons Paquet, "Anmerkungen zu Sturmflut" in Die Szene, XVI (1926), 117.

¹⁰ "Ich war erfüllt von den Ereignissen der wirklichen russischen Revolution, war mir bewusst alle politischen und sozialen Zusammenhänge und Überschneidungen, kannte alle Probleme und alle Schwierig-

Sturmflut ranks as Piscator's first opportunity to influence a playwright at first hand. In spite of Paquet's alterations, however, Piscator was not pleased with the script in its final form. His objections to the script centered in its fictions. He wrote that Sturmflut taught him the impossibility of combining political theater and poetic or non-documentary theater. He viewed Sturmflut as a step backwards from the plateau he had achieved in Fahnen and Trotz Alledem.¹¹ Piscator's experience with Sturmflut may have convinced the director of the necessity of using actual events for political theater.

A second technique which Piscator initiated in Sturmflut was his use of film. Sturmflut stands as Piscator's first show which used film shot for a specific production. Although Trotz Alledem used newsreels and film footage adapted to the script, Sturmflut used film made specifically for the production. Piscator hired a professional movie director, Johann Hübla-Kala, and a film company, Filmhaus Mischke,¹² to shoot film sequences simulating St. Petersburg locations,¹³ and using actors who also appeared on stage.

keiten," Erwin Piscator, Das politische Theater, p. 78.

¹¹"Aber Sturmflut lehrte uns, dass der Versuch den politischen Stoff zu entpolitisieren, ihn "ins Dichterische zu heben," notwendigerweise zur Halbheit (Inkonsequenz) führt. So erwies sich Sturmflut als ein Rückschritt gegenüber Fahnen und Trotz Alledem." Ibid., pp. 75-76.

¹²The program of Sturmflut has been preserved at the Volksbühne's archives, East Berlin.

¹³The available information does not indicate that the film was shot on location in St. Petersburg.

As can be noted from the plot summary, the film in Sturmflut served either to complete the stage action as in the flaming plane crash which killed Rune, or to establish the scene, as in the rising flood water. Film was essential to the action of Sturmflut, unlike previous productions, where film served only to document or comment on the stage action. Piscator's use of film increased as he progressed in his career in the twenties until film became an essential part of a production as it had been in Sturmflut.

Sturmflut required six to ten projectors located at the rear wall of the Volksbühne's stage.¹⁴ The playing area consisted of a circular turntable stage. The screen for the rear projections divided this turntable in half, hanging not quite to the top of the highest level of the set, and was surrounded by an irregular border acting as a picture frame for the screen.¹⁵

The set consisted of non-representational levels connected by steps and ramps, which served for both the St. Petersburg scenes as well as the forest outside the city. Behind the set hung the movie screen and behind the movie screen was a ramp which allowed the actors to appear as silhouettes before making their entrances, or after their exits.¹⁶ The script does not indicate when Piscator

¹⁴"Der Filmapparat war in einer Vorführrkabine hinter dem Rundhorizont untergebracht, darüber hinaus waren sechs bis zehn Projektionsapparate in Tätigkeit, um die grosse Projektionsfläche zu füllen." Mildemberger, p. 156.

¹⁵A picture of a performance of Sturmflut is included in the Appendix.

¹⁶Mildemberger, p. 155.

used these silhouettes. Edward Suhr, set designer for the Volksbühne, painted the set various shades of grey, a color scheme which, according to reviewers, blended well with the black and white film.¹⁷

Piscator's cast for Sturmflut included some of the best talent of the Volksbühne. Heinrich George, who had played Michael Hundertpfund for Piscator, acted the role of Granka Umnitsch. Alexander Granach, Jewish by birth, played Gad. Granach, like George, had appeared in Falkenberg's première production of Brecht's Trommeln in der Nacht in 1922. Piscator used Granach in several productions following Sturmflut, notably Nachtasyl, Gewitter über Gottland, Hoppla, wir leben, Rasputin and Konjunktur. Granach also belonged to the group of professional actors who repeatedly returned to work with Piscator. A third such actor was Erwin Kalser, also a veteran of Trommeln in der Nacht. Kalser's first important role was creating the Bank Teller in George Kaiser's Von Morgens bis Mitternacht ["From Morn to Midnight"], which premiered in Munich's Kammerspiele under Otto Falkenberg in 1917. Playing often in Munich and Berlin, Kalser appeared in seven Piscator productions following Sturmflut,¹⁸ in which he created the role of Ssawin.

The director encouraged these actors to work together often in his shows, attempting to build an ensemble effort.¹⁹ Piscator lists

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Nachtasyl, Gewitter, Rasputin, Konjunktur, Rivalen, Marlborough zieht in den Krieg, and Der Kaufmann von Berlin.

¹⁹ "Aus ihnen entsteht nach und nach durch die Art der Zusammenarbeit, die meine Aufführungen erforderlich machte. . . eine

Fritz Genschow, Leonard Steckel and Albert Benohr, in addition to Granach, George and Kalser, as members of this developing ensemble within the Volksbühne. With these actors Piscator tried to refine a special style of acting for his political theater, a style he describes as "Hard, unambivalent, frank and unsentimental."²⁰ Piscator instructed his actors not to make a detailed character analysis of a part and not to attempt to throw themselves psychologically into the role, characteristics which are often associated with Brechtian acting.²¹ He did not want his actors to portray individuals, but types,²² which tended to be one dimensional representatives of the class or profession portrayed. Such simplified characterizations may best be seen in the two Paquet plays, and in the agit-prop performance of RRR, Trotz Alledem, and Haut den Lukas.²³

The press greeted Sturmflut with mixed reactions. Many disliked the union of filmed and staged action. Hans Flemming of the Berlin

Gemeinschaft." [From these (actors) there gradually emerged a union, a working together repeatedly which my productions demanded.] Erwin Piscator, Das politische Theater, p. 82.

²⁰Hart, eindeutig, offen, unsentimental." Ibid., p. 82.

²¹"Weg vom Chargieren, von der nur äusserlichen Umrisszeichnung der Charaktere, weg aber auch zugleich von der überdifferenzierten, und bis in die letzten Seelenverästelungen hinein malenden Charakterisierung." Ibid.

²²"Nicht darum handelt es sich, dass der Schauspieler individuell menschlich steigert, aus seiner Qualität als Schauspieler heraus, sondern dass die Übertragung seiner menschlichen Eigenschaften unter dem Gesichtspunkt der künstlerisch-politischen Funktion erfolgt." Ibid., p. 83.

²³These simplified types did not come about as a result of Piscator's neglect of characterization in favor of technical devices such as lights, projections, and the set. Piscator writes that he

Tageblatt wrote that certain scenes were "unabashed movie-house entertainment,"²⁴ and that technical theater seemed to have the whole production by the neck.²⁵ Max Freyhan of the Deutscher Arbeiter Zeitung complained that the film cheated the viewers of the full force of the fantasy of the presentation.²⁶ Max Hochdorf observed that the actors performed with little "inner emotion."²⁷

These and similar comments from other reviewers show little acceptance or even recognition of Piscator's attempt to have the actors play in a "hard, unambivalent" style. The comment about cheating the fantasy in the productions indicates the reviewer's unwillingness to accept or inability to recognize the director's production concept and its factual, rational, unemotional presentation.

The reviewer for Die Rote Fahne, which usually supported Piscator, took the production literally, and complained that Granka was not similar enough to Lenin. No hint was found in the show's program

paid even more attention to his actors than to the technical crew. Ibid.

²⁴"Barmherziger Himmel, wurde nicht die gesprochene Szene unmittelbar zum Kino?" Hans Flemming, Tageblatt (Berlin) n.d., preserved in the Akademie der Künste, West Berlin (Richter Collection).

²⁵"Technik hat alle beim Kragen." Ibid.

²⁶"Das geht nicht zusammen, verhindert im Betrachten den Vollzug der Phantasie." Max Freyhan, Deutscher Arbeiter Zeitung (Berlin), n.d., preserved in Akademie der Künste, West Berlin (Richter Collection).

²⁷"Die Schauspieler müssen sich in diesem Spiel wie in einem Käfig fühlen. Ihre Rollen werden nicht umschrieben durch den Wogen-gang des Gefühles und der inneren Entwicklung." Max Hochdorf, Vorwärts (Berlin), n.d., preserved in the Akademie der Künste, West Berlin, (Richter Collection).

or in any of the available advertisements that Piscator or Paquet intended Granka to resemble Lenin.

Only Herbert Ihering appreciated Piscator's non-conventional directing. In a most perceptive review, Ihering analyzes all aspects of the show from a standpoint of political theater. His conclusion is that a break exists between the "fable" (fictitious plot) and the surface layer of historic fact, the facts of the Russian Revolution. Further, he recognizes the dramatic function of the film as that of widening the plot and documenting the place and time of the action. He also recognized Piscator's attempt at unemotional presentation, writing that the director succeeded in driving all sentiment from the stage and that the actors spoke clearly, factually and definitely.²⁸ Ihering admitted that neither author nor director had these techniques fully in hand, but that the essentials for a new type of presentation existed in Sturmflut and these essentials demanded further experimentation.²⁹ Ihering had reviewed Piscator's productions before, but never had he been so glowing in praising the director's work. Ihering continued to support Piscator throughout the remainder of the director's career in Berlin.

²⁸"Ausgezeichnet, wie jetzt an der Volksbühne gesprochen wird, klar, sachlich, bestimmt." Herbert Ihering, Börsen-Courier (Berlin), 22 February 1926.

²⁹"Man spürte Welt und Weite, Völkerschicksal, Erdschicksal. Noch nicht geformt. Aber als Material. Neue Stoffkomplexe kommen herauf, die eine andere Art der Verdeutlichung verlangen." Herbert Ihering, Börsen-Courier (Berlin), 23 February 1926.

Sturmflut remained in the Volksbühne's repertory through March and April and the first week of May, but only in repertory. The show did not run continuously, receiving thirty-three performances during the two-and-one-half month period.

DAS TRUNKENE SCHIFF

Almost immediately Piscator begin work on another production for the Volksbühne, Das trunkene Schiff ["The Drunken Ship"], which opened on 21 May 1926. Written by Paul Zech, a German poet twelve years older than Piscator, Das trunkene Schiff is subtitled a scenic ballad. The eighteen scenes, referred to as "stations" in the text, depict various incidents in the life of the French lyric poet Jean Arthur Rimbaud. The play begins in Rimbaud's home town, Charlieville, where the fifteen-year-old youth unsuccessfully attempts to run away from home. A subsequent scene shows Rimbaud's successful break with his provincial home and his entry into Paris society through the assistance of Paul Verlaine, an established poet twenty years older than the eighteen-year-old Rimbaud. As their experiences in Paris grow, the two men come closer together, Verlaine attracted by Rimbaud's youthful and vigorous attitude toward life. Verlaine's wife accuses the two men of having a homosexual love affair, which impels them to leave Paris and tour the countryside, Rimbaud being a great lover of nature. The tour ends tragically, however, for Verlaine shoots at Rimbaud. After spending time in jail for the attempted murder of Rimbaud, Verlaine finds Rimbaud in Germany and again tries to kill his friend. This time, however, Rimbaud beats Verlaine unconscious. The young poet then screams that he was not born a Christian but an

animal and he wants to stay that way. The tenth scene changes the action of the play from Europe to Egypt where Rimbaud, vehement against Christian efforts to convert the natives, excites the natives to rebel against the colonial English government.

Rimbaud's insurrection does not succeed, however, and the poet breaks his leg in the course of the fighting. The injury is serious enough for him to seek passage back to France, where doctors amputate both legs. Delirious with fever and despair, Rimbaud dies in a straight jacket.

The circumstances surrounding the selection of Das trunkene Schiff for production are not known. The script does not have the concentrated political overtones which frequently dominated scripts which Piscator selected. Nevertheless, Das trunkene Schiff stands as an important step for Piscator in his development of political theater, for in the course of directing Zech's poetic drama, Piscator used a set consisting only of scenes drawn by George Grosz flashed on screens.

One of the popular artists of Berlin's decadency in the twenties, Grosz was an acquaintance of Piscator since Piscator's earliest days in Berlin, but the two men collaborated for the first time on Das trunkene Schiff. During the twenties Grosz worked often as a cartoonist and illustrator for the satiric magazine Simplicissimus. His contribution to the production consisted of a series of cartoons (their exact number remains unknown) which Piscator projected as background for the eighteen scenes of the play. These drawings did not

portray realistic scenes, but were sketches which vaguely indicated the location of the scene (e. g. in jail, Egypt, Germany.)³⁰

A center screen hung full front to the audience. On either side of it, a screen equally tall but not as wide, hinged on the central screen. At times all three screens hung full front to the audience; at times the two side screens swung toward center stage to confine the playing area and thus gave the set a feeling of forced perspective.³¹ Set pieces (chairs, tables, hand props) were the only other scenic elements in the stage picture. The screens hung higher than a man's head, allowing the actors to make entrances by riding the turntable stage into the central acting area.

Available reviews praised the production, dividing their plaudits between Grosz and Piscator, while only mentioning Zech. Alfred Kerr, drama critic for the Berlin Tageblatt, wrote of the "wundervollen George Grosz" and parenthetically referred to Piscator as "der mein Mann ist!" [Who is my boy!]. Understandably Otto Steineke of Die Rote Fahne, observed that the work split in two parts (Europe and Africa) and Rimbaud's private revolt against his society was well portrayed in both the first half and in the second, his public revolt. The communist reviewer considered as essential Rimbaud's final leading of the masses in his agitation in Egypt.³²

³⁰Three scenes from Das trunkene Schiff are pictured in the Appendix.

³¹Mildenberger, p. 161.

³²Otto Steineke, Die Rote Fahne (Berlin), 23 May 1926.

However appreciative the reviews, they did not establish a lengthy run for Das trunkene Schiff which opened very late in the season (21 May); it ran for only eight performances until 30 May. With a simple set and projections, the production probably ranks as one of Piscator's least complex. Following Das trunkene Schiff, Piscator left Berlin for the summer, apparently to direct August Strindberg's Rausch ["There are Crimes and Crimes"] in Munich's Kammerspiele.³³ However, no evidence concerning the production is available.³⁴

Piscator directed only three productions in Berlin during the 1925-26 season. These three shows mark, however, significant advances in his directing career. By his association with Heinrich George, Erwin Kalser and Alexander Granach, who were the first of many professional actors Piscator used repeatedly, he was able to encourage a style of acting which he characterized as hard, unambivalent and unsentimental. He wanted his actors to avoid getting psychologically involved in their roles, preferring the one dimensional portrayals of representatives of a class or profession. During this season Piscator also made two scenic advances which he was to repeat often, (1) incorporating documentary motion picture film into the action of a play and (2) shooting film for a specific production.

³³Erwin Piscator, Schriften II, p. 379.

³⁴The only available source was the Völkische Beobachter (Munich) which carried daily theater advertisements. Advertisements listed the Kammerspiele as closed from 19 May throughout June.

By the end of the 1925-26 season, Piscator's sixth directing for the Berlin public, he might well have considered himself a full-fledged member of the professional directing corps of the city. He was collaborating with established artists and writers such as Grosz and Paquet and professional actors were reappearing often in his productions. Moreover, the Volksbühne continued to request his services for productions considered noteworthy by reviewers in the major newspapers. Not many other directors thirty-two years old could claim a comparable record.

CHAPTER VII
THE BREAK WITH THE VOLKSBUHNE
1926-1927

During the summer of 1926, Piscator vacationed in Bandol, a small coastal village in the south of France where he, Ernst Toller, the playwright, and Erich Engel, the director, and several others discussed the possibility of forming their own theater group for exclusively left-wing productions.¹ Nothing came of these discussions immediately, for the group did not see any way to finance their venture.

DIE RÄUBER

Following Piscator's vacation in Bandol, Leopold Jessner invited him to stage a production in the Staatliches Schauspielhaus, for which Jessner was managing director. Piscator's production, Friedrich Schiller's Die Räuber ["The Robbers"], which opened on 11 September 1926, was his one essay into classical drama, for apart from Die Räuber, Piscator directed no show written before 1900 during his career in Berlin in the twenties.² Written in 1777, Die Räuber is Friedrich Schiller's first play. Later Schiller came to be admired as one of Germany's greatest playwrights and with this rise in esteem came a sanctification of his works.

¹Erwin Piscator, Das politische Theater, p. 121.

²The oldest script directed by Piscator was Gorki's Night Lodging written in 1902 and directed by Piscator in the Volksbühne in 1926.

The plot of Die Räuber is familiar to many German theatergoers. The ageing Count Maximillian von Moor is caught in a dispute between his two sons. The younger son, Franz, deceives his father into thinking that Karl, his older brother studying at the University of Leipzig, is a scoundrel, when in fact he is only boisterous. After some hesitation, Moor disinherits his elder son in favor of Franz. Being cut off from his father and fortune, Karl takes to robbing, forming a band from his university companions. Two of them, Spiegelberg and Roller, play influential roles in the decisions which Karl makes. Spiegelberg secretly seeks to supplant Karl, while Roller is faithful. The robbers embark on a round of burning, looting and ravaging of rich towns, convents, and churches in the Bohemian forests. The gang carefully avoids harming the poor, however, acting in this sense the role of Robin Hood and his band.

At Count von Moor's castle, Franz schemes to come into his inheritance as soon as possible by imprisoning his sick father. Adding insult to injury, Franz proposes to Amelia, his brother's fiancée who lives at the castle.

Karl tires of his life as a robber, and decides to visit his father's castle with his outlaw band. Encamped in the woods, the robbers wait while Karl sneaks into his father's house. During Karl's absence Spiegelberg tries to take leadership of the men. His plot fails, however, as the gang kills him for his attempted treachery.

As Karl returns to his companions, he finds his imprisoned father outside the castle walls. Enraged, Karl instructs his band to capture Franz alive at any cost. The band attacks the castle,

but Franz commits suicide when he realizes that his brother has come for vengeance.

The band returns to Karl, bringing Moor and Amelia. Moor becomes so excited upon seeing Karl that he dies, and Amelia, upon hearing that Karl does not plan to stay with her, tries to kill herself. Karl stops her, however, and then in a rage, kills her himself. As Karl comes to his senses, he repents that he has killed Amelia, and surrenders himself to the authorities designating that the reward should go to a poor peasant whom he happened to have passed on the highway.

Piscator altered Die Räuber considerably, not only deleting some of Schiller's lines, but also adding lines which Schiller never authored. In general, the heaviest deletion of lines centered around the scenes played in the castle by the Moor family: Francis, Amelia and the elder Moor. Piscator deleted fewer lines in scenes with Karl, Spiegelberg and Roller, and at the same time added many for the robbers.³ In contrast to Schiller's script, Spiegelberg, as he died in Piscator's production, called out: "Servants of a slave. Infants. Do you not hear the bells of freedom ringing. I hear the bells of freedom ringing."⁴

Piscator also altered Karl's final scene. As Karl holds Amelia in his arms, he is made to say, disgustedly, "Look at this beauty:

³"Der Schlossteil wurde zusammengestrichen, dass selbst Herr Jessner die Haut geschaudert haben muss: der Rest, der schliesslich nicht mehr gestrichen werden konnte, wurde auf andere Weise weiter "aufs Wesentliche hin" konzentriert." Paul Fechter, Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung (Berlin), 13 September 1926.

⁴"Leibeigene eines Slaven, Säuglinge, hört ihr nicht die Glocken

look at me--should my brothers have thrust me back to this?"⁵ Then Piscator had Karl stab Amelia and stab himself, both fatally.⁶

In defense of his alterations, Piscator writes that he intended his production to raise the question "Whether Karl Moor might not have been a romantic fool, and his robber band not communists, but just robbers in the truest sense of the word."⁷ Karl Moor, although Schiller's hero, and although leader of the robber band, appeared in Piscator's production as an individual with a personal motive for revolution instead of a social motive. Piscator described Karl as "a revolutionary from private sentiment."⁸ Piscator's production pictured Spiegelberg as the model revolutionist, one with social conviction.⁹ In Piscator's script as Spiegelberg died he told his companions that they were following a false cause. In the final scene of Piscator's version, Karl states that his revolution was a private, almost a family affair, centering mainly around Amelia.

⁵Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung (Berlin), 13 September 1926.

⁶In Schiller's play, Karl kills Amelia in a fit of delirium, and not in disgust. Also in Schiller's play, Karl does not kill himself but turns himself into the authorities to accept his punishment.

⁷"Ob Karl Moor nicht doch vielleicht ein romantischer Narr und die ihn umgebende Räuberbande keine Kommunisten, sondern eben nur Räuber in des Wortes wahrster Bedeutung sind." Erwin Piscator, Das politische Theater, p. 85.

⁸"Revolutionär aus privatem Sentiment" Herbert Ihering, Börsen Courier (Berlin) quoted in Erwin Piscator, Das politische Theater, p. 87.

⁹"Revolutionär aus Gesinnung." Ibid.

Old Count von Moor and the inhabitants of the castle wore costumes which linked them to the upper class while the robber band dressed as proletarians involved in a class struggle. Von Moor wore a fin de siecle hunting costume, knickers with a decorated tight coat. Franz carried a monocle, a cigarette, and was also attired in an 1890's upper-class fashion: long tight pants with patent leather shoes. Amelia dressed in a high-necked, floor-length gown with leg-of-mutton sleeves.

The robber band dressed as contemporary communists. Karl wore a black wool blouse with a belt, long pants and no hat: what one reviewer called official communist dress.¹⁰ Spiegelberg wore gold wire framed glasses, a blond goatee, a grey overcoat and a mask of Leon Trotsky, the communist revolutionist leader.

The set also contributed to the concept of struggle. Designed by Traugott Müller, it suggested a fortress, but not a medieval or baroque fortress. Its two turrets resembled those of tanks able to swivel, raise or lower and with a lengthy gun barrel protruding from each. Müller did not construct realistically von Moor's castle on stage but rather suggested modern military fortifications to indicate the well protected stronghold of the upper-class count.

The basic set consisted of a series of levels which represented various locations within the castle while scenes from the Bohemian

¹⁰"Karl trug den offiziellen Kommunistendress: schwarze wollige Bluse mit Gürtel, lange Hose, keinen Hut." Paul Fechter, Deutsche Allegemeine Zeitung (Berlin), 19 September 1926.

forests were played downstage of the castle. This arrangement enabled Piscator to experiment with overlapping various scenes, such as one where Amelia is speaking with Count von Moor while, in another part of the castle, Franz is delivering a soliloquy.

The simultaneous staging of scenes, together with the alterations in the script, accelerated the action of the play, causing one reviewer to remark that playing time was surprisingly just over two hours.¹¹ Another noticed a further result of Piscator's directing of Die Räuber: the script appeared strangely objective and free from sentimentality.¹² At least one critic noted the use of movies during the production;¹³ and several referred to the inclusion of jazz music.¹⁴ Unfortunately further details on these aspects are lacking.

The outcry against this production marked a new phase in the director's career. Opening on 11 September 1926, Die Räuber played only twelve times before cancellation on October 15. These dozen performances were sufficient to spark the Prussian Landtag (state legislature) to request an end to the production.¹⁵ Reviewers were

¹¹ Alfred Kerr, Tageblatt, (Berlin), 13 September 1926.

¹² Herbert Ihering, Börsen-Courier (Berlin), 13 September 1926.

¹³ Alfred Kerr, Tageblatt (Berlin), 19 September 1926.

¹⁴ Max Hochdorf, "Piscators Räuber" Vorwärts (Berlin), 13 September 1926.

¹⁵ Günther Rühle, p. 72. Note: The legislature intervened because the production took place in the Staatliche Schauspielhaus, a government subsidized theater under the direction of Leopold Jessner.

also critical of Die Räuber. The extensive alterations to the text, and Piscator's disregard of Schiller's stage directions form the essence of the complaints of most reviewers. Monty Jacobs wrote that even cutting is an art and that Piscator possessed that art only as a dilettante.¹⁶ Max Hochdorf observed that Piscator was no Schiller-scholar in his alterations¹⁷ while Karl Kraus complained that the production caused him to whisper audibly several times when an omission pained him particularly.¹⁸

The critical outcry against Piscator's Räuber moved Herbert Ihering to defend the dramatic experiment in a pamphlet entitled, Reinhardt, Jessner, Piscator oder Klassikertod ["Reinhardt, Jessner, Piscator, or the Death of the Classicists"]. This in turn led yet another reviewer, Bernhard Diebold to propose a five year moratorium on classical drama to end any further adulterations,¹⁹ a proposal which was not accepted.

In his book, Das politische Theater, Piscator included a chapter concerning the relationship of classical drama to political theater.

¹⁶"Aber auch das Streichen ist eine Kunst, und Piscator beherrscht sie nur dilettantisch." Monty Jacobs, Vossische Zeitung (Berlin), 14 September 1926.

¹⁷"Piscator ist kein Schillerphilologe. Er kürzt den Text, er stellt Szenen um, er fügt sogar Worte hinzu." Max Hochdorf, Vorwärts (Berlin), 13 September 1926.

¹⁸"Du hast das Gift weggelassen!" rief ich halblaut von meinem Sitz dem Darsteller zu." Karl Kraus, Unsterblicher Witz ["Undying Joke"] (Munich: Kösel Verlag, 1961), p. 183.

¹⁹Quoted in Erwin Piscator, Das politische Theater, p. 89.

Essentially, Piscator thought that a classical drama should be placed in the same relationship with a contemporary audience as it was with its original audience.²⁰ Piscator wrote that he was not limiting this relationship merely to questions of costuming or set design, but also the text itself: "The director should not be a servant of the script."²¹ This philosophy Piscator continued to use throughout his career in the theater.

Die Räuber stands as Piscator's sole venture into classical drama during the twenties. It is not alone in its place among scripts which the director altered radically. The other notable example is Gewitter über Gottland, but before he undertook this production, Piscator directed Maxim Gorki's realistic Nachtasyl ["A Night's Lodging"].

NACHTASYL

Written in 1902, Nachtasyl describes in four acts the sufferings of a group of Russian peasants living in a crowded boarding house. The central figure in the play, sixty-year-old Luka, arrives at the house in the midst of bitter quarreling among the occupants. Pepel, a young thief, is having an illicit love affair with Wasselissa, the twenty-six-year-old wife of the owner of the boarding house, Kostylew, fifty four years old. Kleschtsch, a locksmith, beats his wife, Anna, over trivial incidents and several of the tenants complain to Kostylew that they cannot possibly pay their rent. Luka's arrival temporarily dampens the quarrelling, but it flares up again as Pepel threatens to

²⁰"Die Verlebendigung, das Näherrücken der klassischen Dichtung ist nur möglich, indem man sie in dieselbe Beziehung setzt zu unserer Generation, die ihre eigene Generation zu ihr gehabt hat." Ibid., p. 87.

²¹ "Der Regisseur kann gar nicht blosser "Diener am Werk"

kill Kostylew in a fight over Wasselissa. Sorrow descends on the household when Anna, never very strong, succumbs to a lingering illness and dies.

After selling his tools to pay for his wife's funeral, Kleschtsch becomes destitute. Pepel attempts to reform, promises to stop thievery, breaks off his relationship with Wasselissa, and proposes to Natascha, the younger sister of Wasselissa. This leads the two sisters to bitter fighting, which brings the police. In an attempt to get rid of Pepel, Kostylew identifies his young boarder as a thief. For this, Pepel strikes him dead, causing Wasselissa to mourn her dead husband. When Pepel runs away with Natascha, and Luka leaves the boarding house, the remaining boarders talk over the sad situation and one of them, the actor, hangs himself in despair.²²

Piscator's production of Nachtasyl emphasized the wretched living conditions of these poor peasants. Contrary to Gorki's stage directions, which locate the action of the play in a small country village, Piscator provided a setting in a large city whose skyline, one reviewer observed, greatly resembled that of north Berlin.²³ No available review noticed any alterations of Gorki's script. Apart from the change in location, Piscator's only technical experimentation in Nachtasyl was a brief use of film. Before the curtain rose,

sein." Ibid., p. 90.

²²Plot summary gleaned from Maxim Gorki, Dramen (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag, 1962), pp. 6-70.

²³Alfred Kerr, Tageblatt (Berlin), 11 November 1926.

a projection flashed on it: "Hier zu sehen das Nachtasy1" [Here you will see, The Night's Lodging.] After the curtain rose, a brief film clipping showed several of the main characters making their way through the back streets of Berlin to the boarding house. The action then continued on stage as the actors entered the boarding house.²⁴

The distinguishing feature of Piscator's production of Nachtasy1 seems to have been his locating the action in a poorer section of Berlin as opposed to Gorki's stage direction. The director achieved this identification through filmed sequences and an elevated skyline of Berlin designed by Edward Suhr, resident designer for the Volksbühne. Although Nachtasy1 did not cause a critical uproar comparable to Die Räuber, the production indicates Piscator's attempts to make a social comment on contemporary living conditions of the large city.

Nachtasy1 enjoyed a relatively long life on stage at the Volksbühne. Opening on 10 November 1926, it played forty-six performances in repertory, the last performance being 29 April 1927. Following his work on Nachtasy1, Piscator traveled to Munich, where he mounted his third production in Otto Falkenberg's Kammerspiele, Das gastliche Haus ["The Hospitable House"], a comedy by Thomas Mann written in 1924.²⁵ Opening on 21 January 1927, Das gastliche Haus played only four performances. The only available review concerned itself

²⁴Max Hochdorf, Vorwärts (Berlin), n.d., review preserved in the Akademie der Künste, Piscator Mappe.

²⁵Lexikon der Weltliteratur ["Lexicon of World Literature"], Gero von Wilpert, ed. (Stuttgart: Alfred Kröner Verlag, 1968), p. 863.

mostly with the script of the play which is called a play with "faint satire, a satire which did not succeed."²⁶

GEWITTER ÜBER GOTTLAND

Piscator's excursion to Munich was brief. Almost immediately he returned to Berlin, working on his next production for the Volksbühne. Ehm Welk's Gewitter über Gottland ["Storm over Gottland"] which opened on 27 March 1927, only two months after Das gastliche Haus. Although written in 1912, Gewitter über Gottland was not produced for fifteen years.²⁷ Ten years older than Piscator, Welk worked as a journalist and editor throughout his life, turning only occasionally to theater as an outlet for his compositions.²⁸ Although Gewitter über Gottland never achieved publication, its reviews reveal the outlines of the plot.

Set about the year 1400 on and around the Baltic Sea, the play is based on an historical conflict between the people of the island of Gottland who were members of the Hanseatic League, a medieval association of merchants, and the Vitaliebrüder [literally, the victual brotherhood], an organization of pirates who attempt to destroy Gottland's ancient alliance with the League.

²⁶ "Ein Schauspiel mit ohnmächtiger Satire, einer Satire die nicht gelang," U.R., "Münchner Schauspielhaus," Völkische Boebachter (Munich), 23 January 1927.

²⁷ Herbert A. Frenzel, editor, Kürschners Deutscher Literatur-Kalender (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1928), p. 1248.

²⁸ Lexikon der Weltliteratur, p. 1419.

Gewitter's main character is a knight, Störtebeker, a member of the Hanseatic League but who, having been disinherited from his ducal domain, has changed his allegiance, and now fights for the Vitaliebrüder. The ambitious Störtebeker finds difficulty in adapting to his new situation, however, for the Vitaliebrüder share all of their possessions in common, a concept which is foreign to the free-enterprise system of the Hanseatic League. Matters come to a head as Störtebeker, a successful pirate, attempts to reestablish his claim to be duke of Gottland by means of the arms of the Vitaliebrüder. One of the pirate leaders, Asmus, goes to Hamburg, to the seat of the Hanseatic League and conspires to betray Störtebeker in order to rid the brotherhood of his ambitious, corruptive influence. The plot succeeds, and the Hanseatic League captures Störtebeker, but the double-dealing merchants then turn on Asmus and kill him. Störtebeker, on the other hand, slyly argues his way out of captivity, marries a duke's daughter and inherits land.

Piscator interpreted this plot in contemporary political terms: the free enterprise system of the League, versus the communism of the Vitaliebrüder. The actors wore medieval costume until the climax of the play when Asmus, the leader of the Vitaliebrüder, donned a mask of Lenin and Störtebeker, the man who cannot accept the communist system, dressed as a National-Socialist. Without question Piscator identified the German right wing of 1927 (the Nazi party) with one faction in the play and the left wing (the communists) with the opposing faction.²⁹

²⁹Erwin Piscator, Das politische Theater, p. 100.

Piscator identified the political bias of the production in the program which announced, "This drama does not take place only around the year 1400."³⁰ Filmed scenes of various revolutions preceded the performance: the French Revolution, the 1848 German Revolution, the 1917 Russian Revolution and finally the uprising in Shanghai, 1927. The latter film brought especially strong applause for a house sympathetic to revolution.³¹

Apart from the introduction of Nazi and communist costumes during the last act, Piscator set the show pictorially in medieval rather than in modern times. Filmed sequences preceding act one and following the scenes of the various revolutions gave cultural and historic facts of Gottland which informed the audience about the Hanseatic League and the Vitaliebrüder. This background information appeared on three screens, one hanging in front of the main curtain, and one on either side of the proscenium.³² Pictures of Gottland, the characters in the play, and printed text alternated on these screens. Finally, the center screen showed a ship tossed on waves during a storm. During this sequence the screen rose, the curtain opened and the same ship was on stage with projected clouds swiftly moving across the cyclorama.³³

³⁰"Dieses Drama spielt nicht nur um 1400." Ibid.

³¹Norbert Fal, BZ am Mittag (Berlin), 24 March 1927.

³²Kurt Pinthus, 8 Uhr-Abendblatt (Berlin), 24 March 1927.

³³Ibid.

The two side screens remained during the performance. As in his production of Fahnen, Piscator projected comments, maps, and photographs on the side screens as the action on stage continued. He also filmed segments of the action, for example, the trial of Störtebeker, which allowed the actors time to change costumes for a subsequent stage scene.³⁴

An exact reconstruction of the performance of Gewitter is not possible from the available information. Reviews do not describe the complete set, but mention the ship of the first scene, a projected skyline of Hamburg across the cyclorama in a later scene and a projection of a stained glass window from the church on Gottland.³⁵ Reviews also refer to a constant din of revolutionary songs, music and shouts which accompanied the production.³⁶

The projections, the music (or the din) and the modern dress of the final scene must have been Piscator's invention, for they were not in Welk's stage directions. Piscator also altered Welk's text, but information on the alterations is scanty. Welk objected to the alterations and complained to the administrators of the Volksbühne that he had not authorized changes in the script:

In the discussions about the play, in the rehearsals, and in letters to Mr. Piscator, I have energetically and emphatically protested against the way which he neglected and botched up the text and against the actor George who

³⁴ Hebert Ihering, Börsen Courier (Berlin), 24 March 1927.

³⁵ Paul Fechter, Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung (Berlin), 24 March 1927.

³⁶ Ibid., also, Max Hochdorf, Vorwärts (Berlin), 24 March 1927.

in some scenes spoke not one word of the manuscript, but only babbled nonsense.³⁷

Welk was not alone in the complaining about Piscator's production. The reviewer for the Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung wrote that had he written Gewitter he would have bought a pair of pistols and challenged Piscator to a duel to the end.³⁸ The board of directors of the Volksbühne concurred with Welk and the Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung: they suspended production of Gewitter on 26 March after only three performances, claiming that the production was communist propaganda and in violation of the Volksbühne's policy of political neutrality.³⁹ Further, the board released Piscator from his position as guest-director, ending a three-year association.

The Volksbühne's action sparked a protest from a segment of the artistic community of Berlin. On 30 March, four days after performance of Gewitter was suspended, the Volksbühnenjugend [Youths of the

³⁷"Ich habe dagegen protestiert, energisch und unmissverständlich, beim Dramaturgen, auf Proben und in Briefen an Herrn Piscator: gegen die Verschlampung und Verhudelung des Textes; gegen den Schauspieler George, der in ganzen Szenen kein Wort des Manuskriptes sprach, sondern Quatsch, Kitsch und Unsinn redete." From a letter to the administration of the Volksbühne from Ehm Welk, quoted in Jürgen Rühle, p. 140.

³⁸"wäre ich der Verfasser dieses Dramas, ich hätte mir nach der Vorstellung ein paar Pistolen gekauft und den Regisseur--er hiess Piscator--auf Kugelwechsel bis zur Kampfunfähigkeit gefordert." Paul Fechter, Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung (Berlin), 24 March 1927.

³⁹Erwin Piscator, Das politische Theater, p. 108.

Volksbühne], a group of young workers within the membership of the Volksbühne's subscription audience, held a protest meeting of all interested parties at 8:00 P.M. in the Festsaal of the Herrenhaus, the upper house of the Prussian Landtag [stage legislature]. The meeting resulted in a document of support for Piscator's right to produce a politically oriented play in the Volksbühne.⁴⁰ As many as two thousand people attended the protest meeting and heard the poet and editor of the Weltbühne, Kurt Tucholsky, as well as the authors Leo Lania, Heinrich Mann, Alfons Paquet and Alfred Döblin speak in favor of Piscator and political drama.⁴¹ Piscator's cast from Gewitter also appeared in support of their director.

Piscator's supporters numbering 2000 at the Herrenhaus protest meeting were small compared to the 155,000 membership of the Volksbühne.⁴² Nevertheless, the event received comment in all available newspapers. Monty Jacobs, drama critic for the Vossische Zeitung, who had reviewed Piscator's productions since Die Kleinbürger in the Central Theater in 1922, wrote that without a doubt Piscator had ignited a new phase in his development.⁴³ The phrase most often used

⁴⁰"Der Versuch des Vorstandes, sein rigoroses Vorgehen gegen den lebendigsten und zukunftsreichsten Künstler und Kämpfer in seiner Mitte mit der Verpflichtung zu "grundsätzlicher politischer Neutralität," die ihm obläge, zu begründen widerspricht dem Geist, aus dem die Volksbühne geschaffen wurde." Tageblatt (Berlin), 5 April 1927.

⁴¹Die Rote Fahne (Berlin), 1 April 1927.

⁴²"Hauptversammlung der Volksbühne," in Blätter der Volksbühne (Berlin), January 1926, newsletter preserved in the archives of the Volksbühne, East Berlin.

⁴³Monty Jacobs, Vossische Zeitung (Berlin), 1 April 1927. "Ohne Zweifel hat Erwin Piscator in der neusten Phase seiner Entwicklung gezündigt."

to describe Piscator's production Gewitter was Zeittheater,⁴⁴ or theater which dealt with contemporary political and social problems. An anonymous article in the Berlin Tageblatt gave the most explicit definition of the term: "ein Theater, im Stoff und Form der Gegenwart nahe" [a theater relevant to the present in matter and form].⁴⁵

Opposition to Piscator continued. The Volksbühne ran an emasculated version of Gewitter the last two days of March and sixteen times during April, a version which presented the text as Welk wrote it, and omitted Piscator's textual alterations, filming and costume changes.⁴⁶ Journalistic opposition to Piscator seems to have come from the right-wing newspaper Vorwärts which claimed that Die Rote Fahne hoped to use the group of artists who supported Piscator to turn the Volksbühne into an instrument of communist propaganda.⁴⁷ Vorwärts reported that the Berlin Tageblatt, the Berlin Zeitung, and the Börsen-Courier (all of which had given Gewitter favorable reviews) printed the party line direct from Moscow.⁴⁸ In spite of journalistic opposition, Piscator's career made a significant advance during the 1926-27 season as the director's agit-prop methods of directing

⁴⁴The report in the Tageblatt (Berlin) was entitled: "Konsumverein oder Zeittheater" Tageblatt (Berlin) 31 March 1927. Jacobs report was entitled "Die Zeit und das Theater" Vossische Zeitung (Berlin), 1 April 1927.

⁴⁵"Konsumverein oder Zeittheater," Tageblatt (Berlin), 31 March 1927.

⁴⁶Die Rote Fahne, 29 March 1927.

⁴⁷"Sie (Die Rote Fahne) möchte aus der kleinen Gruppe der Oppositionellen eine Zelle konstruieren, um die Volksbühne als kommunistisches Propagandaorgan in die Hand zu bekommen." Vorwärts (Berlin), 1 April 1927.

⁴⁸Ibid.

moved into conventional theater. Piscator's experiments in agit-prop often preceded his innovations in conventional theater as in his use of motion picture film in Trotz Alledem and subsequently in Sturmflut. In Die Räuber and Gewitter Piscator made blatant political references through costuming and wax masks as he had done in Trotz Alledem and RRR. Perhaps the distinguishing factor of Piscator's directing in 1926-27 was its lack of subtlety, for political references became so pronounced in Gewitter that the Volksbühne no longer tolerated them. A Piscator production could no longer be considered as mere entertainment but had to be viewed as political comment. For this the Volksbühne dismissed him. Far from changing his ways, however, he decided to continue his own style of production unencumbered in his own theater venture.

CHAPTER VIII
THE FIRST PISCATOR-BÜHNE
1927-1928

Erwin Piscator ended a three-year association with the Volksbühne in March 1927, and in September of the same year opened his own theater, the first Piscator-Bühne. The aspiring director did not wait, however, for his break with the Volksbühne to begin planning his own theater. Serious discussion of a Piscator-theater first arose during the last of July and first of August 1926, while Piscator vacationed in Bandol, France, not far from Marseilles.

While working on the script of Toller's new play, "Scheunenveitel,"¹ Piscator and Ernst Toller vacationed together with Erich Engel, Wilhelm Herzog and Otto Katz. The five composed a varied and creative group. In 1926 Engel held the position of a Spielleiter or Regisseur, the production director of a show in the Berliner Staatstheater, an organization of four state-supported theaters in Berlin under the administration of Leopold Jessner. Wilhelm Herzog, an editor of literary journals in Berlin since 1907, antedated both

¹Erwin Piscator, Das politische Theater, p. 121. Note: a review of the listings in Deutscher Bücherverzeichnis ["German Index of Books"] failed to reveal any publication of "Scheunenveitel" between 1926 and 1935. Presumably Toller never completed the play.

²Deutsches Bühne-Jahrbuch, XXXVII (1927), 641.

Piscator and Toller by some ten years.³ Otto Katz, who headed the advertising department of the weekly Berlin newspaper Montag Morgen, centered his interest in theater around his wife, the actress Sonja Boggs. Piscator, Toler, Engel, Herzog and Katz discussed the possibilities of founding not only a leftist theater, but also a periodical which, according to Piscator, "alle linken intellektuellen Kräfte zusammenfassen sollten" [should bring together all of the leftist intellectual powers].⁴

By Piscator's own admission the group never expected to see any of their plans materialize, for none of them could suggest an adequate scheme to finance their proposed theater and periodical.⁵ Nevertheless, two months later financial assistance appeared from an unexpected source, the actress Tilla Durieux. Born and schooled in Vienna, and acting in Berlin since 1903 under such directors as Max Reinhardt and Leopold Jessner, Tilla Durieux held the fancy of the theater public in Berlin as early as 1910 by excelling not only in varied classical roles such as Electra, Clytemnestra, and Shakespeare's

³ Herzog served as editor for three literary periodicals, Pam (1909-1910), März (1913), and Das Forum (1914-1915). He translated six of Romain Rolland's works from French to German, edited publications of the collected letters of Lichtenberg and Kleist, and had written two books by 1924. Handbuch der deutschen Gegenwartsliteratur ["Handbook of Contemporary German Literature"], Hermann Kunisch, editor, (Munich, Nymphenburger Verlag, 1965), p. 463.

⁴ Erwin Piscator, Das politische Theater, p. 123.

⁵ Ibid.

Titania, but also in more modern parts such as Hedda Gabbler and Eliza in Pygmalion.⁶ The occasion of Tilla Durieux's first acquaintance with Piscator's work came in September 1927, when the actress attended a performance of Die Räuber in the Staatstheater. In her memoirs she describes her pleasure and fascination with Piscator's directing:

His direction so pleased me that I sought to meet him personally. He told me of his plans, which so fascinated me that I resolved to find him the money for a theater.⁷

According to her memoirs, Tilla Durieux gave Piscator 400,000 gold marks toward establishing his own theater. She does not give the exact date of the transaction, nor her source for such a sum of money, but most probably she obtained the marks from Ludwig Katznellenbogen, the general director of the Schultheiss-Brauerei, one of the larger breweries in Berlin.⁸ Katznellenbogen divorced his wife and married Tilla Durieux in 1930.

After receiving financial backing, Piscator encountered trouble from the city police of Berlin when he attempted to obtain a Koncession. The city officials required that the Piscator-Bühne post

⁶Der grosse Brockhaus, III, 399.

⁷"Seine Regie gefiel mir so sehr, dass ich seine persönliche Bekanntschaft suchte. Er erzählte mir von seinen Plänen die mich so fesselten, dass ich mich entschloss, ihm das Geld für ein Theater zu verschaffen." Tilla Durieux, Ein Tür steht offen ["One Door Stands Open"] (Berlin, Herbig Verlag, 1958), p. 149.

⁸Jügen Rühle, p. 140. Note: Tilla Durieux gives the worth of the brewery, together with its subsidiary holdings as 250 million marks in 1928. Durieux, p. 151.

Kautionsgeld [security] of between 30,000 and 40,000 marks against the possibility of bankruptcy.⁹ This was the first of several actions by which the local police tried to hinder the Piscator-Bühne. Fortunately for Piscator, he was able to raise the money.

By 24 May 1927, newspapers announced that the new Piscator-Bühne would be housed in the Theater am Nollendorfpfplatz,¹⁰ and only three months later the organization premièred its first production. In spite of the speed with which Piscator pulled together his theater which became known for its dedication to the proletarian revolution, the organization of the whole endeavor appears quite sound and definitely thorough.¹¹

Apart from donations such as that of Tilla Durieux's money, the Piscator-Bühne received its capital from three main sources: daily box office receipts, subscription membership in the Piscator-Bühne, and advanced sales membership in the Sonderabteilung, a special subscription program worked out between the Piscator-Bühne and the Volksbühne.

⁹ Piscator claims that the sum was far in excess of the norm. He cites as proof the Kautionsgeld which the managers of the Lessing Theater posted during the 1927-28 season, only 4,000 to 6,000 marks. Erwin Piscator, Schriften II, p. 84.

¹⁰ Deutsche Zeitung (Berlin), 24 May 1927.

¹¹ Both Fiebach and Pfützner list the Piscator-Bühne as Germany's first significant theater dedicated to the proletarian revolt. Fiebach, p. 245, and Klaus Pfützner, Schriften zur Theaterwissenschaft, Bd. 1, p. 437. Today any theater in East Germany would fit the description of a theater dedicated to presenting the proletarian revolution.

The theater in Germany, with only a few exceptions, received no support from the state during the twenties, being strictly a private enterprise of individual directors.¹² Financially, Piscator assumed responsibility for the entire venture at the Theater am Nollendorfplatz when he signed the Koncession.¹³

As a result of the box office and subscription sales, Piscator's audience was composed of mainly two classes of people: the workers who bought their tickets through either of the subscription plans for 1.50 marks per performance, and bourgeois who bought their tickets at the box office for various prices up to eighteen marks. Of the two subscription plans, the Sonderabteilung is perhaps the more confusing since it was actually part of the Volksbühne, Piscator's one-time employer.

The Sonderabteilung of the Volksbühne came into existence at the suggestion of Piscator soon after he established the location of the Piscator-Bühne in June 1927.¹⁴ He needed the firm footing of assured

¹² Ernst Aufricht, "Die erregenden Zwanziger Jahre," ["The Exciting Twenties"] in Julius Bab und das Theater der Republik, Dr. Walter Huder, editor (Berlin, no publisher, 1967) p. 31.

¹³ Fiebach located this document in the file "Akte Theaterunternehmer Erwin Piscator," in the archives, Brandenburgisches Landeshauptarchiv. Piscator signed a Koncession earlier, in 1920, for the Proletarian Theater, but in 1921 the police chief of Berlin refused to renew Piscator's Koncession, forcing the director to disband his troupe. Das politische Theater, p. 44.

¹⁴ Blätter der Volksbühne (Berlin), "Neugestaltung der Sonderabteilung" ["New Arrangement of the Special Section"], September, October 1927, p. 3.

ticket sales to finance his experiments in the Piscator-Bühne, which the Volksbühne could offer since it had extensive experience in organizing and running subscription programs. In 1893 it began its existence with only 1200 subscription members, and by 1925 membership had increased twelvefold to 155,000.¹⁵ The Volksbühne organized this massive membership according to interest groups, each of which elected delegates who had a voice in the affairs of the Volksbühne. One of these groups, the Volksbühnenjugend supported Piscator vigorously throughout the storm over Gewitter über Gottland and the director's dismissal. Subsequently Piscator proposed that the Volksbühne create a Sonderabteilung [special section or interest group], which the two theater groups would share;¹⁶ consequently, the Sonderabteilung offered four performances at the Haus am Bülowplatz, two performances at the Theater am Schiffbauerdamm and five performances at the Piscator-Bühne. Advertisement promised that all eleven of these performances would be "Zeittheater," a term used to describe plays which "take their material from the struggles of the times."¹⁷

The Volksbühnenjugend waged a subscription drive which resulted in a total membership of 16,000 in the Sonderabteilung. The young workers directed their sales pitch toward workers and sympathizers

¹⁵Blätter der Volksbühne (Berlin), "Hauptversammlung der Volksbühne Geschäfts- und Vorstandsbericht über das Spieljahr 1924/25" ["General Business Report of the Volksbühne for the 1924-25 Season"], January-February 1926.

¹⁶Blätter der Volksbühne (Berlin), "Neugestaltung der Sonderabteilung."

¹⁷"...ihren Stoff aus dem Kämpfen der Zeit schöpfen." Ibid.

with the proletariat movement:

Help us, so that these special sections of the Volksbühne will grow strong and powerful! Do it, to show the strength of the wish and the will of the masses to have a contemporary theater, which will lend its artistic support to the struggle of the proletarian masses.¹⁸

Unfortunately, no figures are available on the regular membership of the Piscator-Bühne.¹⁹ In all probability the Sonderabteilung's 16,000 membership represented many more members than the Piscator-Bühne's own subscription program. Aside from the inclusion of a reprinted advertisement for subscription membership in the Piscator-Bühne, Piscator does not mention his own subscription program in the text of Das politische Theater.

While the Volksbühnenjugend solicited subscriptions for the Piscator-Bühne, at least one journalist turned his attention to the location of the Theater am Nollendorfplatz, which stood in the upper-class "west end" of Berlin, that is, the section of the city west of the Brandenburg Gate, north of Bayerischen Platz and south of the Tiergarten. Stefan Grossmann, the editor of the theater periodical, Das Tagebuch, questioned the choice of a west end location. Grossmann points out that Piscator passed over several theaters in sections of the city where the workers traditionally live, such as

¹⁸"Hilf mit, dass diese Sonderabteilungen der Volksbühne sich mächtig und stark entwickeln! Tue es, um zu zeigen, wie gross in den Massen der Wunsch und Wille ist, ein Zeittheater zu haben, das mit neuen künstlerischen Mitteln dem Kampf der proletarischen Massen seine Unterstützung leiht!" Reprinted in Erwin Piscator, Das politische Theater, p. 119.

¹⁹Piebach concurs on the absence of figures, p. 250.

Neu-Kölln or Schonhauser Allee.²⁰ Piscator, on the other hand, argues that the Theater am Nollendorfplatz was the only theater available which offered him adequate facilities for his technical experiments:

Of the theaters available at that time, the Theater am Nollendorfplatz was the most suitable. Of the other stages on the selected list, the one had too small of a seating capacity, with degenerated stage facilities which would have been costly to repair. The other theater was even farther west.²¹

Piscator seems to have preferred a theater which offered him facilities for technical experimentation rather than a theater located in a section where the proletariat lived.

Available descriptions of the Theater am Nollendorfplatz reveal that it possessed spacious technical facilities.²² Smaller than the Volksbühne's Haus am Bülowplatz, and with better acoustics, the Theater am Nollendorfplatz housed a revolving stage and a full cyclorama. Other advantages of the theater included easy access to a workroom located directly behind the stage and a seating capacity of 1100.

²⁰ Stefan Grossmann, "An Piscator", Das Tagebuch ["The Diary"], VIII (18 June 1927), 997. Monty Jacobs expresses the same sentiments in the Vossische Zeitung, 24 January 1928.

²¹"Von allen verfügbaren Theatern war damals das Nollendorfplatz-theater am geeignetsten. Von den anderen in engerer Wahl stehenden Bühnen besass die eine einen zu geringen Fassungsraum und einen technisch ganz verfallenen Bühnenapparat, dessen Instandsetzung grosse Reparaturkosten erfordert hätte; das andere Theater lag noch weiter westlich. Erwin Piscator, Das politische Theater, p. 127.

²²A floor plan of the Theater am Nollendorfplatz appears in Erwin Piscator, Das politische Theater, p. 135.

Following his selection of a house, Piscator invited leading left-wing artists to assist him in directing productions of the Piscator-Bühne. These artists made up the dramaturgisches Kollektiv [a collective Dramaturg],²³ which Piscator defined as "eine Art kollektiver Regie" [a sort of collective direction].²⁴ Piscator seemed to expect the dramaturgisches Kollektiv to work for him as artistic assistants:

Our Dramaturg had to be capable of not only reworking a given play, but also of piecing it together scenically and textually in the closest dependance on my directorial point of view.²⁵

Piscator organized the Kollektiv to alleviate the scarcity of scripts for production by his political theater, a problem he described as arising because

"Poets" (writers) who are part of this movement have not yet come forth. Therefore, adaptors."²⁶

The Kollektiv supplied Piscator with both original plays and adaptations of earlier works. Piscator's theatrical organization needed the Kollektiv as much as the subscription audience: the one supplied the money with which to operate, the other, the scripts.

²³The position Dramaturg is roughly equivalent to the position of artistic director of the American theater system. Das Atlantishbuch des Theaters, p. 970.

²⁴Erwin Piscator, Börsen Courier (Berlin), 25 December 1927.

²⁵"Unser Dramaturg musste imstande sein, aus unserer politischen Haltung heraus ein vorliegendes Stück nicht nur zu bearbeiten, sondern in engster Anlehnung an meiner Regieabsichten szenisch zu entwickeln und tetlich mitzugestalten." Erwin Piscator, Das politische Theater (1963), p. 139.

²⁶"Ein Bedürfnis (i.e., Zeittheater) war geschaffen und die Produktion beeilte sich, diesem Bedürfnis nachzukommen. "Dichter" sind

Available information does not clarify the exact organization of the dramaturgisches Kollektiv. Although the Deutsches Bühnen Jahrbuch ["German Stage Yearbook"] lists the communist writer and associate of Piscator, Felix Gasbarra, as Dramaturg of the Piscator-Bühne,²⁷ Piscator writes that Gasbarra only acted as organizational director of the individual talents of the dramatisches Kollektiv, some fifteen experienced artists, writers and composers.²⁸ Among the members of the dramatisches Kollektiv Piscator names the communist party writers Felix Gasbarra and Bela Balazs, the poet, Johannes R. Becher, the journalist, Leo Lania, the poets Walter Mehring and Kurt Tucholsky, the literary editor, Wilhelm Herzog, the playwrights Bertolt Brecht and Ernst Toller and the author Erich Mühsam. These artists worked on shows in no discernable pattern but as Piscator needed them.

According to Wassilij Linke, close friend of Piscator, the members of the dramatisches Kollektiv did not always receive pay for their services, and at times this was a source of friction within the group.²⁹ Brecht, standing in the wings during an unidentified

dabei bis jetzt noch nicht herausgekommen, dafür Konjunkturisten." Erwin Piscator, Das politische Theater, p. 89. Note: parenthetical inclusions not in the original.

²⁷ Deutsches Bühnen Jahrbuch 1927-1928, "Theater am Nollendorfpplatz (Piscatorbühne)," XXXIX (1928), 262.

²⁸ Erwin Piscator, Das politische Theater (1963), p. 141.

²⁹ Wassilij Linke, private interview held at the Akademie der Künste, West Berlin, December 1969.

rehearsal, shouted, "My name is a mark and whoever uses this mark must pay for it."³⁰

Pay was not the only source of friction within the Kollektiv. Several of the artists found it difficult to submit their own works to their fellow artists for adaptation or alteration, a practice upon which Piscator insisted. The young journalist Leo Lania, author of Konjunktur, the fourth production of the Piscator-Bühne, objected to the "enormous demands" which "restricted the spiritual and artistic freedom. That is bitter. That is hard."³¹ The young journalist admits, however, that he profited from this discipline. Some of the older writers such as Wilhelm Herzog, made it clear to Piscator that they did not intend to work under the leadership of other writers.³² Otto Katz, general business manager of the Piscator-Bühne, played the diplomat and somehow kept these temperamental artists working together through the 1927-28 season.

Piscator claimed that the idea of a dramaturgisches Kollektiv came from the Volksbühne where Arthur Holitscher, novelist and author,

³⁰"Mein Name ist eine Mark, und wer diese Mark benutzt, muss dafür zahlen." Erwin Piscator, Das politische Theater (1963) p. 141.

³¹"Sie stellt an jeden der Mitarbeiter ungeheure Anforderungen: Nicht nur setzt die Disziplin voraus, Unterordnung des einzelnen unter die gemeinsame Aufgabe, sie beschränkt auch die geistig und künstlerische Freizügigkeit. Das ist bitter, das ist hart." Leo Lania, Welt im Umbruch ["World in Revolution"] (Frankfurt: Forum Verlag, 1955), p. 268.

³²Erwin Piscator, Das politische Theater (1963), p. 141.

as well as Alfred Wolfenstein, author and leader of the expressionist literary circle "November Gruppe," and Hans von Zwehl, a drama critic contributed irregularly their ideas and suggestions toward various productions in a sort of informal Kollektiv.³³

While literary aspects of each production held the attention of the Piscator Kollektiv, theatrical training and experimentation occupied the members of the Studio of the Piscator-Bühne. Piscator described the Studio as a laboratory for practice and experimentation in all fields of theater.³⁴

One field of experimentation was acting. The studio served Piscator as a laboratory in which Piscator wanted to develop a new technique of acting compatible with his machinery:

The actor accustomed to playing between the standing decorations of the old, middle class stage, needs to discover the style which is proper for my stage contrivances. Here it is a matter of year-long training, schooling, and experience.

Piscator mentions specific problems which the actors encountered, playing on the gigantic mechanical constructions, timing dialogue to intermesh with filmed sequences, and acting while upon a moving treadmill.³⁶

³³Erwin Piscator, Das politische Theater, p. 140.

³⁴"Hier gewinnt das Studio die Aufgabe eines Laboratoriums, in den an immer neuen Aufgaben die Mitglieder des Theaters und alle ihm verbundenen Kräfte sich praktisch erproben können, dass Gebiet des Theaters von allen Punkten aus überblicken lernen. . ." Ibid., p. 143.

³⁵"Es ist selbstverständlich, dass der Schauspieler, der gewöhnt ist, zwischen den stehenden Dekorationen der alten, bürgerlichen Bühne zu spielen, erst sehr langsam den Stil findet, der meiner Bühnenapparat adäquat ist. Es ist eine Sache langjähriger Erziehung, Schulung und Erfahrung." Ibid., p. 152.

³⁶Ibid.

Although the exact membership of the Studio remains uncertain, professional performers composed a large section of the laboratory. The Studio originated officially at a meeting of all festengagierten Mitglieder (i.e., professional actors listed in the Deutscher Bühnen-Jahrbuch, the annual listing of engagements of German professional actors) of the Piscator-Bühne on 16 October 1927.³⁷ Announcements of the formation of the Studio do not indicate whether it was composed of only the company of the first Piscator-Bühne, or if some private students also attended the lectures.³⁸

According to a report on the founding of the Studio (16 October 1927), Piscator divided his laboratory into three sections with an immediate, practical goal for each section. Group I prepared as a practical experiment a studio production of Singende Galgenvögel ["Singing Jailbirds"] (Upton Sinclair) and Heimweh ["Homesick"]³⁹ (Franz Jung). Group II prepared a production of Märchen, a group of folk tales. Group III, a Lehrstudio [seminar], offered lectures in various aspects of theater: character and ensemble acting, gymnastics, foreign languages, stage diction, direction, theater history,

³⁷ Ibid., p. 144.

³⁸ A close examination of the one available cast list of a Studio production (Heimweh, on 8 January 1928) against the listings of members of the Piscator-Bühne found in the 1927/28 Deutscher Bühnen-Jahrbuch reveals that three members of the cast of eleven were not actively engaged members of the Piscator-Bühne.³⁹ The Studio could have included a small number of non-professional actors. Die deutsche Bühne, "Die neue Spielzeit 1927/28," XIX (29 August 1927), 214.

³⁹ Deutscher Bühnen-Jahrbuch, "Theater am Nollendorfplatz (Piscator-Bühne)," XXXIX (1928), 262-263.

set construction, costuming and film.⁴⁰ The entire membership of the Piscator-Bühne took part in gymnastic classes under Fritz Sommer and diction classes under Margaret Wellhorner.⁴¹ According to a December report of Group III, the gymnastic and speech lessons met daily: speech from 11:30 A.M. to 12:30 P.M.: gymnastics, the following hour.⁴² In addition the actor Erwin Kalser offered a Szenenstudium [acting class],⁴³ the Piscator-Bühne's own set designer, Traugott Müller, lectured in set design and two members of the dramaturgisches Kollektiv, Gasbarra and Lania, spoke on dramaturgy.⁴⁴

Apparently the Studio's offerings did not fulfill Piscator's expectations, however, for six weeks after the founding a report of Group III of the Studio lodged the following specific complaints of

⁴⁰ Erwin Piscator, Das politische Theater, p. 145.

⁴¹ Unfortunately, nothing further is known of these two teachers. A search of the Deutscher Bühnen-Jahrbuch of 1927 and 1926 revealed no listed employment for either. Both are indexed, however, in the 1928 yearbook, under the Piscator-Bühne.

⁴² An advocate of gymnastic exercise for the actor, Piscator himself boxed (as did Bertolt Brecht) and installed a punching bag and other exercise equipment in his apartment, a picture of which appeared in Die Dame. Designed by a member of the Bauhaus group of architects the apartment was the latest in modern living. Die Dame provided several pictures of the newly furnished interior. Die Dame, Number 14 (1928), pp. 10-12. In Das politische Theater, Piscator registered his disapproval of these pictures, which he did not intend for publication. Erwin Piscator, Das politische Theater, p. 248.

⁴³ Erwin Kalser had been acting professionally in Berlin since 1911. Deutsches Theater Lexikon, p. 953.

⁴⁴ Erwin Piscator, Das politische Theater, p. 226.

lax handling in its program: Tilla Durieux had reneged on her promise to offer acting lectures; Alexander Granach, one of the leading actors of the Piscator-Bühne, had not yet appeared for a scheduled lecture on acting; and although Erwin Kalser's lectures on Szenenstudium had begun, the actor had met the Studio group only twice.⁴⁵ The first and second groups submitted a report which showed more accomplishments. Group I prepared Galgenvögel, and Group II, a presentation of Märchen [Fables]. Galgenvögel eventually reached the boards (1 March 1928).

Piscator did not treat the Studio as a school separate from the Piscator-Bühne, but instead attached its work to that of the main stage. The Studio mounted four productions in the course of the 1927-28 season. Although the Studio played a secondary role in the story of the first Piscator-Bühne, such learning groups reappear constantly in Piscator's work. Both the second and third Piscator-Bühne had studios, and Piscator's entire stay in New York revolved around the work of the Dramatic Workshop of the New School for Social Research, a studio similar to that which was part of the first Piscator-Bühne.

HOPPLA WIR LEBEN

Piscator's first choice for an opening production fell initially on Wilhelm Herzog's Rings um den Staatsanwalt ["Ring Around the

⁴⁵Quoted in Erwin Piscator, Das politische Theater, p. 224.

Public Prosecutor"]. Piscator wanted to begin with a play developed from his own "circle of ideas."⁴⁶ He commissioned Herzog to write such a play for 2,000 marks. Upon reading the first drafts, however, the political director was "masslos enttäuscht" [immeasurably disappointed] that Herzog pieced together mere newspaper reports of various political events and wrote almost no dialogue to bridge the pieces. After rejecting Herzog's play,⁴⁷ Piscator contacted Ernst Toller concerning the possibility of a play on the theme which the two men discussed in the spring of 1927; a dramatization of a revolutionary Marxist who, released after eight years in an insane asylum, views the changes Berlin has undergone. This discussion resulted in Hoppla, wir leben ["Hooray, We Live"].⁴⁸

This play concerns Karl Thomas, a fifteen-year-old who, in the prologue is pardoned by the Weimar Republic only minutes before he is to be executed for his part in a leftist uprising. The narrow escape brings on a mental breakdown.

Act one opens eight years later as Thomas receives his discharge from the insane asylum. He visits William Kilman, a former leftist

⁴⁶Erwin Piscator, Das politische Theater, p. 146.

⁴⁷Note: Rings um den Staatsanwalt premièred finally at a matinée in Berlin's Theater des Westens on 6 April 1928. Die deutsche Bühne, 11 June 1928, p. 145. This production followed soon after Herzog disassociated himself from the dramatisches Kollektiv, declaring that his play had not been written as a dramatic exercise. Richard Wilde, 8 Uhr Blatt, 7 May 1928.

⁴⁸Unfortunately, no prompt book remains of Piscator's production of Hoppla. The plot summary and stage directions are in a 1927 edition of Hoppla (Ernst Toller, Hoppla, wir leben! Ein Vorspiel und fünf Akten ["Hooray, we Live! A Prologue and Five Acts"], Potsdam: Gustav

friend who, as minister of finance now ignores Thomas. Eva Berg, Kilman's secretary and likewise a one-time leftist, takes Thomas to her apartment where he stays for several days. During this time he meets Albert Kroll and Frau Müller, friends who have remained true to their leftist leanings.

The Grand Hotel hires Karl Thomas as a waiter, a job which requires that he visit various floors on various duties, interrupting scenes but being excused and ignored until he reaches the radio tower on the roof. The plush hotel and the radio messages amaze Thomas who has been out of touch with the world for eight years.

When Kilman visits the hotel on business, he ignores Thomas just as everyone else has ignored the waiter. In a fit of anger, Karl decides to shoot Kilman, but before he can fire his pistol, an unidentified radical assassinates Kilman. Shocked, Thomas fires at the assassin who escapes. The police arrive, misunderstand and arrest Thomas for Kilman's murder. Thrown once again into jail, Thomas hangs himself in despair.

A review of the background of Hoppla, Toller's fifth play, reveals that the plot bore a resemblance to an event in its author's own lifetime. Toller took an active part in the Räte-Republik, a short-lived communist coup of the Bavarian government centered in

Kiepenheuer Verlag, 1927). Presumably, this edition followed the acting edition: no comments in the available reviews seem to contradict this assumption; the date of publication follows the Piscator première closely; and finally, the 1927 edition carries as a dedication the words "Grüsse an Erwin Piscator und Walter Mehring" [Greetings to Erwin Piscator and Walter Mehring] (Mehring wrote the words to the song "Hoppla! Wir leben!" sung in the fourth act.)

Munich in the winter of 1918/19.⁴⁹ For his part in this uprising, the legitimate Bavarian government sentenced the playwright to five years in prison. Conceivably, Toller experienced much of Thomas' disillusionment following his release.⁵⁰ Unlike Thomas, however, Toller built a reputation as an author while serving his term in the Bavarian prison. Toller received his sentence in Munich on 16 July 1919, and on 30 September, the same year, his first play, Die Wandlung ["The Transformation"] premiered in Berlin at Die Tribüne, directed by Karl Heinz Martin. A number of incidents transpired to make the author of Die Wandlung "über Nacht bekannt" [famous overnight].⁵¹

Die Wandlung at Die Tribüne ranks as one of the first political theater ventures in Berlin, an experiment which, in part, caused Piscator to return from Königsberg to the metropolis. Die Wandlung introduced its director, Karl Heinz Martin, to the Berlin Theater, in which he remained active for some fifteen years, rising to the position of artistic director of the Volksbühne in 1929.⁵² Die Wandlung also introduced the actor Fritz Körtner to Berlin. His

⁴⁹ Handbuch der deutschen Gegenwartsliteratur, p. 578.

⁵⁰ A second similarity to Thomas was to appear much later in Toller's life. Exiled by Hitler in 1933, the playwright hanged himself in New York on 22 May 1939. Handbuch der Gegenwartsliteratur, p. 579.

⁵¹ Günther Rühle, p. 156.

⁵² Der grosse Brockhaus, V, 560.

performance was so successful that immediately following the collapse of Die Tribüne, Leopold Jessner invited him to join his company at the Staatstheater, where Körtner played leading roles throughout the twenties.⁵³ Karl Heinz Martin, the Tribüne, and Fritz Körtner coincided and made Toller, in his prison cell, famous overnight through the production of the revolutionists' first play.

While still in prison, Toller wrote three additional plays, Masse Mensch ["Masses and Man"] (1921), Die Maschinenstürmer ["The Machine Wreckers"] (1922) and Hinkemann (1923). These plays also received their première during Toller's incarceration. Upon his release in 1924, Toller published Schwalbenbuch ["The Swallow Book"], a book of poetry. Hoppla, wir leben appeared in print three years later.

The German theater historian Günther Rühle writes that many Germans of the twenties considered Toller a "Heiliger der Revolution" [saint of the revolution, i.e., the attempted communist coup of 1918/19].⁵⁴ In choosing Hoppla for his opening production, Piscator appears to have achieved his objective of beginning with someone of his own socialist bent. Although Piscator agreed with Toller's philosophy, the director objected that Karl Thomas appeared too autobiographical. "The times of ego-art are gone . . . Karl Thomas is anything but a class-conscious proletarian."⁵⁵

⁵³Fritz Körtner was never a member of the Piscator-Bühne.

⁵⁴Günther Rühle, p. 156.

⁵⁵"Die Zeiten der Ich-Kunst sind vorbei . . . Karl Thomas ist alles andere als ein klassenbewusster Proletarier" Erwin Piscator, Das politische Theater, pp. 147-138.

In order to offset the personal autobiographical aspects of Karl Thomas' character, Piscator attempted through filmed interludes to combine the development of the revolutionist's personal fate with general historical determinants of the twenties: "Here, as always, we took as our guide the development of a personal fate out of general historical determinants: we tried dramatically to bind the fate of Karl Thomas with the war and revolution of 1918."⁵⁶ In this attempt Piscator compiled a film manuscript of some 400 specific dates of political, economical, cultural, sporting, business and fashion significance over the previous ten years.⁵⁷

Exactly how many of these 400 specific dates Piscator actually used remains unknown. Two members of the technical staff of the Piscator-Bühne, Kurt Örtel and Simon Guttman, compiled the final scenario and supervised the shooting of some 3,000 meters (c. 9,000 feet) of new film for the production, including much of Berlin's "local color" and even the front of the Theater am Nollendorfpplatz.⁵⁸ A third member of the technical staff, Viktor Blumm, headed a committee which researched the archives of several professional film companies for fictional or documentary material of the previous ten years. The work of these three men resulted in a highly spliced film of both old and newly shot segments.

⁵⁶"Hier wie immer massgebend: Einzelschicksal aus dem allgemeinen historischen Factoren abzuleiten, das Schicksal des Thomas dramatisch zu verbinden mit Krieg und Revolution." Ibid., p. 151.

⁵⁷Ibid.

⁵⁸Ibid.

Although no description remains of the complete film which accompanied Hoppla, the first three film interludes can be reconstructed at least partially. The Kiepenheuer edition of the script indicates a total of seven filmed Zwischenspiele [interludes], each of which Piscator used as an introduction to the action of the following scene.

Preceding the prologue a filmed sequence showed documentary scenes of World War I, of the 1919 revolution in Berlin, and of its repression by the German military.⁵⁹ After the documentation, a symbolic sequence concluded the filmed segment: "the wearer of a medal-laden uniform without a head is shown, whose medals are ripped off violently."⁶⁰

Following Thomas' nervous breakdown at the end of the Prologue, a filmed segment served both as a transition to the insane asylum and a documentation of the following eight years:

Thereafter, a new film interrupts, which focuses on still pictures of Thomas' stay in the asylum and, showing men going insane, sketches national and international developments of the time from 1919 to 1927.⁶¹

Then followed immediately film sketches of national and international developments in some detail:

⁵⁹Toller, p. 8.

⁶⁰"... der Träger einer ordensgeschmückten Uniform ohne Kopf gezeigt, dem die Orden gewaltsam abgerissen werden." Fiebach, p. 263. Fiebach based his information on the Berlin police report numbered IML Akte, 12/227, Bl. 49.

⁶¹"Darauf setzte ein neue Film ein, der ständig Bilder von Thomas, Aufenthalt in der Heilanstalt einblendet und Menschen zeigend, die irrsinnig werden, internationale und nationale Entwicklungen in der Zeit von 1919 bis 1927 skizzierte." Ibid.

On the screen: scenes of the years 1919 to 1927: 1919: the treaty of Versailles. 1920: Stock market unrest in New York. Men going insane. 1921: Fascism in Italy. 1922: Hunger in Vienna. Men going insane. 1924: Lenin's death in Russia. Newspaper obituary: Mrs. Louise Thomas died this evening. 1925: Gandhi in India. 1926: Fighting in China. Conference of European leaders in Europe. 1927: the face of a clock. The hands move forward, first slowly and then more and more rapidly. Sound: clocks.⁶²

In this post-prologue sequence, Piscator used film to complete developments of the fictional plot (showing still pictures of Thomas in the asylum and the death notice of his mother, Frau Thomas), to document the historic developments between 1919 and 1927, and to make symbolic comment (the wildly swinging hands of the clock). The entire sequence lasted seven minutes, indicating that the individual segments may have been very short.⁶³

Following the seven-minute sequence the psychiatrist, Dr. Lüdín, interviews Thomas on stage, and releases him from the hospital. The reviewer, Paul Fechter, describes the end of the interview and the filmed transition:

⁶²"Auf der Leinwand: Szenen aus den Jahren 1919-1927. 1919: Vertrag von Versailles. 1920: Börsenunruhen in New York. Menschen werden irrsinnig. 1921: Faschismus in Italien. 1922: Hunger in Wien. Menschen werden irrsinnig. 1923: Inflation in Deutschland. Menschen werden irrsinnig. 1924: Lenins Tod in Russland. Zeitungsnotiz: Heute Nacht starb Frau Louise Thomas. 1925: Gandhi in Indien. 1926: Kämpfe in China. Konferenz europäischer Führer in Europa. 1927: Zeigerblatt einer Uhr. Die Zeiger rücken vor. Erst langsam . . . dann rascher und rascher . . . Geräusche: Uhren." Toller, pp. 21-22.

⁶³Günther Rühle, p. 791.

Karl claps his hat on his head and exits. The front screen descends rapidly: he (Karl) appears on film and wanders through twisted streets.⁶⁴

The available materials preclude a further reconstruction of the film accompanying Hoppla. These first three sequences indicate that Piscator used the projections in Hoppla for symbolism, for documentation and to continue the action of the plot. The action of the play flowed directly into short film segments spliced from many sources, and represented the director's attempt to link Thomas' personal fate with documented historic developments of the twenties.

For the first time Piscator used translucent cloth coverings on the walls of the set resulting in the opportunity to project an image on the set's back wall: so "that the film could shine into the play."⁶⁵ Perhaps the most spectacular use of this device occurred in the final act of the play. As the prisoners, incarcerated in solitary confinement, tapped their morse-coded messages to one another, their projected words ran written across the back of the set.⁶⁶

The newspaper critic Herbert Ihering labeled Piscator's use of film in Hoppla as "fabelhaft" [fabulous], but pointed out the

⁶⁴"Karl stülpt sich seinen Hut auf und geht ab; die Leinwand vorne sinkt rash nieder: er erscheint im Film und zieht nun durch die gekurbelten Strassen." Paul Fechter, Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung (Berlin), 6 September 1927. Quoted in Günther Rühle, p. 796.

⁶⁵"So dass der Film ins Spiel hineinflimmern kann." Ernst Heilborn, Die Zeitung (Frankfurt), 6 September 1927, quoted in Günther Rühle, p. 795.

⁶⁶Günther Rühle, p. 794.

confusion resulting from dual purposes for which Piscator employed film:

Often, one is confused, for the film used as documentation is not separated from that used as symbol. Sometimes the film means something, sometimes it chronicles something.⁶⁷

Piscator's use of film received extensive and mixed comment in all of the available reviews. Paul Fechter described the filmed interludes as "almost as dull as the text,"⁶⁸ while Monty Jacobs commented that it displayed: "The masterpiece of a theatrical art which presses forward, creating new values." The controversial use of film seems to have overshadowed the set designed by Traugott Müller, who had worked intermittently with Piscator from the production of Segel am Horizont (14 March 1925) at the Volksbühne. The set of Hoppla illustrated a principle of design advocated by Piscator: Zweckbau [functional construction], as opposed to decorative construction.⁷⁰ Piscator wrote that he wanted the construction of the set to mirror that of the plot:

⁶⁷"Hier wird man manchmal verwirrt, weil der Film als Dokument und als Symbol nicht auseinandergehalten wird. Manchmal bedeutet der Film etwas, manchmal stellt er chronologisch dar." Herbert Ihering, Börsen Courier (Berlin), 5 September 1927, quoted in Günther Rühle, p. 798.

⁶⁸"Fast so langweilig wie der Text," . . . Paul Fechter, Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung (Berlin), 6 September 1927, quoted in Günther Rühle, p. 797.

⁶⁹" . . . das Meisterstück einer vorwärts dringenden, neue Werte schaffenden Bühnenkunst." Monty Jacobs, Vossische Zeitung (Berlin), 5 September 1927.

⁷⁰The exact origin of the term Zweckbau is not clear. Julius Richter, stage manager for the Piscator-Bühne, applies it specifically

Toller had already indicated a sociological cross section in the play through his selection and grouping of scenes. So a stage picture had to be created which gave a precise and visible form to this concept: a tiered stage, with many different acting areas over and next to one another, which should signify the social order.⁷¹

The result was a multi-level arrangement of scaffolding which resembled the cross section of a building still under construction. One high-ceilinged narrow room, resembling an elevator shaft, is joined on either side by three vertically presented, one-room units, resulting in a total of seven simultaneously presented acting areas, plus a small cupola attic crowning the entire structure.⁷²

Substructure for the set consisted of 3" steel pipe, the set measured 11 meters (c. 33 feet) wide, 8 meters (c. 24 feet) high and 3 meters deep (c. 9 feet), and weighed about 4,000 kilos (8,800 lbs.).⁷³ Built on a motorized turntable, the monstrous set could be turned sideways, providing yet another surface on which Piscator projected films.⁷⁴

to Traugott Müller's set for Hoppla. Julius Richter, "Wegen technischer Schwierigkeiten" ["Concerning Technical Difficulties"]. Quoted in Erwin Piscator, Das politische Theater, p. 136.

⁷¹"Toller hatte im Stück durch die Wahl und Gruppierung der Schauplätze bereits den sozialen Querschnitt angedeutet. Es musste also eine Bühnenform geschaffen werden, die diesen Gedanken präzisierete und sichtbar machte: ein Etagenbau mit vielen verschiedenen Spielplätzen über- und nebeneinander, der die gesellschaftliche Ordnung versinnbildlichen sollte." Erwin Piscator, Das politische Theater, pp. 149-150.

⁷²Ibid., facing p. 113.

⁷³These figures are taken from a report of the stage manager of the Piscator-Bühne, Julius Richter in "Wegen technischer Schwierigkeiten." Quoted in Erwin Piscator, Das politische Theater, p. 136.

⁷⁴Ernst Heilborn, Frankfurter Zeitung (Frankfurt), 6 September 1927, quoted in Günther Kühle, p. 795.

Edmund Meisel composed and conducted music which accompanied Hoppla. Reviewers referred to the music as "Geräusch hämmern" [noise hammering].⁷⁵ Exactly when and how music accompanied the play is unknown. Walter Mehring, a poet of the Kollektiv, composed the text to the title song, "Hoppla, wir leben," sung to Meisel's accompaniment during the fourth act, as Karl Thomas wanders through the various rooms in the hotel. The Kiepenheuer edition indicates no other songs. As in other productions by Piscator, the Internationale, the communist anthem sung by the cast and audience, concluded the program.

In brief comments on the acting the reviewers in general praised the cast, but Monty Jacobs observed that Piscator paid his actors less directorial attention than his technicians: "Piscator's weakness is certainly the leadership of the individual performers."⁷⁶ Alfred Kerr echoed a similar sentiment suggesting that Piscator make his future goal not machinery and stage pictures but the human element--specifically, the volume of his actors.⁷⁷ A second possible directorial weakness of Piscator's production is evident in an inability to coordinate the timing of his production. Piscator planned the opening date of Hoppla for 1 September 1927, but technical

⁷⁵Monty Jacobs, Vossische Zeitung (Berlin), 5 September 1927.

⁷⁶"Piscators Schwäche bleibt freilich die Führung des einzelnen Darstellers." Ibid., p. 793.

⁷⁷Alfred Kerr "Toller, Hoppla wir leben," Tageblatt (Berlin), 5 September 1927.

difficulties forced him to delay his opening.⁷⁸ On opening night at the Theater am Nollendorfplatz, 3 September, the curtain rose punctually at 7:00 P.M. and then required four hours playing time, causing one disgruntled reviewer to remark "four hours of bad theater."⁷⁹

Hoppla was not a critical success. The only critic able to overlook its technical difficulties was Herbert Ihering who wrote that the Piscator-Bühne was the only stage in Berlin which took a stand, that it had a personality where others did not.⁸⁰

Although poorly received by the critics, the opening production of the first Piscator-Bühne enjoyed a respectable run for a Berlin production, sixty-six consecutive performances, ending on 7 November 1927.⁸¹ Possible reasons for this success are many and varied. Audiences may have been attracted by the autobiographical nature of the script, by many unusual technical devices employed, or even by the curiosity and excitement that accompanied the opening of a new theater.

⁷⁸In an interesting quirk of theatrical history, the two-day delay resulted in the première performance of Hoppla not occurring at the Piscator-Bühne as planned, but at the considerably smaller Kammerspiele in Hamburg on 2 September, directed by Hanns Lotz. Die deutsche Bühne (Berlin), 19 September 1927, p. 222.

⁷⁹"Vier Stunden schlechtes Theater." Paul Fechter, Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung, (Berlin), 6 September 1927.

⁸⁰Die Piscator-Bühne ist heute die einzige Bühne, die Aufgaben gibt, die zur Stellungnahme zwingt. Eine Persönlichkeit ist da." Herbert Ihering, Börsen Courier (Berlin), 5 September 1927.

⁸¹Deutscher Bühnenspielplan (Berlin).

Even before the production opened, ticket agents charged "unheard-of fees"⁸² for first night seats, so great was the interest in the controversial director.

In his first production of the Piscator-Bühne the director continued to use interruptions of stage action with film and live incidental music as he had in earlier agit-prop productions and in his last productions in the Volksbühne. Piscator's interruptions served to divert the focus of the production from the individual characters on stage to the general historical determinants of the twenties and specifically to life in Berlin. The show enjoyed a relatively long run, but Piscator's second play, Rasputin, proved to be even more successful.

RASPUTIN

Unlike Hoppla, the second production of the Piscator-Bühne did not originate from within the circle of the dramaturgische Kollektiv, but from a Russian author, Aleksej N. Tolstoy,⁸³ who wrote a novel in 1925, Zagovor imperatitsy which two Germans, P. E. Schtschegolew and S. Arnold, translated and adapted for the stage. This adaptation, Rasputin, oder die Verschwörung der Zarin ["Rasputin, or the Renunciation of the Czarina"],⁸⁴ provided the script for Piscator's production.

⁸² Maria Ley Piscator, p. 81.

⁸³ Not to be confused with the Count Leo Tolstoy also known as Count Aleksej K. Tolstoy, a Russian author who died forty-five years before the Russian Revolution. Aleksej N. Tolstoy supported the revolution and in turn received support of the government in Moscow until his death in 1945. Lexikon der Weltliteratur, p. 1335.

⁸⁴ Aleksej N. Tolstoy and P. E. Schtschegolew, Rasputin, oder

Composed of nine scenes and a prologue, Rasputin, oder die Verschwörung der Zarin, revolves around the mystic and monk, Rasputin, and his ability to influence the Russian royal family on political decisions. The action of the prologue takes place in a small court room in St. Petersburg on 6 May 1917 following the Czar's fall from power. Revolutionists question Anna Wyrubowa, a close friend of the Czarina, concerning the activities of Rasputin within the government. Wyrubowa recalls the first time she saw evidence of Rasputin delving in political intrigue. Scene one recalls the incident dramatically. In February 1915 at Wyrubowa's house, the Czar receives a letter from Rasputin requesting the dismissal of the minister of the interior. The Czarina urges her husband to follow the monk's bidding. Later, in Rasputin's house, the monk conspires against some royal officials and threatens others in order to get his friends into power. The play's action then moves to the headquarters of the Russian Field Marshal, Alexjew, who briefs the Czar on the progress of the German offensive. On the telegraphed advice of Rasputin the Czar makes a strategic decision which results in a Russian defeat with heavy losses. The Czarina then convinces the Czar, who is disillusioned by the monk's advice, that Rasputin's aid is valuable.

A group of aristocrats decides to take matters into their own hands and conspire to murder the powerful monk, luring him with the hint of an assignation with Irene Jussupow, the beautiful wife

die Verschwörung der Zarin: Ein Stück Weltgeschichte in 5 Aufzüge und 1 Vorspiel (Heidelberg: Merlin Verlag, 1926).

of one of the conspirators. Lecherously, Rasputin arrives at the Jussupow household where the conspirators poison, shoot and finally drown the monk.

Even before the news of Rasputin's death reaches the Czar, Wyrubowa falls into a faint and claims to see a vision of the monk. News arrives of Rasputin's death along with the news that the Russian Army has deserted and a revolution has broken out. Czar and Czarina are separated and revolutionists take command of the royal house.

This translation-adaptation provided the skeleton of a script which Piscator and his Kollektiv altered with some nineteen new scenes and numerous filmed segments. The title underwent a change also, being billed at the Theater am Nollendorfpfplatz as Rasputin, die Romanovs, der Krieg und das Volk das gegen sie aufstand ["Rasputin, the Romanovs, the War and the People Who Rose Against Them"]. In contrast to the original script of Rasputin which required a cast of twenty-eight actors in nine scenes and a prologue, Piscator's production listed a cast of sixty-seven players in twenty-nine scenes.⁸⁵ Although a complete reconstruction of the Piscator script is not possible, the first eight scenes can be pieced together.

⁸⁵The exact number of scenes in the Piscator production of Rasputin cannot be determined. Piscator writes "Insgesamt sind zu den acht ursprünglichen Szenen des Stückes neunzehn hinzugefügt worden." [All together, nineteen scenes were added to the eight original scenes of the play] (Erwin Piscator, Das politische Theater, p. 166). Remarks in the Henschelverlag edition (1968) of Das politische Theater,, edited by Ludwig Hoffman, noted East German scholar of early German communist theater history, state that Piscator's memory was faulty concerning the numeration of scenes. Hoffman writes that the original version contained sixteen scenes, the rewriting, fifteen (Das politische Theater, p. 283). A contemporary

Piscator omitted the prologue (trial) scene and began immediately with scene one, Wyrubowa's room in the St. Petersburg suburb of Zarskoje Selo.⁸⁶ Available material indicates little if any textual alteration in this first scene. On the other hand, dialogue for scenes two through five originated from the dramaturgisches Kollektiv, specifically from Leo Lania, Felix Gasbarra and Bertolt Brecht.⁸⁷

Scene two of Piscator's production showed a "Vorstadtkneipe in St. Petersburg" [suburb pub in St. Petersburg] in which common Russian peasants expressed strong anti-war sentiments, singing songs imputing that the German Kaiser Wilhelm II acted as the Antichrist in declaring the war: "according to the will of Wilhelm, according to the will of the Antichrist, war has been let loose over the earth."⁸⁸

dramatic critic of Rasputin gives the number of scenes as twenty-one (Otto Steinicke, Die Rote Fahne, Berlin, 12 November 1927), another gives twenty-four as the total number of scenes, eleven of which came from the original script (Friedrich Hussong, Lokal-Anzeiger (Berlin), 11 November 1927). The Tolstoy-Schtschegolew version of Rasputin, as preserved in the Heidelberg University library contains eleven scenes (actually five acts, divided into ten scenes and a prologue). Since a check of the Deutsches Bücherverzeichnis reveals only this one German edition of Rasputin, no explanation can be given of Hoffman's statement that the original version contained sixteen scenes. Discrepancies in reporters' numbering of the scenes may have arisen from the director's use of simultaneous staging and filmed interludes, which some observers may have considered as separate scenes, while others as continuous.

⁸⁶ Erwin Piscator, Das politische Theater, p. 166.

⁸⁷ Günther Rühle, p. 812.

⁸⁸ "Nach dem Willen Wilhelms, nach dem Befehle des Antichrist ist der Krieg über die Erde losgelassen worden . . ." Fiebach quotes the words to this song (p. 265), and gives as his reference a program of

Reviews entitled scene three "the scene of the three emperors." Using the Russian workers' execration of Wilhelm II as a transitional motive, the action shifted to the Kaiser himself, praying for victory in battle. Then followed in quick succession similar prayers from the emperor Franz Josef of Austria and Czar Nicholas II of Russia. After the pious supplications, however, each monarch turned war-monger and issued instructions to his troops.⁸⁹

In sharp contrast to the instructions of the three warring monarchs,⁹⁰ scene four presented a proletarian's viewpoint of the war. In Zimmerwald, a village just outside of Berne, Switzerland, on 5 September 1915, at a conference of communist and socialist pacifists, Lenin, leader of the international soviet, addressed the meeting in a gentle speech.

Scene five, which was scene two of the original version, returned to Rasputin's room. Scenes six and seven continued the list of alterations. Scene six introduced representatives of Krupp, Creuzot and Armstrong, who gave yet another viewpoint of the war. They used their persuasive economic influence to lengthen the war ostensibly for noble purposes:

the Piscator-Bühne. The East German scholar then cites a second reference in the Berlin court records, Anschrift des Urteils in Akte 5616, Bl.134.

⁸⁹ Erwin Piscator, Das politische Theater, pp. 166-167.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

As Krupp's representative crowed "We are dealing with the salvation of the Germanic essence," Creuzot's representative warbled out "Democracy and civilization must be defended," and Armstrong's representative "We fight for the liberty of the world"—and one saw behind them the forest of Essen and the smokestacks of heavy industry, then the essence of the imperialistic war was laid bare to its very roots through the (satiric) contrast.⁹¹

Scene seven presented the generals Haig and Foch planning the offensive on the Somme. Scene eight, originally scene three, depicted the Czar's briefing session on the Somme offensive.

Unfortunately, the descriptions of subsequent scenes are available only in fragments. Only two other textual additions can be summarized, the last two of the play. Following the end of the original script, the arrest of the Czarina and Wyrubowa by the revolutionists, Piscator added two scenes, continuing the action to include the coup of the Bolshevik rebels in November 1917, and concluding with Lenin's speech to the second Russian Soviet Congress.

The key to Piscator's extensive additions is suggested in the title of the production at the Theater am Nollendorfplatz. The new title encompassed not only Rasputin, but also the Romanovs, World War I and the Bolsheviks, as did the action of the play. Just as Piscator objected to the exclusively individual fate of Karl Thomas

⁹¹"Wenn Krupps Vertreter auftrumpfte: "Es geht um die Rettung des deutschen Wesens," Creuzots Vertreter hinausschmetterte: "La démocratie et civilisation doivent être défendues," Armstrongs Vertreter erklärte: "We fight for the liberation of the world"—und man sah dahinter den rauchenden Wald der Essen und Schloten der Schwerindustrie, dann war durch den (satirischen) Kontrast das Wesen des imperialistischen Krieges bis auf die letzten Wurzeln blossgelegt." Ibid., p. 174

In Toller's play, so did he object to "the personal, private fate of Rasputin."⁹² Leo Lania, one of the members of the dramaturgisches Kollektiv was active in rewriting the Tolstoy script, explained this point of view in the program, "Here a play of world history should arise whose main character is just as much the miraculous monk as each viewer in the orchestra and balcony of this theater."⁹³ Piscator's alterations of the Tolstoy play changed the focus of the script completely. Instead of depicting the role Rasputin played in the downfall of the Russian imperial throne, the action of Piscator's production depicted the many other determinants as well as Rasputin with the collective hero, the people, emerging triumphant. Piscator achieved this shift of emphasis through the use of a montage of additional scenes which juxtaposed Rasputin's activities with various determinants of World War I such as the Romanovs, Lenin, the Russian people, the German emperors and the industrial-military complex supporting the war.

Piscator's alterations in Rasputin bear one resemblance to the alterations of Hoppla. In both plays Piscator dismissed the "personal fate" of the main character and attempted to widen the viewpoint of the production from that of one individual to the viewpoint of worldwide developments of history. Piscator carried the concept through

⁹²"Das persönlich-private Schicksal Rasputins." Erwin Piscator, Das politische Theater, p. 163.

⁹³"Hier sollen stehen ein Stück Weltgeschichte, deren Held ebenso der russische Wundermönch ist, wie jeder der Zuschauer in Parkett und auf den Rängen dieses Theaters." Ibid.

to include the set which was a partitioned hemisphere, the Globus-bühne [global stage] designed by Traugott Müller.⁹⁴

Müller's set followed Piscator's penchant for Zweckbau. He asked Müller specifically for a representation of the globe, a rather obvious symbol on which the director portrayed all of the world-wide occurrences connected with the Russian Revolution. ". . . the global stage had not only a symbolic meaning, but also a practical purpose."⁹⁵ Built on a revolving turntable, the set offered its director twelve acting areas on one construction, with the limitation that no more than two areas could be fully visible to the audience at any one time. Resembling a globe cut in half, and high enough to enclose two levels of acting areas, the hemisphere contained several large panels which opened, allowing the audience to view action presented within. On opening night, however, one panel worked itself loose in the course of the production. Realizing that the revolving turntable would have slung the loose panel into the audience, had not an alert stagehand prevented it, Müller removed the panels shortly after the show opened.⁹⁶

Both circular floors of the set contained six acting areas, the total floor surface of the lower level being somewhat larger than

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 168. A picture of this set, and a floor plan of it appears in the appendix.

⁹⁵ ". . . der Globusbühne, die nicht nur symbolische Bedeutung hatte, sondern auch einen sehr praktischen Zweck." Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 169.

that of the second story. For the first half of Rasputin, Müller provided settings for the following scenes on the bottom level:⁹⁷

1) Wyrubowa's room in Zarskoje Selo; 2) the three emperors' scene; 3) Rasputin's room; 4) conference room of the industrialists; 5) field headquarters of the Czar; 6) Jussupow's room. The second level contained either extensions of the lower scenes, or bare acting areas for crowd scenes with the back wall serving as a reflective surface for moving pictures.⁹⁸ The crown⁹⁹ of the entire hemisphere could be raised, revealing a large motion-picture screen and enabling crowd scenes to be played across most of the second level.

A heavy grey fabric covered the outside structure of the hemisphere. One reviewer refers to the tent-like quality of the covering as "a tediously creeping turtle of grey tent covering,"¹⁰⁰ but Piscator writes that the fabric was actually a fairly expensive material out of which balloons were constructed. For its use on Müller's set, Piscator had this material specially treated to enhance its reflective qualities, enabling film to be projected directly onto the hemisphere itself.¹⁰¹

⁹⁷The numbers correspond to the numbers on the floor plan which appears in the appendix.

⁹⁸Julius Richter, "Rasputin/Nach der Aufführung der Piscator-Bühne, Berlin," ["Rasputin In the Production of the Piscator-Bühne, Berlin] Blätter für Bühnenkunst, XVIII, (February, 1928), 40-41.

⁹⁹In geographic terms, think of this "crown" as the "arctic circle" of the hemisphere.

¹⁰⁰"Schleischschleppende Schildkröte aus grauer Zeltleinwand." Alfred Kerr, Tageblatt (Berlin), 11 November 1927, quoted in Erwin Piscator, Das politische Theater, p. 168.

¹⁰¹Erwin Piscator, Das politische Theater, p. 168.

The exact number of surfaces onto which Piscator projected films in Rasputin is difficult to determine. The outside covering of the set provided one surface, while the crown of the globe flew to reveal a second reflective surface. A third lowered from the flies, downstage of the set,¹⁰² and a fourth screen slid from stage right, providing what Piscator called his "Notizblock" [note pad]. This last screen measured only 2 1/2 meters wide (c. 8 feet) but was as high as the proscenium.¹⁰³

Like the set for Hoppla, the hemispherical set for Rasputin was heavy. Composed of two sections (each a quarter-sphere) constructed of steel supports, the entire set weighed over 2,000 kilos (c. 2 tons). Each quarter-sphere had a radius of 7.5 meters (c. 24 feet).¹⁰⁴

Rotating on the turntable, with film and actors appearing in all segments, Müller's set must have been fascinating to observe. When the curtain rose, it revealed a motion-picture screen for use in the first segment of the play.¹⁰⁵

As in many previous productions, Piscator used motion picture sequences in Rasputin, but a distinct variation in approach distinguishes Rasputin from others. In Toller's play, Piscator used film

¹⁰²This third screen was the same downstage screen used in Hoppla, and measured 8 x 10 meters (24 x 30 feet). Julius Richter, Bühnentechnischen Rundschau XIX, (1927), 8.

¹⁰³Erwin Piscator, Das politische Theater, p. 170.

¹⁰⁴Julius Richter, "Wegen technischer Schwierigkeiten," [Because of technical difficulties] quoted in Erwin Piscator, Das politische Theater, p. 136.

¹⁰⁵Otto Steinicke, Die Rote Fahne (Berlin), 12 November 1927.

as a part of the action of the play. In Tolstoy's play, however, the director used film to clarify the action of the play and to help his audience understand the historical drama they came to see:

It (the film) instructs the audience about the material. No one can be expected to command the genealogy of Nicholas II, the history of Czarism, the meaning of Russian Orthodoxy. Nevertheless, the audience must command this information, if they want to understand the play.¹⁰⁶

As an example of Piscator's use of film occurred in the opening scenes of the production when a filmed prologue depicted the genealogy of the Romanovs. Portraits of the Czars appeared on the screen above the set, while written comments were projected on the rectangular Notizblock screen on stage right. All very brief, these comments consisted of phrases such as "died suddenly," "died insane," and "committed suicide." Instead of a portrait of the last Czar, the actor portraying Nicholas II, Erwin Kalser, appeared live on stage, while an ominous shadow of Rasputin covered the screen behind the monarch.

Having established the royal chronology, Piscator then depicted in film events preceding the revolution, among which were scenes of Russian peasants in poverty, and the ruthless suppression of early revolts.¹⁰⁷ This second filmclip, three minutes in length, appeared

¹⁰⁶"Er (der Film) belehrt den Zuschauer über den Stoff. Es kann von niemandem verlangt werden, dass er die Ahnenreihe Nikolaus des Zweiten, die Geschichte des Zarismus, die Bedeutung der russischen Orthodoxie beherrscht. Der Zuschauer muss sie aber beherrschen, wenn er das Stück verstehen will." Erwin Piscator; Das politische Theater, p. 171.

¹⁰⁷Ibid., p. 172.

on the downstage screen which flew into position following the live appearance of the Czar. The shift in screens allowed time for the crown of the hemisphere to descend to its usual position.¹⁰⁸ Following this second series of filmclips, live actors appeared on stage and began the scene of Wyrubowa's room in Zarskoje Selo, at the congratulatory birthday gathering.

Piscator's use of film in Rasputin instructed the audience. No available reports reveal any use of film to establish a symbol for the play or to continue or complete the action. Apparently, Piscator shot no new film for Rasputin, but relied entirely on the archives of existing film companies. Some companies refused to cooperate with Piscator-Bühne in Rasputin, a refusal which Piscator attributes to activities of Alfred Hugenberg, an industrialist and strong supporter of Hitler and the National Socialists.¹⁰⁹ Nevertheless several companies did cooperate. The single most helpful source was a Russian company which had recently compiled a documentary film entitled "Der Untergang des Hauses Romanov" ["The Fall of the House of Romanov."] ¹¹⁰ A young member of the Piscator-Bühne, J. A. Hübla-Kahle, handled the final editing of the film.

¹⁰⁸ The raising and lowering of this crown caused Piscator some worry. The electric winch used to hoist the topmost covering of the entire set required some three to seven minutes to complete the operation. Ibid., p. 169.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 171

¹¹⁰ Ibid. Piscator lists several of the films and film companies from which he borrowed material for the prologue of Rasputin: "Die Herrschaft von Scotnini" ["The Lords of Scotnini"]: Meinert-film.

In addition to extensive alterations and the frequent use of film, Piscator employed several technical devices familiar to those who had seen his previous productions. Alexander Granach appeared in a mask which was apparently a good likeness of Lenin.¹¹¹ The actors impersonating the three emperors also carried masks, which reports described as unmistakable.¹¹²

As in former productions, Edmund Meisel composed jazz music to accompany the play. The show concluded with the cast and audience singing the Internationale.¹¹³ Rasputin also included at least one song not indicated in the Merlin Verlag script, "Neige dein Herz zur Bitternais" [Incline your Hearts toward Bitterness], sung by Ernst Busch.¹¹⁴

"Prinzessin und Geiger" ["Princess and Violinist"]; Ufa. "Matrosenregiment 17" ["Naval Regiment 17"]; Ufa. "Die Solotänzerin des Zaren" ["The Solo Dancer of Czar"]; Meinert-film. "Die Dekabristen" ["The Dekabrists"]; Herschel-Sofar. "Die Bärenhochzeit" ["The Bear's Wedding"]; Lloyd-Film. "Die Todesbarke" ["The Death Ship"]; Prometheus. "Der Sohn der Berge" ["The Son of the Mountains"]; Sudfilm. "Iwan der Schreckliche" ["Ivan the Terrible"]; Nationalfilm. "Palast und Festung" ["Palace and Fortress"]; Fried Film. "Der schwarze Adler" ["The Black Eagle"]; United Artists. "Pater Sergius": Ermolieff. "Der Postmeister" ["The Postmaster"]; Lloyd-Film. "Auferstehung": ["Resurrection"]; United Artists. "Brandstifter Europas: ["Firebug of Europe"]; Bruckmann.

¹¹¹Max Hochdorf, Vorwärts, (Berlin) n.d., presumably 11 November 1927.

¹¹²Erwin Piscator, Das politische Theater, p. 184

¹¹³Rolf Nürenberg, "Rasputin, im Theater am Nollendorfplatz," 12 Uhr Blatt (Berlin), n.d., presumably 11 November 1927.

¹¹⁴Hebert Ihering and Hugo Fetting, Ernst Busch (Berlin, Henschelverlag, 1965) p. 46.

In general, reviewers praised the acting, specifically the performances of the main roles, that of the Czar, played by Erwin Kalsner, the Czarina, Tilla Durieux, and Rasputin, Paul Wegener, all experienced actors. As in earlier productions, however, comments indicated that on the whole, the technical devices outshone the performers. One reporter expressed the wish that Piscator have the "human" element of theater so well in hand as the technical elements.¹¹⁵ Reporting to the readers of the Volksbühne-periodical, Robert Breuer expressed the opinion that Piscator's actors appeared as puppets on the revolving global stage.¹¹⁶

Overall technical organization appears to have been a large problem, but one which Piscator overcame. The first two productions of the Piscator-Bühne followed each other closely, Hoppla ending on 7 November and Rasputin opening three days later on 10 November. Nevertheless, at a great expense of labor, Piscator rehearsed his Rasputin cast on its own set during the run of Hoppla. Following the nightly production of Hoppla, sixteen men worked three hours striking the tiered stage and bringing the hemisphere forward. The next morning a similar shift pieced together the set for Rasputin. Piscator held Rasputin rehearsals until 4 in the afternoon, when a crew of twenty-four men began to disassemble the hemisphere and reconstruct the set for Hoppla. Piscator expended these 168 man-hours daily for

¹¹⁵"Wenn er das erste material der Bühne das Menschlichen; so gut wie das technische in der Hand hätte." Arthur Eloesser "Rasputin" Die Weltbühne, XXIII (1927), 759.

¹¹⁶Robert Breuer, "Rasputin in der Piscator Bühne," Die Volksbühne, (1927), n.p. preserved in the archives of the Volksbühne.

three weeks in order to rehearse his actors on the set of Rasputin.¹¹⁷ This expense may be one indication of the importance which he placed on his actors familiarity with the scenic environment on which they were to work. Although multi-level sets were no innovation in Berlin, neither were they commonplace. Most actors, accustomed to working on the conventional stage floor may have needed extra rehearsal to acclimate themselves to the more restricted space.

Opening night the curtain rose at 7:30 in the evening, half an hour after the scheduled curtain and, apart from one intermission, did not come down for four hours. In spite of its rather formidable length, Rasputin ran from 10 November 1927 to 15 January 1928, a total of sixty-six consecutive performances. Reasons for this relatively long run must have been many and varied. The show opened exactly ten years to the week after the 6 November Bolshevik revolution under Lenin. While the anniversary may have interested communist sympathizers in the drama, two protests brought independently against the Piscator-Bühne by Dimitri Rubenstein and the ex-Kaiser, Wilhelm II, probably roused the curiosity of the man-in-the-street about the controversial production at the Theater am Nollendorfplatz.

Dimitri Rubenstein made the first complaint. The Tolstoy script pictured Rubenstein as involved in an intrigue with the Germans.

¹¹⁷Erwin Piscator, Das politische Theater, p. 134. Piscator points out that rehearsals with lights and film for Rasputin were not possible during this three week period because the instruments were set for Hoppla.

Still living in exile in Paris at the time of the production of Rasputin in Berlin, Rubenstein travelled to the German capital to see the play for himself and subsequently objected that the production maligned the role he had played in the Czarist regime. Rubenstein complained further that his business in Paris had suffered considerable setbacks which he attributed to accounts in French newspapers that the banker was appearing as a German spy on the Berlin stage.¹¹⁸ After long discussions with Piscator, Rubenstein persuaded him to eliminate the words spy and profiteer in direct references to the person of Dimitri Rubenstein. Threatened court proceedings against Piscator on this issue appear never to have materialized.

The second protester of Piscator's production did bring court proceedings against the production. Living in exile in Doorn, Holland, the ex-Kaiser Wilhelm II instructed his attorney in Berlin, Leopold von Kleist, to initiate legal proceedings to block the impersonating of the monarch on the stage of the Piscator-Bühne. A court ruling handed down on 24 November 1927 declared that the Piscator-Bühne must comply with a German law forbidding a living person's representation on stage without that person's permission. Characterizations of the emperors Franz Joseph and Nicholas II could continue to appear on stage since neither was still alive. Rather than cut the three emperors' scene altogether, and in protest to the

¹¹⁸Erwin Piscator, Das politische Theater, p. 179.

action of the court, Piscator instructed Leo Lania, the member of the dramaturgisches Kollektiv responsible for the textual composition of the scene, to appear on stage in place of William II and read the court judgment against the Piscator-Bühne. Lania reported, "Following my first appearance, the house was sold out for weeks."¹¹⁹

Although Rasputin increased Piscator's reputation as a controversial director in Berlin, the production did not mark any innovations in the director's approach to the theater, for the show included the use of extensive textual alterations to focus attention on the proletariat, projections, multi-level sets, wax masks and jazz interludes, all familiar practices of Piscator. This production added to Piscator's career a new dimension of opulence, however, for the director had never amassed his many devices so extensively in one production. Rasputin ranks as one of Piscator's most complex staging attempts (second perhaps only to Der Kaufmann von Berlin). By this effort Piscator added a second popular success to his young theatrical organization. This wave of popularity continued in the third production of the Piscator-Bühne, Schwejk.

SCHWEJK

No published version was found for the Piscator-Bühne's script for its third production, Die Abenteuer des braven Soldaten Schwejk ["The Adventures of the Good Soldier Schwejk"]. Originally a novel,

¹¹⁹"Nach meine ersten Auftreten war das Theater auf Wochen hinausverkauft." Lania, p. 270.

this story of the Czech soldier Schwejk inspired numerous translations and adaptations throughout the world. Its author Jaroslav Hasek, died in 1923 before completing what became his major work, the picaresque adventures of his fellow countryman, Schwejk, during World War I. First translated into German from Czech in 1926,¹²⁰ the story inspired Hans Reimann, editor of the German satirical periodical, Das Stackschwein ["The Porcupine"], and Max Brod, drama critic of the Czech newspaper, Prager Tageblatt, to compile an adaptation for the stage. Piscator knew of the Brod-Reimann adaptation and announced his intention to stage it as early as the opening production of the Piscator-Bühne.¹²¹ Upon close inspection of the script, however, Piscator decided that the Reimann-Brod version did not remain true to Hasek's satirical novel.¹²² In a move not unusual for the director, Piscator and his Kollektiv, Bertolt Brecht, Felix Gasbarra and Leo Lania rewrote the Reimann-Brod adaptation.¹²³ Confronted with a finished copy of the revision, along with the director's strong recommendation for it, the two journalists authorized production of the revised version.

¹²⁰Jaroslav Hasek, Die Abenteuer des braven Soldaten Schwejk während des Weltkriegs ["The Adventures of the Good Soldier Schwejk During the War"]: 4 vols., translated from the Czech to the German by Grete Reiner. Prague: A. Cynek, 1926-1927. Unfinished fourth volume completed by Karel Vanek.

¹²¹"Die Neue Spielzeit 1927/28," Die deutsche Bühne, XIX (29 August 1927), 214.

¹²²Erwin Piscator, Das politische Theater, p. 188.

¹²³In the 1963 edition of Das politische Theater by Rohwolt Verlag, Piscator describes the circumstances surrounding the rewriting. The director withdrew to a hotel in the village of Neubabelsberg,

The location of the Piscator-Kollektiv manuscript is uncertain. Fiebach refers to an incomplete version of what may be a copy of the Piscator-Kollektiv's Schwejk in the Brecht Archives in East Berlin.¹²⁴ The Brecht manuscript may be an early version of Brecht's own 1950 adaptation of Schwejk, Schwejk im zweiten Weltkrieg ["Schweyk in World War II"].¹²⁵ Moreover, the scene designer and personal friend of Piscator during the forties, Mordekai Gorelik, refers to an English translation by Erich Burroughs of the Schwejk production at the Theater am Nollendorfpfplatz.¹²⁶ Gorelik does not give the location of the Burroughs translation, nor does he mention how Burroughs obtained his source-script.

Evidence of a third version exists in the New York City Library which records among its holdings a typed translation of "The Max Pallenberg touring version of Die Abenteuer des braven Soldaten Schwejk." Max Pallenberg played the title role in the production of Schwejk at the Piscator-Bühne, but no material is known to exist

just outside of Berlin. For the dramatization of Schwejk, Lania and Gasbarra accompanied him. Brecht drove to the location in his newly purchased first car. For four weeks the group remained in this country retreat, frequently visited by Traugott Müller, Julius Richter and Otto Katz for consultation. Erwin Piscator, Das politische Theater, (1963), p. 180.

¹²⁴ Fiebach, p. 279. Fiebach gives his reference as Abenteuer des braven Soldaten Schwejk, Brecht-Archiv, Mappa 511.

¹²⁵ Brecht's play in its final form has sparked some scholarship on its own merits. (See Vladimir Rus, Brecht's Schwejk im zweiten Weltkrieg and Hasek's Good Soldier Schweyk, Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, New York, University, 1964.) Other dramatizations stemming from Hasek's novel include a play by P. Kohout (1963) and a comic opera by R. Kurka (1960). Lexikon der Weltliteratur, p. 3.

¹²⁶ Mordekai Gorelik, New Theaters for Old (New York; E. P. Dutton, 1964), p. 449.

concerning any touring of this show under Piscator's direction. The library admits in words stamped across the top of the one-hundred-and-eleven-page translation, "Nothing else known about this manuscript."

The plot summary provided by Gorelik and Burroughs appears to parallel the one staged at the Theater am Nollendorfplatz in January of 1928. Certainly, no contradictions were found between the Gorelik summary and available reviews of the production in Berlin. The story concerns a bungling Czech named Schwejk and his misadventures in the Army during World War I.

The play opens with Schwejk, a dogcatcher crippled with rheumatism, relaxing in his room as his landlady Frau Müller sweeps. The old woman tells Schwejk of the assassination of the Archduke of Austria, Francis Ferdinand. Schwejk ponders simply, "It's a great loss for Austria," and the scene shifts to a local pub.

A stranger, Bredtschneider, is enjoying a glass of beer in the tavern with Schwejk. The inn-keeper takes down a portrait of the Austrian emperor, causing Schwejk to comment that Francis Ferdinand can not be replaced by just any fool. Revealing himself as a police spy, Bredtschneider has the two men arrested for treason against Austria.

Schwejk is cleared of the charges against him and returns home to find Frau Müller in receipt of his induction papers. Confident that rheumatism will exempt him, Schwejk is pushed in a wheelchair to the induction center shouting, "On to Belgrade," and waving his crutches.

At the physical inspection, army doctors admit anyone who breathes. A consumptive recruit appears and passes inspection. The head doctor counters every ailment with recommendations for either a physic and aspirin or a stomach pump and quinine. Schwejk's severe case of rheumatism does not hinder his induction.

Assigned to a Lieutenant Lukasch, Schwejk bumbles one assignment after another by following all his orders exactly, and without question. A notorious woman-chaser and no sincere soldier, Lieutenant Lukasch aggravates the situation of his sincere subordinate by often voicing whims as commands. Superior officers dispatch both Lukasch and Schwejk to front lines on the Serbian border.

On the train toward the front, Schwejk pulls the emergency cord without good reason, and is arrested. Railway police question Schwejk, but find him so exasperating in his naiveté, that they send him to walk to join his company at Ceske Budejovice in southern Bohemia.

Schwejk arrives at Ceske Budejovice only after incidental scenes in which the people of various town suspect the walking soldier of deserting. Finally, he boards an army transport which is actually only an ancient freight car.

Once at the front, Schwejk wanders around the battlefield. He finds a Russian soldier swimming in a pond and steals the enemy uniform. Amused with his souvenir, Schwejk tries on the uniform, is mistaken for a Russian by a Hungarian patrol, and is shot by his country's allies.

The plot of Piscator's Schwejk in the Theater am Nollendorfplatz followed the novel closely. The Kollektiv omitted many of Schwejk's adventures, to Piscator's chagrin. Gasbarra writes that the director contemplated at one point staging the complete adventures of Schwejk over the span of five nights.¹²⁷

Although cuttings were extensive, Piscator made no additions to the novel in presenting Schwejk to the opening night audience at the Piscator-Bühne. Following Schwejk's death, Piscator did contemplate a bizarre scene of war cripples assembled before God, several carrying their own torn limbs, others headless. In all, some twenty-five blood smeared war casualties were to appear on their way to particular judgment.¹²⁸ Schwejk, in the meantime, was to appear on film upstage, confronted by a Grosz-caricature of the Deity, who was to treat the bungling soldier with the same blind authority as military officers whom Schwejk encountered in his earthly existence.

The addition apparently reached script-form and a performance at a special preview for some members of the Sonderabteilung of the Volksbühne but Piscator objected to the dreadfulness of the scene and eliminated it.

Although the Kollektiv was quite active in rewriting the story of Schwejk, they remained true to the spirit of Hasek's novel, writing no additional scenes, and merely trimming the story to a presentable length. Technical devices used by Piscator included

¹²⁷Die Welt am Abend ["The World in the Evening"], January 1928, quoted in Erwin Piscator, Das politische Theater, p. 192.

¹²⁸Erwin Piscator, Das politische Theater, p. 195.

animated film sequences as well as cut-out and realistic props in conjunction with a simple set of two treadmills. Detailed descriptions of Piscator's use of technical devices in any one scene is not available. Nevertheless, individual technical aspects of various scenes can be described.

Instead of using realistic photography, Piscator employed animated cartoons by George Grosz. Although Grosz designed cartoons for Das trunkene Schiff in the Volksbühne in May 1926, Schwejk appears to be his first attempt at animated film sequences.¹²⁹

Piscator used Grosz's filmed sketches to introduce action on stage and to make satirical comment. Projected from upstage of the set, the filmed images fell on either of two large screens, one upstage of the set, one downstage, both capable of being flown.¹³⁰ Gorelik describes the film sequence which followed upon Schwejk's reception of his induction notice:

They (the induction papers) are in a big envelope with a double eagle and official seals; Frau Müller is excited. (Schwejk reassures her) "Calm yourself, Frau Müller. I am not going to war . . ." On the screen the invisible pen scratches furiously a hairy hand heaping gold coins upon a figure with the head of a phonograph. The figure types reams of propaganda: Gott strafe England, Jeder Stoss ein Franzos, while a fountain pen gives a military salute and screams Hurrah! (Meanwhile, on the treadmill) in a wheelchair propelled by Frau Müller, Schwejk is on his way to medical inspection at the regional Army H.Q. "On to

¹²⁹Some of Grosz's pictures for Schwejk were compiled in Leon Moussinac, The New Movement in the Theater (New York: Benjamin Bloom, 1967), plates 41 and 42. Several of these sketches are included in the appendix.

¹³⁰Gorelik, p. 382.

Belgrade!" he shouts, waving his crutches, while the streets of Prague flash by behind him in motion pictures.¹³¹

Non-realistic caricatures, Grosz's animated cartoons served as a visual background for the action of the play. They also made wry comment on the social situation of the war years. One sketch showed a priest addressing a troop of soldiers. Out of the divine's mouth poured a stream of bullets, not words.¹³² Another sketch showed Christ, hanging on the cross, wearing a gas mask and military boots.¹³³ This last picture gained Grosz much notoriety, for it resulted in his being convicted of blasphemy. His trial was one of a series of charges by which the Weimar Republic's legal councils attempted to control revolutionary proletarian writers and artists.¹³⁴

In contrast to the two previous productions, Schwejk had no large, structural set, but it presented an important innovation, two conveyor belts. Credit for the idea goes to Piscator. George Grosz, however, received credit in the productions' program for scene design. Set parallel to each other and parallel to the proscenium

¹³¹Ibid., p. 383. Note: Parenthetical remarks not in the original. A picture of the fountain-pen-phonograph cartoon appears in the appendix to this paper.

¹³²A picture of this cartoon appears in Erwin Piscator, Das politische Theater, p. 201.

¹³³See George Grosz, catalogue of the Akademie der Künste, for a reproduction of this picture. See also Unser Jahrhundert im Bild, ["Our Century in Pictures"], (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann Verlag, 1967), p. 340.

¹³⁴Istvan Deak, Weimer Germany's Left-Wing Intellectuals (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), p. 133. Note: The trial dragged for several years, through several appellate courts. Although finally convicted, Grosz never paid the resulting

opening, the two belts completely spanned the stage. Mechanically driven, either treadmill could move scenery and/or actors across the stage. A small island of permanent platforms separated the two tracks. Unfortunately, dimensions of the treadmills are not available. Apart from occasional realistic props, such as Schwejk's wheelchair, scenery consisted of upright cut-outs of grotesque cartoon-like characters by Grosz. As Schwejk, remaining in place, marched toward stage right on one treadmill, scenery moved from stage right to left on the other treadmill, meeting the actor in center stage. Available details give some insight into how Piscator used the treadmills in two scenes.

The action of the play began with a motion picture of a pencil sketching a cartoon of German and Austrian military generals holding hands, an unshaven preacher balancing a cross on his nose and a personification of death with a cat-o-nine-tails overlooking the scene.¹³⁵ Upon completion of this sketch, the downstage treadmill brought in Schwejk, seated in his room, and Frau Müller sweeping. Following this first scene Schwejk rises, and as he walks to the pub on the downstage treadmill he remains in the center stage while the upstage conveyor belt carries his room off behind him. On an upstage screen realistic sequences of Prague, shot from the slowly moving auto, added to the illusion of Schwejk traveling forward.¹³⁶

fine of 400 marks because he fled to the United States on 12 January 1933.

¹³⁵ See Erwin Piscator, Das politische Theater, p. 187.

¹³⁶ Gorelik, p. 383.

The entire production revolved apparently around this one technical inspiration of the conveyor belt. In somewhat more detail than Gorelik, Piscator provides a description of the conveyor's use in act II, scene 2, depicting in part Schwejk's march toward Ceske Bedujovice to join his troops.

Sample of the procedure of a scene in Schwejk.

II. 2.

Treadmill #1--from right to left. Schwejk marches from left to right, singing.

On treadmill #1 (from right to left) an old woman rides on stage, standing. She meets Schwejk. Treadmill#1 halts. Dialogue until ". . . regiment hurries."

Treadmill #1 from right to left. Schwejk marches further. Standing, the old woman rides off stage.

On treadmill #1 the following travel on stage: a mileage marker, trees, a sign: the city of Maltshin.

On treadmill #2 from right to left a bar travels on stage. Treadmill 1 and 2 halt. Scene, until ". . . on the quickest way to the regiment."

Treadmills #1 and #2, from right to left. The bar travels out. Schwejk marches. On treadmill #2, a haystack (snoring, for eight seconds).

Scene until ". . . unless you have deserted."

Treadmill #1 travels (1/2 minute).

Treadmill #2 also travels from left to right.¹³⁷

¹³⁷"Muster eines szenischen Bewegungsvorganges zu "Schwejk"

II. 2. (Anabasis):

Band 1 von rechts nach links. Schwejk marschiert. Von links nach rechts. Singend.

Auf Band 1 (von rechts nach links) fährt stehend ein: Alte Frau. Begegnung. Band 1 hält: Dialog bis ". . . Regiment eilt."

Band 1 von rechts nach links: Schwejk marschiert weiter. Alte Frau stehend hinaus.

Auf Band 1 fahren ein: Kilometersteine, Bäume, Schild: Ortschaft Maltshin.

Band 2 von rechts nach links: Kneipe fährt ein

Band 1 und 2 hält: Szene bis ". . . auf dem schnellsten Weg zum Regiment."

Band 1 und 2 von rechts nach links: Kneipe fährt hinaus. Schwejk marschiert. Auf Band 2 fährt ein: Heuschober (Schnarchen 8 Sek.), Szene bis ". . . wenn sie nicht desertiert wären." Band 1 läuft

The conveyor belt served the practical necessities of the play by enabling a rapid flow of action from one location to another. Piscator viewed the set construction as a reflection of his concept of the production, an illustration of how the society can put man on an assembly line during war time.¹³⁸

Grosz's film caricatures and Piscator's ingenious but simple technical apparatus did not fully account for the critical acclaim which reporters showered on Schwejk. In its anti-war sentiment and liberal viewpoint this production did not differ from its predecessors on the Piscator-Bühne and like the others, Schwejk ended with the Internationale.¹³⁹ Schwejk did differ from Rasputin and Hoppla in approach, however, being satiric and comic, in place of the seriousness of the earlier shows. Schwejk successfully satirized the old guard, but at the same time failed to point up the strengths of communism.¹⁴⁰ Apparently Berlin reviewers appreciated this change of pace. Without exception, the available reviewers received the production favorably, lauding especially the memorable performance of its leading actor, Max Pallenberg.

Fifty-one years old, Pallenberg appears to have been a sure success for the role of Schwejk. An accomplished comic actor and

(1/2 minute). Band 2 von links nach rechts mit." See Erwin Piscator, Das politische Theater, p. 187.

¹³⁸ Ibid., p. 190.

¹³⁹ Monty Jacobs, Vossische Zeitung (Berlin), 24 January 1928.

¹⁴⁰ Hagen, p. 125.

Austrian by birth, Pallenberg began playing in Vienna. Discovered by the critic Alfred Polgar, Pallenberg came to Berlin shortly before World War I. There the Austrian comic worked with several directors including Max Reinhardt. Pallenberg played witty character parts, among them Theodor in Der Unbestechliche ["The Man Who Would Not Take Bribes"] (Hugo von Hoffmannsthal, Raimund Theater, Vienna, 16 March 1923) for which he gained a reputation as the "Weiner Wurstls" ["Vienna's Clown"].¹⁴¹ A second comic role for which Pallenberg received wide acclaim was Argand in Der eingebil-dete Kranke ["The Imaginary Invalid"] (Theater in dem Schloss Leopoldskion, Berlin, directed by Max Reinhardt, 20 August 1923).¹⁴² Pallenberg constituted such an essential part of the Schwejk production, that when he left to tour South America in April of 1928, Piscator did not even attempt to fill the role with someone else, but instead changed the playbill.

In addition to plaudits for Pallenberg, the acting company received praise, but as in reviews of previous productions, comments on the technical apparatus were more extensive than comments on individual actors. The reviewer for Die Rote Fahne cautioned against the dangerous "overshadowing of the technical" [überschätzung des technischen] over the artistic elements of the production.¹⁴³

¹⁴¹Günther Rühle, p. 436.

¹⁴²Ibid., p. 466.

¹⁴³"Gesinnungs Theater" [Meaningful Theater]; Die Rote Fahne (Berlin), 12 February 1928.

In several technical aspects, Schwejk resembled preceding productions of the Piscator-Bühne: The style of the set symbolized a production concept and film played an important role in the presentation. At the same time the first comedy of the Piscator-Bühne differed from the preceding productions in overall tone. Piscator did not crusade for communism with Schwejk. He did not use the filmclips to instruct the audience, nor to document the action on stage. Moreover, he refrained from making additions of his own invention to the script. Berliners apparently appreciated the change, for Schwejk played an unusually long run of eighty-two consecutive performances, between 23 January and 10 April 1928. No other production of the Piscator-Bühne rivaled that figure.

KONJUNKTUR

The success of Schwejk precipitated the financial problems of the fourth production of the Piscator-Bühne, Konjunktur ["Boom"]. Five days following the opening of the well-received misadventures of the bungling soldier, an announcement heralded Piscator's acquisition of a second theater:

Erwin Piscator has leased the Lessing-Theater from 1 March. So far as we have been able to ascertain, the contract has been signed for a six month period, that is until 1 September. Since Piscator ends his season in the Theater am Nollendorfplatz on 30 June, he will present his ensemble in the Lessing Theater during the coming summer.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁴"Erwin Piscator hat ab 1. März das Lessing-Theater gepachtet. Der Pachtvertrag ist, wie wir erfahren, zunächst für die Dauer von sechs Monaten, also bis zum 1. September, abgeschlossen worden. Während Piscator die Spielzeit im Theater am Nollendorfplatz am 30. Juni beendet, wird er mit seinem Ensemble auch während des kommenden Sommers im Lessing-Theater Aufführungen veranstalten." Die deutsche Bühne, XX, (28 January 1928), 30.

The second theater constituted an economic necessity for Piscator. The commitments of the subscription program of the Sonderabteilung obligated the director of the Piscator-Bühne to offer five productions in the course of the 1927-28 theatrical season.¹⁴⁵ Already Piscator had cut off the successful runs, Hoppla and Rasputin, and probably he was loath to abort a third, Schwejk. Nevertheless, he needed to meet his subscription obligations before the end of the season. In handling the problem, Otto Katz, Piscator's business manager, suggested leasing the Lessing Theater so that Schwejk could continue at the Theater am Nollendorfplatz while the Piscator-Bühne offered a fourth production. Katz made the necessary financial arrangements during the last weeks of January, as Piscator began work on Leo Lania's new play, Konjunktur.

Journalist and member of the dramatisches Kollektiv, Leo Lania began writing Konjunktur during the summer of 1927, while Gasbarra, Toller and Piscator prepared Hoppla, wir leben for production.¹⁴⁶ By the end of July, Lania finished two acts of the comedy, his first dramatic attempt. Preliminary readings pleased the Piscator-Bühne's leading actress, Tilla Durieux, consequently, Piscator considered a presentation of Konjunktur after Hoppla, wir leben.¹⁴⁷ The director's final choice fell on Rasputin, however, and not until after Schwejk did Piscator seriously consider a production of Konjunktur.

¹⁴⁵Erwin Piscator, Das politische Theater, p. 228.

¹⁴⁶Ibid., p. 204.

¹⁴⁷Ibid., p. 205.

Piscator planned to open the Lessing Theater with the Lania script. One advantage centered on Durieux's interest in the leading role. But one disadvantage also existed: Lania had not yet found a satisfactory conclusion for his plot. Under Piscator's direction, Lania composed a conclusion in which a Russian agent gained control of a newly discovered oil field in Albania through inciting revolution. Following a preview performance this conclusion came under heavy fire from an influential segment of the Piscator-Bühne's audience, representatives of the KPD, the Russian embassy and the reviewer of the German communist newspaper, Die Rote Fahne. Piscator received from his guests such adverse criticism of the picture of Russian foreign policy which the play presented, that the director decided to alter the script.¹⁴⁸ Bertolt Brecht took matters in hand, however, and prevented the theater from closing its doors. Alone, the experienced playwright rewrote the final act of the play to please all concerned by changing the Russian agent to an American spy in disguise thus making it possible for the curtain to rise on Konjunktur on 10 April 1928.¹⁴⁹ Although no published version of Lania's play is available, a general outline of the story can be summarized from several reviews and Piscator's own comments on the

¹⁴⁸Ibid., p. 211.

¹⁴⁹Piscator gives 8 April as the opening night of Konjunktur (Das politische Theater, p. 204), but the Deutsches Bühnenspielplan lists 10 April as the Uraufführung [première]. The editor of the Henschelverlag edition of Das politische Theater concurs with the theater periodical (see Erwin Piscator, Schriften II, p. 380.) In either case, the opening took place long after the scheduled opening. Piscator planned for Konjunktur to inaugurate the Piscator-Bühne in the Lessing Theater on March 1, but the show was not ready

play. Labeled "the comedy of economics" [Die Komödie der Wirtschaft"],¹⁵⁰ Konjunktur, which in colloquial German indicates a favorable turn of the market or a boom, concerns a fictitious oil discovery in the small Adriatic country of Albania.

The play depicts three tramps who notice their pants sticking to the ground. They investigate and find a pool of oil. Before the three can exploit their find, two bandits chase the tramps away. In a similar manner, the two bandits are chased out of the oil find by a French speculator. News of the oil travels fast, and an Italian speculator soon cheats the owner of the field, a local barmaid, out of her land. The girl leaves the Italian and the Frenchman to dispute the oil rights. The Royal-Dutch Shell Company enters the squabble under the auspices of an obscure regulation of the League of Nations. Yet another speculator, Frau Claire Barsin, appears on the scene, aggravating the confused situation even more. She claims to be an agent of the Russians, but in fact comes from Boston representing the United States Standard Oil Company's attempt to gain

for that date. A quick shift of schedule placed Singende Galgenvögel by Upton Sinclair on stage at the Lessing Theater. Originally planned as an experimental production by the Studio of the Piscator-Bühne, Sinclair's play ran between March 1 and March 16 as a part of the theater's regular season. Small audiences led to a close of the production, directed by Ernst Lönner, a young assistant of Piscator and a revival of Hoppla, wir leben, on 17 March which lasted until 10 April.

¹⁵⁰ Erwin Piscator, Das politische Theater, p. 204.

control of the oil find in Albania. Her chief assistant is a con-
 niving Albanian, Trebitsch-Lincoln, a former Greek-Orthodox monk
 who became her press secretary. So successfully does the former
 monk unite religion and nationality that he soon becomes the Albanian's
 dictator. When he sells Albanian oil rights to Mrs. Barsin, however,
 he enrages a revolutionary army of Albanian workers and farmers, who
 then march on the capital. This left-wing movement sweeps Trebitsch-
 Lincoln and his American oil queen from power, thus securing the
 profits of the natural resources of the tiny country for the people
 who live there.¹⁵¹

The growing importance of oil wells in Albania found a mirror
 in the set designed by Traugott Müller. The action began on an
 empty stage—"dem nackten Feld" [the naked field], as Piscator termed
 it.¹⁵² Bit by bit pieces of scenery appeared until the actors
 found themselves among five oil wells.¹⁵³ All of this was according
 to Piscator's directorial conception of the play: ". . . a set
 construction completes itself before the eyes of the spectators and
 demonstrates the complete technical proceedings of oil production."¹⁵⁴
 Available reviews do not explain exactly how Piscator demonstrated

¹⁵¹For the most part, this summary comes from a newspaper review
 by Paul Wiegler, "Lania: Konjunktur—Piscator-Bühne im Lessing
 Theater," B.Z. am Mittag (Berlin), 11 April 1928.

¹⁵²Erwin Piscator, Das politische Theater, p. 208.

¹⁵³Fiebach, p. 280.

¹⁵⁴". . . ein Spielaufbau vollzieht sich vor dem Augen des
 Zuschauers und demonstriert den ganzen technischen Hergang der
 Ölproduktion." Erwin Piscator, Das politische Theater, p. 208.

the procedure, but are complimentary concerning the set. One reviewer writes, "The words are nothing and the staging is actually the poetry."¹⁵⁵

Reviewers give few details of the production, seeming to assume that Piscator's style of theater is already familiar to their readers: "Once again film, once again loudspeakers, once again a tiered stage, and jazz music accompanied the dialogue."¹⁵⁶ Available pictures do not show a playing space on a "tiered stage". Possibly the reviewer was referring to the oil rigs, towers as well as pumping stations, which Müller arranged on the stage.

Besides being repetitious of earlier techniques, the technical apparatus of Konjunktur was not as spectacular as that of the previous productions. "Piscator has offered so much new and interesting this winter," one reporter wrote, "that we should not take it badly when he rests a little."¹⁵⁷ As in previous productions, Edmund Meisel supplied a jazz musical accompaniment for the play which ended with a chorus of the Internationale. Film also accompanied the actors in a documentary fashion.

¹⁵⁵"Das Wort ist nichts und die Inszenierung die eigentliche Dichtung." Arthur Eloesser, Vossische Zeitung (Berlin), 11 April 1928.

¹⁵⁶"Noch einmal Film, noch einmal Lautsprecher, noch einmal mehrstöckige Bühne und Jazz musik zu dem Dialogue." Felix Hollander, 8 Uhr Abendblatt (Berlin), 11 April 1928.

¹⁵⁷"Piscator hatte in diesem Winter . . . doch so viel Neues, so viel Interessantes geboten, dass man es ihm diesmal nicht allzu übel nimmt, wenn er sich ein wenig ausruht." Rolf Nürnberg, 12 Uhr Blatt (Berlin), 11 April 1928.

Piscator writes that he envisioned the film for Konjunktur as providing not only the background of the play but also as defining the scope of the events portrayed in the Journalisten-Komödie [Journalistic comedy].¹⁵⁸ His motif was a page of newspaper. He projected it onto a screen which flew between the stage set and the audience. Divided into printed columns, the newspaper-movie provided some essentials of the plot. Piscator states that the action of the plot always picked up from the exact point at which the newspaper commentary ended.¹⁵⁹ Unfortunately, no description of any such scene was found. The only filmed segment described in any detail was the final film segment of the show, in which the cinematic newspaper seemed to burst afire in the course of the Albanian workers' rebellion. The fire was all in the film, of course, a technique which was not wholly new for the Berlin public. One reporter remarked that he recently saw the same technique produced even better in a local movie-house, the Winterpalast.¹⁶⁰

Although the last production directed by Piscator, Konjunktur was not the final presentation of the first Piscator-Bühne, the opening of Konjunktur began financial problems which resulted ultimately in the failure of the organization.

As Piscator admitted, financial difficulties seem to have appeared first with the leasing of the Lessing Theater in late January

¹⁵⁸ Erwin Piscator, Das politische Theater, p. 209.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ F. Hussong, Lokal Anzeiger (Berlin), 11 April 1928. Hussong even gives the title of the film, "Holzfäller im brennenden Wald" ["The Logger in the Burning Forest"].

1928.¹⁶¹ At the time the director rented the theater, Schwejk was bringing in seven to nine thousand marks per night.¹⁶² Expecting the hit to continue at the Nollendorfpfplatz Theater until the end of the season, Piscator thought that he needed a second theater in which he could meet his five production requirements to his subscription audience. The leasing of the Lessing Theater would have been a sound idea, had Schwejk been able to play into the summer months. But the director and his business manager, Otto Katz, did not know that Max Pallenberg, the star of Schwejk, was available only until April 12, at which time he had scheduled a South American tour. Pallenberg would not change his schedule--and Piscator did not replace the actor but ended Schwejk's run, a decision which the director does not explain.

In addition to problems with Schwejk, Piscator experienced delays in opening Konjunktur, for the show's lead, Tilla Durieux, became ill.¹⁶³ Instead of opening March 1, Konjunktur opened April 8. During the intervening four weeks, rather than allow the Lessing

¹⁶¹ Ibid., p. 229.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Piscator does not reveal the exact nature of Durieux's illness in his book. According to Frau Sonja Boggs-Hessdörfer, widow of Otto Katz, Till Durieux was not ill, but in Cairo, Egypt, for three days with Ludwig Katznellenbogen, the angel of the Piscator-Bühne. In Durieux's three-day absence, Piscator recast Konjunktur's leading role. Upon Tilla Durieux's return, she insisted Piscator give her the part. The director relented, returned to his original cast, and lost several days of rehearsal. Frau Boggs-Hessdörfer recounted this explanation in an interview in West Berlin, December 1969.

Theater to stand empty, Piscator opened Singende Galgenvögel by Upton Sinclair. Directed by Ernst Lönner, a professional actor but an inexperienced director, Singende Galgenvögel was an experimental project of the members of the Studio of the Piscator-Bühne. After only fourteen days on the stage of the Lessing Theater, small audiences led Piscator to cancel Sinclair's play.¹⁶⁴

The public not being interested in an experimental production, Piscator turned to a revival of Hoppla, wir leben, which he re-opened on March 17. Hoppla's revival proved to be a mistake, but lacking any other choice, he allowed it to play to almost empty houses until April 9, the day before Konjunktur opened.

April 10 marked the last performance of Schwejk in the Theater am Nollendorfplatz. Piscator had arranged earlier for a Gast-regisseur [guest director] Karl Heinz Martin, to direct Schwejk's replacement, Der letzte Kaiser ["The Last Emperor"], a piece of French historical fiction. Martin provided a production with experienced direction at a time when Piscator was not available. Nevertheless, one drawback lay beneath the apparent advantage. Martin's production "gobbled up enormous amounts of supplies" at a time when the Piscator-Bühne could not afford it.¹⁶⁵ Not helping the financial situation, Piscator struck a gallant attitude: "Who would have had the courage to deny to the guest material without which he thought that he could not succeed?"¹⁶⁶ Der letzte Kaiser opened on 14 April. If successful

¹⁶⁴Ibid., p. 229.

¹⁶⁵"Frisst enorme Mittel." Erwin Piscator, Das politische Theater, p. 230.

¹⁶⁶"Wer hätte den Mut, einem Gastregisseur die Mittel zu

it might have saved the organization, but it was not. Looking back on the failure of the Piscator-Bühne, Ihering calls Der letzte Kaiser "the decisive failure."¹⁶⁷

Neither Martin's production nor Piscator's Konjunktur cleared the red ink from the box office ledger. During the first week of May costs for the two shows together ran to 7,000 marks per night.¹⁶⁸ The German Internal Revenue Department [Steuerbehörde] then delivered the coup de grace to the Piscator-Bühne, demanding 16,000 marks in taxes. Piscator closed Konjunktur and the Lessing Theater on 3 May selling the lease to Emil Lind, a popular director of light entertainment who opened his summer season early with an English detective story, Haus Nummer 17.

The Theater am Nollendorfplatz held out six weeks longer, but the decline in Piscator's fortunes continued. The Last Kaiser played until 3 May. A second French play in translation, Marlborough zieht in den Krieg ["Marlborough Goes to War"] followed on 5 May. A fantasy written by Marcel Achard, Marlborough departed in tone from the traditional political fare of the Piscator-Bühne, although it treated a historical-political subject. Erwin Kalser, a member of the Kollektiv, directed the production, and Traugott Müller designed the settings. Marlborough ran until Piscator released his permit to operate on 1 June, and the first Piscator-Bühne came officially to a close.¹⁶⁹

verweigern, ohne die er nicht auszukommen glaubt?" Ibid.

¹⁶⁷"Der entscheidende Misserfolg." Herbert Ihering, "Piscator-Bühne," Börsen Courier (Berlin), 4 July 1928.

¹⁶⁸Erwin Piscator, Das politische Theater, p. 230.

¹⁶⁹"Sommerspielzeit," ["Summer Season"], Die deutsche Bühne,

Undisturbed by outside forces such as inflation or depression, the first Piscator-Bühne failed due to overextension. The final solution of the financial deficit is unknown. Possibly, Piscator declared bankruptcy. In any event, his name disappeared from the theater annals of Berlin for nine months, a long absence for one as active as Piscator.

With the exception of the treadmill used in Schwejk, the directorial techniques used in the Theater am Nollendorfplatz did not differ greatly from those of Piscator's earlier period: extensive alterations to texts to focus on the proletariat as hero rather than as individual, the use of masks to impersonate historic figures, films which served as symbol, as documentation, or to continue the action of the plot, music and massive sets. Certainly, these devices were larger and more opulent, but no different from those of the Volksbühne. The distinguishing mark of Piscator's year in the Theater am Nollendorfplatz may lie only in the choice of scripts produced. The Piscator-Bühne was Germany's first significant professional theater dedicated solely to the proletarian revolution. In contrast, Karl Heinz Martin's *Die Tribüne* had lasted for only one performance and Piscator's Proletarian Theater had been composed of amateurs.

During the year of the first Piscator-Bühne Piscator may not have introduced many innovations, but he appeared to direct political theater with a confidence and single-minded energy which had been lacking when he divided his attention between productions for the KPD

XX (11 June 1928), 154.

and those for the Volksbühne. In his endeavors he had the advantage of experienced artists such as Grosz and Müller designing for him, published authors such as Brecht, Toller, Lania, Mehring and Gasbarra writing for him and professional actors such as Pallenberg, Durieux and Granach performing. This combination resulted in a professional sophistication which had been lacking in his earlier experimental productions and made the opening of a production in the Piscator-Bühne a theatrical event which could draw audiences for extended runs. Although his theatrical venture failed financially, it marked a professional success for Piscator and established the thirty-five year old director as one of the significant forces in shaping German theater in the twenties.

CHAPTER IX
THE SECOND AND THIRD PISCATOR-BÜHNE
1929-1931

The effect of the first Piscator-Bühne on the Berlin theater circles may never be fully measured. Following the collapse of the political theater venture, the company disbanded. Nevertheless, traces of the group of socially minded artists were visible in Berlin, even if their former director was not.

Possibly the member of the company most successful in finding employment was Bertolt Brecht, who saw the première of his greatest hit, Die Dreigroschenoper ["The Three Penny Opera"] in the August following the June closing of the Theater am Nollendorfplatz.

Brecht admired Piscator and praises Piscator in several chapters of Schriften zum Theater ["Writings on Theater"], a collection of Brecht's outlooks on theater. Piscator recognized the talents of the young playwright at the same time, and used them when he could. Nevertheless, Piscator never staged a Brecht play in Berlin during the twenties.

No other single member of the Piscator-Bühne fared so well as Brecht. Attracting less attention, was a small group of at least sixteen actors, eight of whom were former members of Piscator's Studio, who received notice of the Berlin press for continuing Piscator's ideals in the absence of their director.¹ Following

¹These eight former members of Piscator's studio were Rene

the collapse of the Piscator-Bühne, an actor from the Deutsches Theater, Hans Deppe, collaborated with Fritz Genschow, a pupil of Piscator, to form the Gruppe junger Schauspieler [Band of Young Actors].² Temporarily out of work but believing in a theater which discussed contemporary problems, the Gruppe junger Schauspieler requested the thirty-four year old author, Peter Martin Lampel, to adapt for the stage his recently published sociological report Jungen in Not ["Boys in Need"]. The result, Revolte im Erziehungs-
haus ["Revolts in the Academie"], dramatized the abuses then prevalent in Prussian boys' schools. A Sunday matinée reading at the Thaliatheater (Berlin, 2 December 1928) brought about spontaneous recommendations for a professional run from the respected authors Carl Zuckmayer and Ernst Toller.³ Viktor Barnowsky, a successful Berlin producer, took up the recommendation and ventured a run of the production in the Theater am Königgrätzerstrasse beginning 8 December.

The show later moved to Berlin's Theater am Schiffbauerdamm and then toured throughout Germany and Switzerland. Enthusiastically praising the production, the reviewer Herbert Ihering ended his column by trying gently to prod Piscator, recognized as the father of the group, back into action: "Hopefully, Piscator knows what

Stobrawa, Werner Kepich, Gerhart Biernert, Adolf Eischer, Alfred Schäfer, Ludwig Roth, Werner Pledath, and Fritz Genschow.

²Günther Rühle, p. 904.

³Ibid., p. 905.

he has to do."⁴

Piscator may well have been aware of "what he had to do." The political director writes that during the nine months inactivity he continually tried to raise money for a new theater. He mentions, but does not elaborate on, three separate occasions on which he came near to realizing the founding of the second Piscator-Bühne.⁵ A fourth attempt was recorded in a German theater magazine which announced in early March that Piscator would direct in the Komische Oper, Berlin, beginning 1 September.⁶ For unknown reasons, Piscator and his new business manager, Ludwig Klopfer, lost his fourth opportunity.⁷

RIVALEN

March marked Piscator's return to the Berlin stage after a nine-month absence. As guest director for Victor Barnowsky, Piscator staged a production of Rivalen [literally Rivals, the translated title of Maxwell Anderson's What Price Glory?] Having directed in Berlin for twenty-four years, Victor Barnowsky was not a controversial theaterman, but definitely a successful one. Piscator confessed that he accepted the invitation to direct for Barnowsky not due to any

⁴"Hoffentlich weiss Piscator, was er zu tun hat." Herbert Ihering, Börsen Courier (Berlin), 4 April 1928.

⁵Erwin Piscator, Das politische Theater, p. 240.

⁶"Neue Theater und Direktionen" [New Theaters and Directors], Die deutsche Bühne, XXI (8 March 1929), 82.

⁷Erwin Piscator, Das politische Theater, p. 240.

similarity of theatrical ideals, but because of his own poor financial situation.⁸ Piscator may not have agreed politically with Barnowsky, but he could not dispute the theaterman's eye for a successful show. Opening on 20 March 1929, Rivalen played for 115 consecutive performances, closing on 13 July. Not even Schwejk ran so long at the Piscator-Bühne. In spite of this success, however, Piscator writes that he would not have produced Rivalen in his own theater and would definitely not have done it in such a style as he did in Barnowsky's Theater in der Königgrätzer Strasse, for the political overtones and technical innovations were minimal.⁹

Translated and adapted from the English by Carl Zuckmayer, Rivalen's plot may have been familiar to a large percentage of Berlin's theater-going public, for many undoubtedly remembered the American film, What Price Glory? which appeared in Berlin during August 1927, also under the title Rivalen.¹⁰ A silent film, it found an appreciative audience in Berlin, according to at least one reviewer.¹¹ Another describes Piscator's production as a "Wiederholung" [repetition] of the film.¹² Apparently Piscator did not tamper extensively

⁸Erwin Piscator, Das politische Theater, p. 243.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰"Rivalen" in Herbert Ihering, Von Reinhardt bis Brecht, ["From Reinhardt to Brecht"], Vol. II (Berlin, Aufbau Verlag, 1960), 535.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Monty Jacobs, "Rivalen, Theater in der Königgrätzer Strasse," Vossische Zeitung (Berlin), 21 March 1929.

with the script. Available pictures of the production center on the actors and not the set, designed by Caspar Neher, who would later be known for his designs for Bertolt Brecht's productions. Although Piscator used no film,¹³ he once again used a treadmill on which soldiers marched to the front. The loudspeaker which amplified all sounds occurring off-stage, even voices, was the technical device which sparked most comments from critics. No review noted that Rivalen was the first legitimate theater production to use such amplification, but all four available reviews made extensive mention of the sound effects of voices, motorcycles, music, machine gun fire, and exploding grenades.¹⁴ Piscator's use of amplified sound effects constitutes one more technical device which he employed at a time when such devices were uncommon on Berlin stages.

In the total development of Piscator's approach to political theater, Rivalen represents a lessening of Piscator's use of technical devices and directorial techniques which had characterized his work in the Piscator-Bühne, a lessening for which Piscator offers no explanation in the available material.

Following his work on Rivalen during February and March 1929, Piscator turned his attention to acquiring again the Theater am Nollendorfpfplatz for the coming season. The first known announcement that an agreement had been reached appeared at the surprisingly late

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Herbert Ihering, Börsen-Courier (Berlin), 21 March 1929.

date of 20 August 1929.¹⁵ Writing of the negotiations, Piscator gave few details, but did state that meetings with the owners of the Theater am Nollendorfplatz, Carl Mernhard and Rudolf Bernauer, sometimes lasted from 5:00 P.M. until 2:00 A.M.¹⁶

When all was settled, the Berlin city police registered the second Piscator-Bühne under the name of the business manager, Ludwig Klopfer. Why Piscator did not receive the permit to operate is not clear,¹⁷ for officially, Piscator held the position of artistic director in the theater organization which bore his name.¹⁸

The second Piscator-Bühne, like the first, received some assistance from a Sonderabteilung of the Volksbühne, which offered a subscription series of four productions in the Volksbühne's own house, the Theater am Bulowplatz, plus four productions in the Piscator-Bühne and four other productions split between the Schiller Theater and the Oper am Platz der Republik. The directors of the Volksbühne explained that the Sonderabteilung was an attempt to serve the growing interest in a proletarian theater which dealt with contemporary social problems:

¹⁵"Neue Theater und Direktionen," Die deutsche Bühne, XXI (20 August 1929), 232.

¹⁶Erwin Piscator, Das politische Theater, p. 240.

¹⁷The political director's exact words: "The following year, I did not receive the permit to operate, but Herr Klopfer did." ["Im nächsten Jahr erhielt ich die Konzession nicht, sondern Herr Klopfer"]. Erwin Piscator, Schriften II, p. 84.

¹⁸"Piscatorbühne Ludwig Klopfer im Theater am Nollendorfplatz," Deutsches Bühnen Jahrbuch, XLI (1930), 288.

The Special Sections want to bring to the foreground plays which serve the concept of a proletarian theater; that is, plays in which political and social conflicts of the present are dealt with from a proletarian point of view. Also, the Special Sections offer plays which seek new artistic means of expression."¹⁹

Prices of subscription tickets and final membership figures are not available on the Sonderabteilung, but the acting company of thirty-nine actors and eighteen actresses was larger than its predecessor which consisted of only thirty-four actors and eleven actresses.²⁰

The Actors' Studio of the Piscator-Bühne continued with its courses of instruction designed to train actors and theater technicians.²¹ Among the courses offered were scene design from Mohloy-Nagy, member of the Bauhaus group of architects and designer for Piscator's first production of the season, Der Kaufmann von Berlin ["The Merchant of Berlin"]; film direction from Bela Balasz; lectures in cabaret and revue theater by Walter Mehring; lectures in dramatic literature by Leo Lania; music from Franz Osborn; voice and diction

¹⁹"Die Sonderabteilungen wollen Stücke in den Vordergrund rücken, die der Idee eines proletarischen Zeittheaters dienen, in denen also die politischen und sozialen Kämpfe der Gegenwart vom Standpunkt der proletarischen Forderungen aus behandelt werden: daneben auch Inszenierungen, die nach neuen künstlerischen Ausdrucksformen suchen." From Volksbühne e.V., Programm 1929-30, a pamphlet on file at the der Akademie der Künste, West Berlin.

²⁰ Figures come from the Deutsches Bühnen Jahrbuch, "Piscator-Bühne Ludwig Klopfer im Theater am Nollendorfplatz," XLI (1930), 288-289, and "Theater am Nollendorfplatz (Piscator-Bühne)," XXXIX (1928), 262-263.

²¹ Erwin Piscator, Das politische Theater, p. 217.

from Gustave Müller; and radio broadcasting from Alfred Braun.²² Unlike its predecessor, the studio of the second Piscator-Bühne did not present experimental theater productions on selected Sunday afternoons. Presumably, the members of the acting company took some part in the studio lectures, either teaching or listening, but concrete details are missing. Perhaps Piscator planned to have experimental productions but was unable to organize them, for the second Piscator-Bühne was short lived, lasting only as long as its first production, Der Kaufmann von Berlin, which closed on 16 October 1928, after a run of six weeks.

DER KAUFMANN VON BERLIN

Piscator originally planned to open Der Kaufmann von Berlin on 30 August 1929,²³ but circumstances delayed the première performance until 6 September. Written by Walter Mehring, an old friend of Piscator and a member of the dramatisches Kollektiv of the first Piscator-Bühne, Der Kaufmann von Berlin is the story of the economic rise and fall of a German Jew who arrived in Berlin from East Prussia with one hundred American dollars at the height of the inflation of 1923. The play consists of four acts and a prologue.²⁴ The action of the play begins in the third-class cabin of a train traveling toward

²²"Rundschau: Berlin," Die deutsche Bühne, XXI (2 November 1929), 309.

²³"Neue Theater und Direktionen," Die deutsche Bühne, XXI (2 August 1929), 232.

²⁴The following plot summary was compiled from Walter Mehring, Der Kaufmann von Berlin, ein historisches Schauspiel aus der

Berlin. The passengers, Germans discussing inflation, often remark that for one dollar, one could buy all of Berlin. In the toilet compartment of the car, Simon Chajim Kaftan, a lonely Jew on his way to Berlin to invest his life savings, quietly counts out one hundred dollars. The first act of the play depicts Kaftan's wanderings through Germany's capital city in the throes of the 1923 inflation. In a series of short, slice-of-life scenes, which is typical of the play's literary construction, Kaftan views people who have succeeded and failed due to the inflation. He wanders through both the upper class sections, such as Unter den Linden, and through the Jewish-ghetto sections, such as Grenadierstrasse. Throughout the first act the times are so hard that he is unable to find anyone able to exchange his dollars for marks.

In the second act Kaftan's luck changes when he meets Müller, the state prosecutor who is also a salesman. Müller introduces Kaftan to Eisenberg who owns a failing Jewish merchandise firm, and the East Prussian Jew invests his savings by buying control of it.

The third act opens on Kurfürstendamm, a popular high-class shopping area of Berlin, where a store on which the name "S. Ch. Kaftan" is prominently displayed, clearly indicates that Kaftan has become one of Berlin's more profitable merchants. As the act progresses, Kaftan reveals that he has gained his fortune through shipments of arms to a right-wing secret German organization known as the Geheimbund der acht [Secret Band of Eight]. The group incites a

deutschen Inflation ["The Merchant of Berlin: a Historic Play of the German Inflation"] (Berlin: S. Fischer Verlag, 1929). The prompt book for this production is not available.

riot in a Jewish neighborhood resulting in several Jewish merchants, Kaftan among them, ruined, their stores looted or gutted by fire. Three street cleaners close the act by sweeping from the stage paper money, soldiers' helmets, and finally even a soldier's body, commenting in song on each: "Dreck, weg damit" [Trash, away with it].

In the fourth act Kaftan is penniless. Müller finds another Jew, Cohn, who is willing to invest his savings, as yet another round of exploitation begins. Kaftan wanders from place to place throughout Berlin until he sees a reward posted amounting to 450 marks for his own capture for failing to pay his back debts. Broken by this last turn of fortune, Kaftan turns to the stranger who happens to be standing next to him, identifies himself as the wanted man, and instructs the stranger to take him to the police station and collect the reward.

Although no prompt book was found for Piscator's production of Kaftan's adventures, he wrote that he requested several songs added to Mehring's script. Mehring was himself a teacher of revue and cabaret theater in the Studio of the second Piscator-Bühne, and may have composed the satirical verse himself at the suggestion of Piscator. Piscator complained that in the play the proletariat was almost totally missing. Mehring's introduction of several songs sung by proletarian chorus, attempted to show the working class as an essential part of the play.²⁵ Although the exact number of the songs used in Der Kaufmann von Berlin is unknown, the names of at

²⁵ Erwin Piscator, Das politische Theater, p. 253.

least three have remained: "Cantata of War, Peace and Inflation" [Kantata von Krieg, Frieden und Inflation], "The Song of Stale Bread" and "The Chant of the Three Classes."²⁶ One reviewer supplied a line from the "Cantata of War, Peace and Inflation" as an example of the song's lyrics: "Man must eat, and because he must, that makes food so expensive."²⁷

Piscator wanted a set containing at least three different, separated and mobile levels. He considered one level as representing the proletariat (which he also referred to as the tragic element in the play), one representing the middle class (a tragic-grotesque element) and a third for the upper and military classes (a grotesque element).²⁸ Designed by Laszlo Moholy-Nagy the set-construction for Kaufmann was possibly the most elaborate to appear on any of the Piscator-Bühnen.

The set design seems to have fulfilled Piscator's original plans. Three rectangular levels, all capable of being flown hung parallel to each other from the theater's grid. Each level measured fourteen meters by two meters (42 feet by 6 feet) and ran parallel to the proscenium wall.²⁹ Movable stairways connected these levels

²⁶ Ibid., p. 254.

²⁷ "Der Mensch muss essen, und weil er essen muss, das macht das Essen so teuer." Bernhard Diebold, Frankfurter Zeitung, 11 September 1929, quoted in Günther Rühle, p. 963.

²⁸ Erwin Piscator, Das politische Theater, p. 253.

²⁹ Fiebach, p. 295.

when they appeared on stage simultaneously. In addition to the three hanging platforms, Moholy-Nagy placed two treadmills, possibly the same used in Schwejk, raked at a slight angle, on the revolving turntable. Available pictures of Der Kaufmann von Berlin do not clarify the rather confusing stage picture.³⁰ Decoration consisted of furniture (chairs, tables, stools) and filmed projections.

At least three movie-screens were used, two of which were comparatively small. One, located downstage right, measured 2.75 meters wide and 4 meters high (8 feet x 12 feet) and the second, upstage left, measured 2.70 meters by 2.75 meters (7 1/2 feet x 8 feet). Both screens were capable of being flown.³¹ A third, larger screen hung across center stage, veiling most of the proscenium opening. A brief description of three short French scenes from the première of Der Kaufmann von Berlin may illustrate how Piscator used this extensive set.

The show opened with the "Cantata of War, Peace and Inflation." A choir of actors assembled on the stage before two treadmills, and two movie screens. Each actor wore black cloth draped so that only his head was visible. During the opening song, projected pictures of cannon appeared on the downstage screen and mounds of money on the upstage screen.

³⁰Pictures of the set are available in Bühne und bildende Kunst im XX. Jahrhundert, p. 147, plates c and d.

³¹Mildenberger, p. 195. The extensive description of the opening scene of Der Kaufmann von Berlin was taken in large part from Mildenberger's work.

Following the cantata, the actors disappeared, the two screens disappeared and the larger screen across center stage descended. Downstage of the large screen, one of the three flying platforms descended, on which a train wagon was represented with Kaftan traveling from his home (off stage right) to Berlin (off stage left). Billboards and signposts on the treadmill traveled past the stationary train, while farther upstage the large screen showed pictures of familiar places whizzing by, as might be seen from the window of a train traveling to Berlin. This film was projected from upstage of the screen.

Kaftan's journey ended as the larger screen rose half of its height, revealing the Berlin station sign "Alexanderplatz." Porters and passengers hurried alongside of the stationary railway car, but, being on the rapidly moving conveyor belt, the people seemed to lose ground, while the train seemed to roll ahead. As the train appeared to come to a halt, the conveyor belt slowed down, until it stopped. The halt was, for the train, a descent actually. The platform on which the railway car was built lowered to floor level and Kaftan disembarked with his fellow passengers. An U-Bahn [subway] station with its blue sign glowing, emitted commuters from below the stage, upwards through a trap-door to the acting level. The trains roared by and cars on the street honked through music composed and directed by Hans Eisler.

The critics did not approve of the heavily technical production. The critic claimed that a "horrible wrong had been done to the

author,"³² while another protested that the machinery so overwhelmed the actors that they "do not reach the limelight."³³ In addition to the actors often being inaudible,³⁴ the machinery did not always rotate, descend or rise on cue and long pauses ensued,³⁵ or else "everything creaked, cracked and rumbled."³⁶ Technically, "nothing worked,"³⁷ for one reviewer. The opening night performance lasted from 7:30 until 11:45.³⁸ A critic concluded "Technical theater as an end in itself is the final defeat of stage art."³⁹ Nevertheless, the technical theater exhibited in Der Kaufmann von Berlin did not cause the greatest protest against the Piscator-Bühne. The most impassioned journalistic ink seems to have been spilled over the political implications of the street cleaners scene in the third act.

³²"Eine schwere Schädigung des Authors." Monty Jacobs, "Piscators Anfang und Ende," Vossische Zeitung (Berlin), 7 September 1929.

³³"Die Schauspieler kommen noch nicht in der Brennpunkt." Bernard Diebold, Frankfurter Zeitung (Frankfurt), 11 September 1929, quoted in Günther Rühle, p. 964.

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Monty Jacobs, Vossische Zeitung (Berlin), 7 September 1929.

³⁶"Alles knarrte, knackte, brummte." Paul Fechter, Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung (Berlin), 7 September 1929, quoted in Günther Rühle, p. 968.

³⁷"Es klappte nichts." Ibid.

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹"Die Technik als Selbstzweck, das ist der Untergang der Bühnenkunst." Monty Jacobs, Vossische Zeitung (Berlin), 7 September 1929.

Ernst Busch, an actor who would later become a prominent member of Brecht's Berlin Ensemble, played the bit part of one of the street cleaners in Der Kaufmann von Berlin. He relates that on opening night scattered applause followed the first and second verses of the street cleaners' song dealing with money and the soldiers' helmets. As described in the plot summary, each verse ended with, "It's trash: away with it," and the actors sang to the third verse while hauling off the body of a dead soldier. Toward the end of the verse, one of the street cleaners, Hermann Spelmans, slapped disrespectfully the realistic dummy's head, causing its helmet to bounce across the stage. Apparently the slap displeased the audience, for shouted objections broke forth.⁴⁰ The performance continued after a pause, but some reviewers emphasized the incident. The Lokal-Anzeiger placed its review of Der Kaufmann von Berlin on the front page, directly under the masthead. Entitled "Trash: away with it," the review applied the play's lines to the Piscator-Bühne,⁴¹ and Der Tag announced that Piscator was inciting the people to civil war.⁴² For the second performance, one hundred police were present in the theater at the request of the Piscator-Bühne to prevent any possible outbreaks of

⁴⁰ Ihering and Fetting, pp. 55-56.

⁴¹ "Dreck, weg damit." Lokal-Anzeiger (Berlin), 7 September 1929.

⁴² Der Tag, 8 September 1929, quoted in Günther Rühle, p. 962.

violence.⁴³ No riot occurred, but Busch reports that following the street-cleaners' song such shouting broke loose in the theater that he had to begin his line six times before the house was quiet enough for him to continue.⁴⁴

In spite of its initial furor, Der Kaufmann von Berlin lasted only six weeks. On 16 October 1929 the Berliner Zeitung reported that Piscator had left Nollendorfplatz due to financial difficulties. A fuller explanation is not available. Overnight, the stage technicians cleared the massive constructions from the theater, as Ludwig Klopfer assumed complete control of the building.⁴⁵ Forty percent of the actors in the former Piscator-Bühne were jobless.⁴⁶

Following Piscator's departure from his Theater am Nollendorfplatz, he received an invitation from Heinz Hofmeister to direct a production in the Apollo Theater in Mannheim. Piscator accepted the offer, but only four actors of the second Piscator-Bühne accompanied their director: Heinrich Grief, Lotte Loebinger, Heinz Oberländer, and Albert Venhor. Recruiting other actors from Berlin, Piscator set out for Mannheim, and a tour of the German Reich.

PARAGRAPH 218

Available information does not indicate whether Piscator planned to tour the show he directed for six months after its performance

⁴³Thering and Fetting, p. 57.

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵"Piscators Abschied von Nollendorfplatz," ["Piscator's Departure from Nollendorfplatz"] Zeitung (Berlin), 16 October 1929.

⁴⁶Renate Waack, "Der Schauspieler Heinrich Greif" ["The Actor

In Mannheim. In any case, he picked a provocative play. Written by Carl Credè, a medical doctor and author of several books on socialism,⁴⁷ Paragraph 218 concerns that section of the constitution of Weimar Germany which forbids legal abortion, a hotly discussed issue during the twenties in Germany. As early as 1922 Manfred Georg, a leading socialist, argued that the German state had no right to control births, especially after the abolition of universal military service.⁴⁸

In 1928 Berliners saw the issue brought upon the stage in Hans Josè Rehfish's drama Der Frauenarzt [The Gynecologist] (2 November 1928, Theater in der Königgrätzerstrasse, Berlin) and the following year in Friedrich Wolf's Cyankali [Cyanide] (6 September 1929, Lessing Theater, Berlin). Credè's drama focused on the theme that abortion was available to rich women, who could pay skilled doctors to circumvent the law, while the poor who could least afford children had to rely on the services of unskilled midwives.

Piscator made only minor alterations in Credè's script, which are available in the Dietz edition of Paragraph 218 which claims to follow the prompt book of the play.⁴⁹ The Dietz edition indicates Piscator's alterations by small print.

Heinrich Greiff"] in Schriften zum Theaterwissenschaft, IV (Berlin, Henschelverlag, 1966), p. 362.

⁴⁷Credè authored at least three books whose titles indicate a concern for the masses: Volk in Not ["People in Need"], Von Corpsstudenten zum Sozialisten ["From Students to Socialists"], and Frauen in Not ["Women in Need"].

⁴⁸Manfred Georg, "Das Recht auf Abtreibung," ["The Right of Abortion"] Die Weltbühne, XVII, (5 January 1922), 7-9.

⁴⁹"Den Bühnen gegenüber als Manuskript vervielfältigt." Carl

Act one of the three act play takes place in the impoverished apartment of Mr. and Mrs. Nolte and their five children, one of whom is sick. The family physician, Dr. Hansen, visits the family and prescribes medication for the child. After the doctor leaves, Mrs. Nolte confides to a neighbor, Mutter Knoblick, that she is pregnant but that they cannot afford to have another child. The two women discuss abortion.

Act two concerns a wealthier couple, Mr. and Mrs. Kleeberg, who are appearing in court requesting an abortion. Liese Nolte, eldest daughter of the Noltzes works as a maid for Mrs. Kleeberg, which provides the only connection between the characters in act one and those in act two. Mrs. Kleeberg, obviously a healthy woman, testifies that she is tubercular and that the childbirth would lead to pneumonia. According to German law, a fetus can be aborted only if its prolonged observation proves it will endanger the life of the mother. A doctor supports Mrs. Kleeberg's testimony, offering as evidence his notes taken during the woman's stay under observation at a nursing home. Under questioning from the state's attorney, Mrs. Kleeberg admits to belonging to a tennis club, and the doctor admits that he owns the nursing home in which Mrs. Kleeberg stayed for observation. The judge decides to allow the abortion in spite of Mrs. Kleeberg's obvious good health, since all concerned have scrupulously followed German law.

Credè-Höraer, Paragraph 218, Gequälte Menschen ["Tortured Men"], Drama in 3 Akten (Berlin: J.R.W. Dietz, 1930). A note on the title page confirms that the alterations for Piscator's production are indicated separately: ["Die Veränderungen für die Piscator-Bühne sind durch kleinen Druck gekennzeichnet"].

In a second case, an unnamed woman appears before the judge to request an abortion. The doctor testifies that the woman is tubercular but cannot afford a lengthy stay in a nursing home for observation. Since German law requires the observation, the judge does not permit her pregnancy aborted but, since the poor woman appears physically weak to the judge, he privately concludes that Germany's laws on abortion make no sense to him.

The action of the third act returns to Mrs. Nolte's apartment, where the pregnant woman decides for financial reasons to have the illegal abortion. A sixty-year-old midwife, Lehmann, performs the gruesome operation with a hat pin, as a result of which Mrs. Nolte dies. After Lehmann leaves, Dr. Hansen enters, summarizes what has happened and calls neighbors who call the police. Misunderstanding the sequence of events, the police arrest Dr. Hansen for both murder and abortion upon their arrival. Although Mr. Nolte knows that Mrs. Lehmann is responsible, he does not support the doctor's protestations of innocence. The room clears as the police take the doctor away. Mrs. Knobloch remains and tells Mr. Nolte that Dr. Hansen is innocent. The father admits that he knows, but could not bring himself to turn in Lehmann. Mrs. Knobloch announces that the proletariat must rise and free the innocent doctor.

Credè's script dealt with a controversial, current issue in no uncertain terms. He appealed blatantly to the lower-classes to rise in rebellion against a law which so enslaved them. Less obviously, the play also argued that the proletariat had its back to the wall on the abortion issue, and thus had to be given some relief or it

would revolt. Piscator's alterations to the script further emphasized these two points.

Piscator added to Credè's script a Vorspiel [prologue], a Zwischenspiel [interlude] between acts one and two, and an Aktschluss [conclusion] to act three. Each of these three additions covered at least two pages in the Dietz edition of the play. Along with these rather lengthy additions, Piscator included one-line interjections in all three acts. Actors seated in the audience delivered these lines both to the actors on the stage and to other actors seated in the house. The prologue, for example, took place in the auditorium of the theater, with the house lights still up. Mr. and Mrs. Kleeberg, the main characters in act two, take their place as regular members of the audience. They greet a nurse, a doctor, Dr. Hansen, a priest, and several civic officials, such as a judge and a prosecutor. The couple discuss what they feel the play will concern. Music introduces the stage action as the house lights dim.

In the course of act one, when Mrs. Nolte complains about her child's illness, Dr. Hansen rises out of the audience to examine the child on stage. When finished, the doctor exits to backstage, where he remains until the third act. Actors in the auditorium performed again when the Kleebergs, upon hearing Liese Nolte discuss their recent abortion, leave the auditorium through its back doors, protesting their servant's indiscretion and mistaken notions.

Additions by Piscator in the course of act two concerned Mrs. Nolte, Mrs. Knobloch and Liese Nolte, who are seated in the auditorium during the hearing on the Kleeberg's abortion. The three

women interrupt the Kleeberg's testimony continually, pointing out inconsistencies in it. At one point, Mrs. Knobloch leaves her seat in the house to go on stage and testify how difficult life is in a crowded, poverty stricken family.

Piscator added an epilogue following the third act. As the police lead away Dr. Hansen and Mrs. Knobloch states that the proletariat must free him, a fight breaks out between the police and members of the apartment house complex who, taking Knobloch at her word, attempt to free the doctor. From the auditorium, a city judge, himself an actor, orders the fighting stopped, and mounts the stage platform. He points out that Dr. Hansen had not obeyed the law and called the police immediately upon finding Mrs. Nolte's body. The actors argue with him until the judge addresses the audience, telling the viewers that they must decide. He urges the audience to work for a change in the law after they leave the theater as the curtain then falls.

By means of these additions, Piscator brought the action of the play into the midst of the auditorium. The audience did not sit in a darkened house and watch an uninterrupted flow of events on stage. Piscator writes that his intent was to involve the audience to the point where they could not help but become active in the problem which was being discussed:

Noteworthy in this production [Paragraph 218] was the attempt to bring the topic (the play was written in a primitive-naturalistic style) and the audience together in such a way that they [the members of the audience] would be forced to take an active part in the exciting theme.⁵⁰

⁵⁰"In dieser Aufführung war der Versuch beachtenswert, das

Alterations constitute the only directorial technique which Piscator used in Paragraph 218. Piscator used almost no technical devices and very simple sets: two rooms in the Berlin apartment building set on stage simultaneously, and a court room setting. Since several reviewers mention the limited and primitive stage apparatus,⁵¹ presumably Piscator used a box set, constructed from traditional flats. The stage directions in the playscript suggest that the court room scene be played downstage of the apartment-setting, and before a curtain.⁵² More than one reviewer commented on the set's simplicity: "Piscator worked in Mannheim without a revolving stage, without film, almost without projections."⁵³ A review of the production in Berlin during late March and early April indicates two projections which Piscator used: "Covering the stage hangs a screen intended for a projection: the picture of a sick child, and the text of Paragraph 218, which the play opposes."⁵⁴

Sujet (das Stück ist primitiv-naturalistisch geschrieben) den Zuschauern so darzubringen, dass sie gezwungen werden, aktiv an dem bewegenden Thema teilzuhaben." Erwin Piscator, "Nachwort zur sowjetischen Ausgabe des 'Politischen Theaters.'" Moscow, May 1933, quoted in Erwin Piscator, Schriften II, 107.

⁵¹ ". . . beschränktester Mittel im Rahmen des primitivsten Bühnenapparates . . ." Carl Werckshagen, "Piscator inszeniert Paragraph 218; politische Theater in Mannheim," Oldenburgische Landerzeitung (Oldenburg), 27 November 1929.

⁵² Credè, p. 31.

⁵³ "Piscator arbeitete in Mannheim ohne Film, ohne Drehbühne, fast ohne Projektion." Werckshagen. Oldenburgische Landerzeitung.

⁵⁴ "Über die Bühne hängt eine Leinwand, bestimmt für eine Projection: Bild eines kranken Kindes, Text des Paragraph 218, den das Stück bekämpft." Paul Wiegler, BZ am Mittag (Berlin), 4 April 1930.

Presumably this projection preceeded the production.

Paragraph 218 marks a de-emphasis of technical apparatus by Piscator and a new use of the actor to convey a political message to the audience. As in previous productions, Piscator altered the script to make the audience aware that the fictitious plot dealt with a contemporary social problem. His alterations, the action in the auditorium, caused at least one reviewer to remark that Piscator attempted to throw off the distance between the theater and life.⁵⁵ Piscator did not explain his reasons for lessening his technical approach. Probably financial considerations would not permit elaborate technical staging. No doubt, too, the great depression played a role. Black Thursday hit Wall Street in New York on 24 October, and Paragraph 218 opened on 23 November 1929.

Piscator paid his actors according to a sharing system. After running expenses were deducted, each night's receipts were shared equally among the cast.⁵⁶ The troupe consisted of fifteen actors and four staff members—each receiving on the average only ten marks per day.⁵⁷

Apart from financial considerations, practicality must have played a role in Piscator's decision to cut his heavy equipment. His troupe traveled through a large section of Germany. Lengths of

⁵⁵ Julius Bab, "Paragraph 218 von Carl Credè," Volkszeitung (Berlin), April 1930.

⁵⁶ See letters of Albert Venohr during March 1930 to the Berlin Police Department in Akte: Schauspielunternehmer Dr. Erwin Kalser, 1930-32," in the Brandenburgisches Landeshauptarchiv, Nr. 5253 Bl. 2, quoted in Fiebach, p. 339.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

stays in individual towns were not available, but the monthly schedule indicates frequent moves, often over great distances:

November, December 1929, Mannheim, Dez, Worms, Magdeburg. January 1930, Lübeck, Bremen, Hamburg. February, Duisburg, Elberfeld, Wuppertal. March, Stettin. April-June, Berlin. June, Jena. In June 1931 the troupe visited Switzerland, playing in Zürich and Bern.⁵⁸

Notwithstanding the de-emphasis of the technical, Piscator raised the hackles on conservative necks throughout his tour.irate citizens prohibited performances of Paragraph 218 in Würtzburg Nord-bayern, Gera, and Jena.⁵⁹ In spite of these Verbote, however, Paragraph 218 reached over thirty cities and more than 100,000 patrons within three months of its opening.⁶⁰

Because of the availability of reviews, comments on the performances in Berlin are numerous. Paragraph 218 opened in Berlin on 3 April 1930 and played continuously until an undetermined date in early June. By vote of the acting company, the troupe leased the Wallner Theater, which lay in a workers' district in the eastern section of Berlin.⁶¹ Reviewers expressed repeatedly the opinion that Piscator had abandoned his technical approach: "And also the first [production] which is worked completely without apparatus or machinery."⁶² Praise for the acting was unanimous. In Magdeburg a

⁵⁸This schedule was compiled from the letters of Albert Venohr by Renate Waack, and quoted in her article "Der Schauspieler Heinrich Grief," Schriften zur Theaterwissenschaft, p. 364.

⁵⁹See "Verbot des Piscator-Gastspiels in Würtzburg" ["Prohibition of the Piscator-Appearance in Würtzburg"] Die Volksbühne, V, (1930), 235.

⁶⁰Renate Waack, p. 364.

⁶¹Fiebach, p. 340.

⁶²"Die erste [Aufführung] auch, in der ganz ohne Apparate

reviewer praised the troupe as a "genuine ensemble."⁶³ In Berlin, reviewers echoed the praise: "Credit [goes] above all to the actors."⁶⁴ In Berlin, Piscator found support from the Volksbühne, which adopted the Wallner Theater's presentation of Paragraph 218 as one of the offerings of the Sonderabteilung, which at this time numbered about 9,000 members, assuring the Wallner Theater, which seated 1,000, of at least 300 people per night during Piscator's two month stay.⁶⁵ In April, the KPD's committee for Culture and Mass Organizations [Kultur und Massen-Organisationen] began to subsidize Piscator's production. Exact amounts of this subsidy are unknown, but this seems to be the first financial support for Piscator from the KPD since the political director's break with the Volksbühne in March 1927. The KPD apparently approved of Piscator's move away from the Theater am Nollendorfpfplatz, with its upper-class audience, and of the director's new simplified approach to political theater presented in a working section of the capital of Germany.

Paragraph 218 played in Berlin until early June 1930, and then continued its tour. But more permanent than the production were the new foundations which the play laid for its director in Berlin. During April, Piscator began negotiations with the Volksbühne and

gearbeitet werden soll, ohne Maschinerie." Paul Wiegler, BZ am Mittag (Berlin), 4 April 1930.

⁶³"Wahrhaftes Kollektiv." Volksstimme, (Magdeberg), 20 December 1929, quoted in Waack, p. 364.

⁶⁴"Ehre aber vor allen den Schauspielern." Tempo, 4 March 1930, quoted in Waack, p. 366.

⁶⁵Fiebach, p. 340.

the KPD on the possibility of the third Piscator-Bühne opening in the autumn. Among others, the Volksbühne welcomed Piscator's re-entry into Berlin. The massive theatrical organization not only offered Piscator's production as part of their Sonderabteilung subscription, they also took out the permit to operate and lay down the Kaution [securities] with the Berlin police department.⁶⁶ In other words, legally and financially the Volksbühne backed Piscator's production of Paragraph 218 in Berlin. This friendly attitude changed almost immediately, and the reason for this sudden turnabout is unknown. Sometime in late May, Piscator left Berlin to continue his tour. On 26 May newspaper notices announced that the executive committee [Vorstand] of the Volksbühne had dissolved the Sonderabteilung.⁶⁷ The executive committee gave no explanation, neither to the newspaper reporters nor to the 4,000 former members of the Sonderabteilung who assembled to protest the action. The rather dictatorial style in which the executive committee dissolved the Sonderabteilung caused one reporter to write: "This measure indicates the assault of an idea: it means the terrorizing of an established intent."⁶⁸ Hitler's Nazis did not emerge politically powerful until September 1930. Possibly the executive committee felt that the great majority of the whole membership of the Volksbühne (about 100,000)

⁶⁶See Akte 5235, Brandenburgisches Landeshauptarchiv, Bl. 2-59, referred to in Fiebach, p. 340.

⁶⁷Herbert Pfeiffer, "Der Sturm über der Volksbühne, Massen-Protest-Versammlung an Friedrichshain," ["The Storm over the Volksbühne: Mass Protest Assembly on Friedrichshain."] 12 Uhr Blatt, (Berlin), 26 May 1930.

⁶⁸"Diese Massnahme bedeutet die Vergewaltigung einer Idee: sie

genuinely disapproved of the organization's support of a radical splinter group of artists. The dissolution of the Sonderabteilung meant that Piscator had to organize and advertise his own subscription program, in addition to the regular negotiations involved in opening a new theater. Help arrived from the KPD. The German communist party newspaper, Die Rote Fahne, called for the various workers' organizations to ban together to form a "work committee" [Arbeitsausschuss] to aid with the publication and preparation of the theater for the third Piscator-Bühne.⁶⁹ From among the many workers' organizations in Berlin, response to Die Rote Fahne's plea came from the Interessengemeinschaft für Arbeiterkultur [or IFA, Interest Group for Workers' Culture], the Internationale Arbeiter Hilfe [IAH, or International Workers' Aid], and Rote Hilfe [RH, or Red Aid].⁷⁰

The former members of the Volksbühne Sonderabteilung responded to Piscator's needy situation somewhat more slowly. Apparently, the one-time leaders of the Sonderabteilung thought that the Volksbühne would relent and re-establish the program once Piscator settled into production. These leaders, whose names were not available, petitioned the Volksbühne to reinstate the Sonderabteilung early in the 1930-31 theatrical season. Die Rote Fahne announced the rejection of the

bedeutet die Terrorisierung eines begründeten Willens." Ibid.

⁶⁹"Die neue Piscator-Bühne" ["The New Piscator-Bühne"], Die Rote Fahne (Berlin), 9 July 1930.

⁷⁰Klaus Pfützner, "Das revolutionäre Arbeitertheater in Deutschland, 1918," p. 469.

petition by the Volksbühne's executive committee on 4 October 1930.⁷¹ The leaders of the disenfranchised Sonderabteilung then set about to form their own theatrical subscription program to support leftist theater productions, resulting in Die junge Volksbühne [The Young Volksbühne], which appeared in November 1930.⁷² The group immediately joined the third Piscator-Bühne.

Total subscription membership for the third Piscator-Bühne numbered between 8,000 and 10,000 persons.⁷³ Subscription prices ranged from six marks to 10.20 marks, and could be paid in as many as eighteen installments. Tickets for individual performances were also inexpensive, some costing little more than the price of a cinema ticket.⁷⁴

As the problems involved in raising a subscription audience were being solved, Piscator also resolved the more fundamental question of the permit to operate. Erwin Kalser, a member of Piscator's acting company since 1927, took out the Koncession for the third Piscator-Bühne.⁷⁵ Kalser registered Piscator as a member of the

⁷¹"Erklärung der Sonderabteilung" ["Clarification of the Sonderabteilung"], Die Rote Fahne (Berlin), 4 October 1930.

⁷²"Gründung der jungen Volksbühne" ["The Founding of the Young Volksbühne"], Die Rote Fahne (Berlin), 25 November 1930.

⁷³Klaus Pfützner, "Ensembles und Aufführungen des sozialistischen Berufstheaters in Berlin, 1929-1933," p. 108.

⁷⁴Ibid.

⁷⁵"Piscator-Bühne im Wallner Theater," Deutsches Bühnen Jahrbuch, XLII (1931), 953.

Bühnenvorstand [stage committee] and Oberspielleiter [head director]. The registered acting company was the smallest of any Piscator-Bühne: seven men and four women. The available figures indicate only an undetermined fraction of the total work force since volunteer help accounted for much of the hand-labor and some of the acting of the Piscator-Bühne. Supplied by communist organizations, these unpaid workers printed and posted advertisements, as well as cleaned and prepared the Wallner Theater for occupancy. Wives of the workers sewed costumes for Piscator's productions, while volunteers manned the box office and handled paperwork.⁷⁶

The result of these labors, the third Piscator-Bühne, opened in the Lessing Theater although its home was the Wallner Theater. The reason for this switch is unknown. The Lessing Theater billed Des Kaisers Kulis as a Gastspiel [guest performance] of the third Piscator-Bühne.⁷⁷ Perhaps the Wallner Theater was not yet ready for occupancy, possessing no spotlights, stage decorations or costumes at the time Piscator leased it.⁷⁸ Whatever the reason, the Wallner Theater did not house the opening production of the third Piscator-Bühne, even though that theater was to be the organization's permanent and legal home.

⁷⁶ Pfütznner, "Ensembles und Aufführungen des sozialistischen Berufstheaters," p. 109.

⁷⁷ Deutsche-Bühnen Spielplan, August, September 1930.

⁷⁸ Pfütznner, "Ensembles und Aufführungen des sozialistischen Berufstheaters," p. 108.

DES KAISERS KULIS

The first production of the third Piscator-Buhne opened on 31 August 1930 in the Lessing Theater and ran continuously until 29 September. Written by Theodor Plivier, Des Kaisers Kulis ["Coolies of the Kaiser"] appeared as a novel in 1929. Together with Plivier, Piscator adapted the anti-war work for the stage. No publication of the stage manuscript is available.⁷⁹ As gleaned from secondary sources, the plot revolves around unrest in the German Navy during World War I. A sailor himself during these times, Plivier centered the action of his book around two sailors, Alwin Köbis and Max Reichpietsch, both historical personages whom a wartime court of military justice [Kaiserliches Marine-Kriegsgericht] condemned to death on 25 August 1917 for inciting their fellow sailors to mutiny. Authorities executed the two men on 5 September 1917.⁸⁰ Plivier limited neither the play nor the novel to the bare story of these two revolutionaries. Des Kaisers Kulis depicted numerous instances which seemed to justify mutiny.

Act one concentrated on the strained relationship between officers and seamen. Punishments inflicted on the seamen, orders dictated to them, and restrictions placed on their free time unified the sailors into a type of class-consciousness and alienated them from their officers. Scenes in port bars demonstrated that the

⁷⁹Fiebach also admits that he found no prompt book for this production, p. 354.

⁸⁰Theodor Plivier, "In Memoriam," in Des Kaisers Kulis (Munich, Verlag Kurt Desch, 1966), p. 5.

friction between the sailors and officers extended even to off-duty hours. The act ended with the report that eighty sailors were burned to death in one battleship during an engagement in the Dogger Bank area off the North Sea in 1915.

Act two focused on a similar bit of war-time action, the Skagerrak Sea attack of 1916. The play's action took place among forty sailors working in the hold of a coal burning ship. Finding the ship's battle situation hopeless, the officers of the vessel abandoned their crew, all of whom were killed when the ship exploded.

Act three presented Reichpietsch and Köbis urging a revolution among the sailors. German authorities crushed the resulting mutiny at Kiel in 1917, bringing Köbis and Reichpietsch before a war-time court. There, they were convicted, condemned, and later shot, all of which received some portrayal on the stage of the Lessing Theater.⁸¹

In staging this extensive justification of a wartime mutiny, Piscator rejected a realistic presentation. Instead he concentrated on the power of the spoken word and the unadorned descriptions of Plivier's style of writing, as for example in the presentation of the explosion concluding act two where Plivier himself, standing at a podium on stage left, read his own description of the event.⁸²

⁸¹ This plot summary comes in large part from the Fiebach dissertation (p. 356). Fiebach compiled this summary from various newspaper reviews, notably one by Paul Friedländer, Die Welt am Abend (Berlin), 1 September 1930.

⁸² Walter Steinthal, "Zeittheater an der Spitze der Saison" ["Topical Theater at the Top of the Season"], 12 Uhr Blatt (Berlin), 1 September 1930.

Plivier's reading was not incongruous with Piscator's approach to the total production. The critic, Herbert Ihering, wrote that Des Kaisers Kulis seemed to be stuck between traditional theater [Dekorationstheater] and readers' theater [Sprechbühne].⁸³ Other aspects of a readers' theater production include a speaking chorus which commented on the action of the play or gave historical (i.e., chronological) details. The business most reviewers commented upon occurred during the last scene of the play, one added by Piscator.⁸⁴ Standing on an abstract representation of a battleship's bridge, sailors hoisted a red flag of revolution during the abortive sailors' revolt of 1918, during which the speaking chorus named political events from 1918 to 1930 which, as one reviewer observed, showed that the seamen had not learned how to use their united strength.⁸⁵

Evidence of at least two technical devices characteristic of Piscator's approach to theater are available: film and an abstract setting. Piscator began the production with a filmed prologue which showed pre-World War I statistics of the military budgets of various states (especially England and Germany), scenes of the North Sea, and the trade and commerce of the North Sea ports and the scenes of the communist Second International Congress at Basel, Switzerland.

⁸³Herbert Ihering, "Piscator im Lessing Theater," Börsen Courier (Berlin), 1 September 1930.

⁸⁴Fiebach, p. 356.

⁸⁵Paul Friedlander, Die Welt am Abend (Berlin), 1 September 1930.

Then followed war pictures, including filmed sequences depicting war laborers in factories, on board ship, and men dying in combat, as well as cemeteries full of crosses, followed by statistics on the war dead.⁸⁶ The filmed prologue provides the audience with background material which chronologically ended about 1915, the year the stage action began.

Not much is known about the set on which the members of the Piscator-Bühne performed Des Kaisers Kulis. One reviewer writes of a "five or six room scaffolding, completely abstract."⁸⁷ Probably Des Kaisers Kulis used a constructivistic, simultaneous setting, similar to that of Hoppla, wir leben, but smaller. This setting may have provided several acting areas.

One final technical apparatus noted by reviewers, the loudspeaker, finds a precedent in Piscator's production of Rivalen. At least one reviewer complained, as in Rivalen, that the loudspeakers often overpowered the actors.⁸⁸

In Des Kaisers Kulis Piscator re-introduced several technical devices. Herbert Ihering noted this re-introduction, and advised

⁸⁶Fiebach supplied the information provided in this summary of the filmed prologue. The East German scholar gives as his references the following reviews: "Die Reichpietsch-Köbis Tragödie," Die Welt am Abend (Berlin), 1 September 1930, "Des Kaisers Kulis," Vossische Zeitung (Berlin), 1 September 1930, and "Des Kaisers Kulis," Die Zeitung (Frankfurt), 2 September 1930.

⁸⁷"Ein fünf-oder sechsräumiges Gerüst, völlig abstrakt." Walter Steinthal, "Zeittheater an der Spitze der Saison," 12 Uhr Blatt (Berlin), 1 September 1930.

⁸⁸Herbert Ihering, "Piscator im Lessing Theater," Börsen Courier (Berlin), 1 September 1930.

Piscator against it in a review of the show. Ihering wrote that Piscator could have been more effective, had he been confined to the more primitive Wallner Theater.⁸⁹ Although Piscator was to direct only one more show in Berlin, he followed Ihering's advice.

The third Piscator-Bühne did not move immediately from the Lessing Theater. Des Kaisers Kulis ended on 29 September 1930, and 30 September the Piscator-Bühne opened a revival of Paragraph 218 at the Lessing Theater, running until 14 October. Sometime in October, the exact date is unavailable, Piscator's ensemble moved, opening their own house with Jeden Tag Vier ["Each Day Four"], a dramatization of the plight of German miners (an average of four died per day, according to the statistics of the late twenties, hence the title). Written by Ernst Ottwalt and directed by Friedrich Neubauer, a member of the Piscator-Bühne, Jeden Tag Vier played only four performances. Mond von Links ["The Moon from the Left"], a Russian comedy translated into German, enjoyed somewhat more success. Written by Bill Bjelozerkowskij, Mond von Links explored the romantic fluctuations of party members in revolutionary Russia. Directed by a little known member of the Piscator-Bühne, Martin Kerb, the comedy opened on 28 October 1930 and played until 12 January 1931. The theater then remained closed for two days, undergoing preparation and rehearsals for Tai Yang erwacht ["Tai Yang Awakes"], Piscator's last show in Berlin before his exile.

⁸⁹"Im Wallner Theater hätte Piscator konsequenter sein können."
Ibid.

TAI YANG ERWACHT

Although Piscator and Friedrich Wolf began textual alterations on Tai Yang as early as October 1930, the play did not receive its première until 15 January 1931.⁹⁰ Piscator made the lengthy preparations, as he wrote to Wolf, in order to have, "perhaps for the first time a completed work."⁹¹ Piscator and Wolf collaborated extensively on the production. The forty-two year old author possessed a long list of published works which included ten dramas, a collection of short stories, a novel and an essay, "Die Kunst ist Waffe" [Art is Weaponry] (1928), whose title shows a similarity in outlook with Piscator's militancy in art. Ideological similarities and extensive experience in writing did not prepare Wolf for Piscator's approach to theater, especially the director's penchant for textual alterations which proved to be extensive in Tai Yang erwacht. A personal friend of Wolf and later editor of the author's works, Walter Pollatschek reports that at one rehearsal of Tai Yang, Wolf stormed from the theater following a dispute with Piscator over a textual alteration. No sooner had Wolf left the theater than a friend called to him, "Wolf, hurry back inside. Just now a complete sentence of yours is being used on stage."⁹²

⁹⁰ Fiebach, p. 377.

⁹¹ See Piscator's letters in Friedrich Wolf Archiv, Deutsche Akademie der Künste, East Berlin, Mappe 11, Bl. 189, no date available.

⁹² "Wolf, komm schnell zurück. Eben wird ein ganzer Satz von dir auf der Bühne gesprochen." Walter Pollatschek, Das Bühnenwerk Friedrich Wolf ["The Stage Works of Friedrich Wolf"] (Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 1959), p. 351.

The full extent of Piscator's textual alterations may never be known. Wolf published Tai Yang erwacht, but not the prompt script of Piscator's production. Wolf re-wrote Tai Yang at least once for Piscator, and possibly yet another time. On Christmas Eve, 1930, Wolf wrote to his sister Else that a third version of the play was developing.⁹³ After examining the available textual material, Fiebach concludes that a full reconstruction of the production is not possible.⁹⁴ Nevertheless, a sketch of the plot summary as published will give the reader some inkling of the tone of the script, and the political nature of the play, although some details may have been altered in Piscator's production.⁹⁵

Composed of eighteen scenes, Tai Yang is set in Shanghai in 1930. The first scene, the hut of the eighteen-year-old girl, Tai Yang, who works in a textile factory, introduces Wan, Tai's brother, and Ma, a younger sister of Tai. The orphans discuss with Sen, a revolutionary soldier in hiding, the long hours, cruel working conditions and poor pay which they receive at the factory. Subsequent scenes depict work in the factory. Tschu Fu, the director, on an inspection tour, notices the beautiful Tai Yang, and takes her as his mistress. Later, in Tschu Fu's house the director defends his brutal suppression of labor unrest to Tai Yang, who now living with Tschu Fu, agrees

⁹³Quoted in Klaus Pfützner, "Ensembles und Aufführungen," p. 111.

⁹⁴Fiebach, p. 377.

⁹⁵The available copy of Tai Yang erwacht was not the 1930 version, but a 1960 reprint of the play in Friedrich Wolf, Dramen, Bd. III (Berlin: Aufbau Verlag, 1960).

with him but is depressed. Several weeks later, Tai visits her family in the factory. Now richly attired and bringing gifts, Tai Yang is surprised when she sees the wretched conditions of her brother and sister and the manner in which the foreman beats them. When Tschu Fu arrives, the director does not rebuke the foreman, who, he claims, was only doing his duty in beating workers not at their machines. Convinced that the system is inhuman, Tai returns to the factory the following morning, and leads a revolt which destroys all of the machinery.

Staged with a minimum of scenery, the setting for Tai Yang erwacht consisted mainly of placards and banners which hung over not only the stage, but also the audience and even in the theater lobby. One reviewer wrote that Piscator had discovered a new style of decoration: banners and placards as backdrops and stage props.⁹⁶ Another claimed that the total effect of these banners gave the auditorium the resemblance of an assembly hall for Chinese workers.⁹⁷ The stage itself was bare except for some banners and a large loom which rolled forward during the factory scenes. The actors assembled on stage and got into costume and make-up in front of the audience.⁹⁸

⁹⁶"Piscator hat für das politische Theater ein neues Stilmittel gefunden: die Fahne und das Plakat als Kulisse und Hauptrequisit. Jürgen Rühle, p. 148.

⁹⁷"Der Zuschauerraum glich einem Versammlungslokal chinesischer Arbeiter." Pfützner, "Ensembles und Aufführungen des Sozialistischen Berufstheaters," p. 113.

⁹⁸"Die Schauspieler verkleiden sich chinesisch, schminken sich, kleben sich Bärte, wobei sie anfangen, sich eine chinesische Seele anzuziehen." Arthur Eloesser, Vossische Zeitung (Berlin), 16 January 1931.

Once the show began, different placards backed each of the eight scenes of Tai Yang, much like folding screens. Each placard carried some phrase which commented on the action of the scene, as for example, in a scene in the house of the ambitious Tschu Fu, one placard read "How shall I become rich and happy?"⁹⁹ During the first scene of the play in which the Chinese workers discuss their situation, placards warned, "The poor man is ungrateful."¹⁰⁰ Not merely providing atmosphere or decoration, the placards supplied a political commentary on the stage action, much as Piscator had supplied with film in Fahnen, Gewitter, Schwejk and other productions.

Film appeared only once in the production. At one point Tschu Fu's men torture a captured communist soldier. An actor at the back of the auditorium then called out that the Chinese were experiencing such a terror. This call introduced a documentary film showing Chinese soldiers shooting into demonstrating mobs, workers being tortured, children working in factories and the starving in the streets.¹⁰¹ The silent film did not halt the action of the play, but supplied documentation while the characters were speaking as in Piscator's earlier production, Gewitter.

Piscator used one innovation in Tai Yang, pantomime, a technique which elicited comments from several reviewers. A local dance

⁹⁹"Wie werde ich reich und glücklich?" quoted in Pfützner, "Ensembles und Aufführungen des Sozialistischen Berufstheaters," p. 114.

¹⁰⁰"Der Arme ist undankbar!" Ibid.

¹⁰¹Ibid.

group, the Red Dancers [Rote Tänzer] under Jan Weidts, acted out pantomimes such as soldiers beating up workers, and workers assembling and protesting. Like the film these pantomimes did not halt the dialogue on stage, but supplied a visual picture as an actor described it.

Tai Yang received favorable reviews with the most favorable from Die Rote Fahne. "Never has a revolutionary director formed so plastically and scenically the materialistic dialectic of history."¹⁰² The communist critic added that Tai Yang was politically and artistically the ripest of Piscator's productions. After praising the production, Herbert Ihering noted that it was Piscator's simplest and shortest presentation.¹⁰³ Newspapers on the right wing of German politics did not condone the rebellious conclusion of the play. Germania called for a Verbot [forced closing] and the Lokal Anzeiger entitled its review "Theater or Soviet Demonstration."¹⁰⁴

Representing a third viewpoint, Arthur Eloesser of the Vossische Zeitung merely pointed out the political overtones of the production and closed his review with the question "Was sagt die Partei dazu?" [What does the party have to say to that?].¹⁰⁵ Eloesser does not

¹⁰²"Nie hat ein revolutionärer Regisseur die materialistische Dialektik der Geschichte szenisch so plastisch geformt." Die Rote Fahne (Berlin), 17 January 1930.

¹⁰³"Es war Piscators einfachste und kürzeste Vorstellung." Herbert Ihering, Börsen Courier (Berlin), 16 January 1931.

¹⁰⁴Quoted in Die Rote Fahne (Berlin), 18 January 1931.

¹⁰⁵Arthur Eloesser, Vossische Zeitung (Berlin), 16 January 1931.

identify which political party he meant, but an answer was not long in coming from the right: on 30 January 1931 Berlin's city police arrested Piscator for failure to pay an entertainment tax of 20,000 marks during his 1927-28 season with the first Piscator-Bühne. As Die Rote Fahne pointed out, however, Piscator's declaration of bankruptcy in 1928 supposedly settled all debts by an equitable division of the assets of the Piscator-Bühne. Piscator was no longer personally responsible for the tax. Die Rote Fahne also stated that Max Reinhardt owed 270,000 marks in entertainment taxes, but he was not jailed for the debt.

Piscator's incarceration preceded by only a few days Friedrich Wolf's arrest in Stuttgart for alleged violation of literary censorship regulation in his pro-abortion play, Paragraph 218. The arrest of the director Piscator and the playwright Wolf sparked an outraged cry from members of the artistic community of Berlin, most notably Arnold Zweig, Leon Feuchtwanger, Anna Seghers, Bertolt Brecht and others. On 4 February the Berlin police department released Piscator, agreeing that the director was not responsible for the debt. The KPD held a rally for Piscator at 7:30 P.M. in the Musikerkärlon on Kaiser Wilhelm Strasse on 5 February. Although no figures were available on the attendance, the subsequent report in Die Rote Fahne seems to indicate that the event's attendance was not as impressive as the Herrenhaus rally, which had followed Piscator's dismissal from the

¹⁰⁵ Arthur Eloesser, Vossische Zeitung (Berlin), 16 January 1931.

Volksbühne in March 1927. The Musikersällen rally presented an almost insignificant list of speakers, such as the playwright Ludwig Renn, the critic Erich Weinert, and the actor Alexander Granach. Die Rote Fahne carried only a brief announcement of the event on 7 February, two days following the rally.

Plagued by financial difficulties, Piscator relied less on technical machinery in his work for the third Piscator-Bühne. Instead he employed a simpler setting, more dialogue in the auditorium, narration and pantomime. In Paragraph 218 actors planted in the auditorium discussed the relevancy of the abortion issue to contemporary Germany; in Des Kaisers Kulis interpretative readings by the play's author reminded the audience of the factual basis of the dramatization of the German Navy's inhumane treatment of its sailors; and in Tai Yang erwacht a troupe of professionally trained dancers pantomimed scenes of police violence perpetrated on striking workers.

Piscator's last three theatrical efforts were well received by the critics, suggesting that Piscator's new simplicity of production did not indicate any diminishing of the theatrical effectiveness.

Piscator did not direct another show in Berlin following Tai Yang erwacht until 1955. His exact movements after his release from jail are not available. Tai Yang erwacht played a relatively lengthy run of thirty-eight performances, ending on 7 February. The third Piscator-Bühne in the Wallner Theater presented visiting troupes and revived Des Kaisers Kulis until 21 March 1931, the last performance of the group.

At the end of March Piscator and a part of his ensemble journeyed to Moscow to discuss a Russian proposition for Piscator to shoot a film, Der Aufstand der Fischer von St. Barbara ["The Uprising of the Fishermen of St. Barbara"]. The remainder of the ensemble from the third Piscator-Bühne joined Piscator in Moscow in the summer months. After Piscator finished the film, the ensemble returned to Berlin sometime in November 1931, but their director remained in Moscow. Since Piscator's film did not follow the party line it did not receive official approval from the Russian censor, and consequently, it has never been released in Russia.¹⁰⁶

Piscator stayed five years in Moscow but directed no productions during that time. While living in Moscow Piscator received a visit from the innovative scene designer Edward Gordon Craig, who told him that the Nazi propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels wanted him to return to Germany because the Nazis could use him. Piscator, who openly held anti-Nazi sentiments, answered that he would go home only when Goebbels was no longer there.¹⁰⁷ In November 1934 the German government forced Piscator to remain in exile by depriving him of his citizenship for anti-German activities abroad.¹⁰⁸

Having encountered difficulties in directing in Russia, Piscator met even more obstacles in trying to leave the country. The government refused to give him the necessary permits to cross the border.

¹⁰⁶ Harry Schulz-Wilde, "Erwin Piscator," Der Monat ["The Month"], XXXV (1966), 66.

¹⁰⁷ Henning Rischbieter, "Piscator und seine Zeit," ["Piscator and his Time"], Theater Heute ["Theater Today"], VII (May, 1966), 11.

¹⁰⁸ The Times (New York), 4 November 1934, p. 5.

Finally, however, in 1936 Piscator escaped with a forged passport¹⁰⁹ and made his way to Paris through Vienna. For the next two years he lectured on dramatic art in the German University in Paris and worked on the script of an adaptation of Tolstoy's War and Peace.

In 1938 Piscator emigrated to New York at the invitation of the producer Gilbert Miller, who wanted Piscator to stage his adaptation of War and Peace. Once in New York, however, Piscator accepted the chairmanship of the newly established Dramatic Workshop, part of the New School for Social Research, a private, nonsectarian liberal arts university headed by Dr. Alwin Jonson.¹¹⁰ Piscator held the position of head of the Dramatic Workshop until 1951.

For the opening production of the Dramatic Workshop, Piscator directed King Lear in which his "New interpretation" attempted to show the elements of today's "world wide tragedy."¹¹¹ His directorial concept in the production was "to see Lear in the company of the dictators who are remaking the world."¹¹² Piscator seemed still bent on producing a theater with political overtones, but without the emphasis on class struggle which had been so evident in Berlin. Although Piscator did not explain exactly why or when he changed his political views, he probably became disenchanted with the communist cause during his unproductive years in Moscow.

¹⁰⁹Schulz-Wilde, p. 66.

¹¹⁰The Times (New York), 20 December 1939, p. 31

¹¹¹Erwin Piscator, The Times (New York), 8 December 1940, p. 7.

¹¹²Maria Ley Piscator, p. 273.

Piscator's main responsibility as head of the Dramatic Workshop was teaching, and among his students were Marlon Brando, Harry Belafonte, Tony Curtis, Rod Steiger, Elaine Stritch, Shelley Winters, Lillian Storch, Tennessee Williams, Philip Yordan and Ted Pollack. Piscator directed several shows while he was in New York, most notably Georg Bruckner's adaptation of Lessing's Nathan the Wise, Shaw's St. Joan, A Marriage Proposal, Mourning Becomes Electra, The Flies, Lysistrata, All the King's Men, and Outside the Door. Although several of these shows appeared on Broadway, by commercial and critical standards Piscator had small success in this country.

In October 1951 Piscator fled New York rather than testify before a congressional hearing conducted by Senator Joseph McCarthy investigating, among other things, Piscator's earlier communist sympathies. Although Piscator had not engaged in communist activities while in the United States, he left New York so abruptly that he did not even take his savings with him on his return trip to Germany.¹¹³

Once back in the Fatherland Piscator returned to the city of his youth, Marburg, and from there to his brother's house in nearby Dillenberg. For the next ten years Piscator worked occasionally as guest director in various theaters in Marburg, Hamburg, Frankfurt, Mannheim, Stuttgart and also in Holland, Sweden and Switzerland. In 1955 Piscator returned to Berlin to stage his adaptation of Tolstoy's War and Peace in the Schiller Theater.

¹¹³"Die Opfer vom McCarthy Hexenjagd" ["The Victim of McCarthy's Witch Hunt"], Die Zeit ["The Times"], XX (19 May 1970), 1.

Not until 1962 did Piscator acquire a permanent position in the West German Theater. At that time he became general director of the Freie Volksbühne in West Berlin (the original Volksbühne in the Haus am Bülowplatz stands in what is now East Berlin). In the new Volksbühne Piscator continued to produce political theater, especially documentary dramas, directing the premières of Rolf Hochhuth's Der Stellvertreter ["The Deputy"] in 1963, Peter Weiss' Die Ermittlung ["The Investigation"] in 1965 and Heinar Kipphardt In der Sache J. Robert Oppenheimer ["In the Case of J. Robert Oppenheimer"] in 1965. This brilliant string of premières preceded only by a short time Piscator's death on 30 March 1966 in Staenberg, Bavaria following emergency surgery for a ruptured gall bladder at the age of seventy-two.

CHAPTER X
CONCLUSIONS

Erwin Piscator's theatrical career in Weimar Germany centered in Berlin between 1920 and 1931. During these years he directed productions characterized by highly technical staging techniques and social and political messages. Perhaps the best method of reviewing the director's work is to borrow terminology from the theorist in communication Marshall McLuhan and to consider Piscator's medium and his message in each production.

The Front Theater supplied Piscator with elements for his medium, the propaganda equipment of the Fatherland lessons. These lectures introduced the director to projections, the technical device for which Piscator is perhaps best remembered. The origin of Piscator's message, social and political injustice, is not so clear. Consistently opposed to war as a result of his experiences in the trenches of World War I, Piscator witnessed the German army's cruel suppression of an abortive communist revolt by workers of Berlin in 1919. This experience, he writes, allied him with the communist cause.

Piscator's first productions in Berlin, those of the Proletarian Theater during 1920-1921, centered on political messages: the German government's indifferent treatment of disabled veterans of World War I, the threat of a spread of right wing Hungarian counter-revolutionary activities to Germany, the injustices of the German

judicial system and a plea for the workers to unite in their own defense.

Piscator's medium was a highly mobile agit-prop troupe carrying minimal equipment and performing in the workers' assembly halls and taverns. Working in an informally defined audience-actor space permitted Piscator, for the first time, to experiment with interruptions of the action of the play. These interruptions, often made by actors planted in the auditorium, instructed the audience and at the same time broke the stage illusion. The Proletarian Theater also provided him with an introduction to the KPD, which later offered him several opportunities and occasions to direct shows in which he could expand many of his production techniques.

After the closure of the Proletarian Theater by the Berlin police department, Piscator moved into the Central Theater which provided him with a new medium, a proscenium stage. Piscator did not employ his agit-prop media in the Central Theater, nor was his message as political as in his first venture; instead he sought to arouse a social consciousness among the working class.

The next important step in Piscator's career, being selected to direct in the Volksbühne in 1924, provided him with new professional recognition and opportunities, for he was now associated with one of the best-equipped, best financed and best established theaters of Berlin. Piscator's first production in the Volksbühne, Fahnen, centered on a social-political message, the right of the working class to organize and to strike. Piscator employed the novel medium of projections for the first time in an effort to document and to

comment on the action on stage. As became characteristic of most of Piscator's productions, the projected comments placed the striking workers of the story in a sympathetic light and shifted the focus of the production at least momentarily from the individual actors on stage to the workers as a whole.

After Fahnen, Piscator enjoyed two theatrical seasons which contained especially rich experiences for him, for during the theatrical seasons of 1924-1925 and 1925-1926 he had the unique opportunity of working simultaneously with the two radically different groups, the Volksbühne and the KPD. Except for Fahnen, Piscator's productions at the Volksbühne were not politically or socially oriented; they depicted instead problems of individuals rather than those of the proletariat. As in the Central Theater, Piscator's medium in the Volksbühne was a proscenium stage, but one which offered him his first directorial experiences in an elaborate technical facility which included a turntable stage.

In contrast to the shows Piscator directed in the Volksbühne, his productions for the KPD carried a definite political message. Two productions directly appealed for votes for the Communist Party in local elections (RRR and Haut den Lukas) while a third, Trotz Alledem, sparked enthusiasm among KPD convention delegates. To support his message of communism Piscator returned to interruptions of the stage action by planting actors in the auditorium and adding projections (motion pictures as well as slides), and live musical accompaniment. Piscator's work with the KPD gave him the opportunity to practice techniques which may not have found a sympathetic

audience among the Volksbühne's bourgeois patrons. It also introduced Piscator to Edmund Meisel, the musical composer and director who worked with Piscator throughout the remainder of the director's career in Berlin.

Although in the employ of both the KPD and the Volksbühne, Piscator did his most experimental work in productions for the communists. Nevertheless, his work for the Volksbühne established him professionally among the theatergoers in Berlin. Further, while with Volksbühne, Piscator had his first opportunity to work for an extended length of time with a company of well-trained, professional actors, several of whom later accompanied him when he left the Volksbühne to begin his own theater.

Piscator's work in 1926-27 brought about his dismissal from the Volksbühne as his message became more political and his medium more startling: in Die Räuber and in Gewitter Piscator altered the texts to embody a political message and used the medium of wax masks resembling contemporary communist figures, Trotsky and Lenin. Through these two productions, the first condemned by the Prussian state legislature, the second condemned by the administration of the Volksbühne, Piscator gained much notoriety in the Berlin press.

After his dismissal from the Volksbühne, Piscator opened his own theater, the first Piscator-Bühne housed in the Theater am Nollendorfplatz. The first Piscator-Bühne was the director's most significant theatrical venture, the one for which he is best remembered and for which he was most popular at the box office. During the year of the first Piscator-Bühne Piscator directed four shows

whose message was at times social (Hoppla, Konjunktur), and at times political (Rasputin, Schwejk). The director's chief medium was projections (both slides and motion pictures) but included devices from his earlier productions such as textual alterations, wax masks and musical accompaniment. The first Piscator-Bühne was Piscator's largest personal undertaking and revealed him as confident in his methods and materials although he was only thirty-five years old with barely seven years of professional experience behind him. When the first Piscator-Bühne failed, he tried, a year later, to repeat the successes of the first venture, but failed financially due to expensive sets and weak audience support. Piscator's use of elaborate mechanical settings in the first and second Piscator-Bühne ranks as his outstanding misjudgment during his career in Berlin. Although excitingly theatrical, the multi-level set for Hoppla, the hemisphere of Rasputin, the treadmill of Schwejk, and the three flying stages of Der Kaufmann von Berlin posed mechanical problems which Piscator was never able to overcome. Reviewers complained of the constant noises the machines created and their frequent malfunctions. Piscator abandoned such elaborate machinery after Der Kaufmann von Berlin and simplified his staging methods for the remainder of his career in Berlin.

Having reduced his technical apparatus to a minimum, Piscator toured Paragraph 218, a play whose message called for reform of the abortion laws. Piscator depended on the medium of actors planted in auditorium to interrupt and comment on the action on stage. The critics' praise for the simply staged production encouraged Piscator to attempt a third Piscator-Bühne.

Piscator directly only two shows for the third Piscator-Bühne, but in both he used the entire auditorium for his medium, which was still simple technically but now included pantomime and interpretative readings. The message of his shows was social more than pointedly political, urging the members of the working class to unite.

Piscator directed thirty-two productions in Weimar Berlin and although he lived to be seventy-two and was continually active in the theater, he never again achieved the prominence he earned in the twenties. He is best remembered perhaps only as an innovator of technical devices, an experimenter with media. Close examination of his productions reveals, however, that emphasis on the technical devices gives only a partial picture of Piscator's approach to theater. Piscator's essential device was interruptions of the action on stage. All of the media Piscator used to support his messages, the projections, the music, the wax masks, the textual alterations, the pantomime, interpretative readings and actors planted in the auditorium, were essentially interruptions of the action on stage. Through these interruptions the director attempted to persuade the audience on political points, or to shock them into an awareness of some social injustice. An understanding of Piscator's use of interruptions in general underlies an understanding of Piscator's directorial approach to his productions in Weimar Germany.

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APPENDIX A

ILLUSTRATION I

Pictured on page 307 is a scene from a performance of Russlands Tag ["Russia's Day"] (uppermost picture) and Der Krüppel ["The Cripple"], two of the three one-acts presented by the Proletarian Theater from 14 October to 29 October 1920. The picture of Russlands Tag shows the actors who personified various forces of capitalistic society (from left to right) world diplomacy, economics, religion and military force. Behind these actors is a map of Europe.

The picture of Der Krüppel shows Erwin Piscator (sitting) who played the title role. He was twenty-seven years old at this time. Behind the actors is a backdrop of a city street drawn in forced perspective. This is the backdrop which Heartfield brought late to the opening performance, interrupting the play to hang the drop.

The source of the picture is Das politische Theater, facing p. 32.

Proletarisches Theater 1920



oben: Szenenbild aus
 «Rußlands Tag»
 Bühnenbild John Heartfield



rechts: Szenenbild aus
 «Der Krüppel» von
 K. A. Wittfogel
 In der Hauptrolle
 Erwin Piscator (sitzend)



ILLUSTRATION II

Pictured on page 309 are two unidentified scenes from Sturmflut ["Stormtide"] which played at the Volksbühne from 20 February through 7 May 1926 in repertory. Sturmflut was the first production for which Piscator shot film. It required six to ten projectors, located at the rear wall of the stage. The playing area consisted of a turntable and a projection screen (a loosely woven scrim). An irregularly stepped border framed the edges of the screen. The set consisted of non-representational levels painted various shades of grey to match the black and white film. Behind the scrim was a ramp which allowed the actors to appear as silhouettes before their entrance or after their exit.

In the uppermost picture, people on the dock observe the explosion of a battleship on the screen. The lower picture may be a scene on the steps of the admiralty building during the flooding of St. Petersburg.

The source of this picture is Das politische Theater facing p. 49.

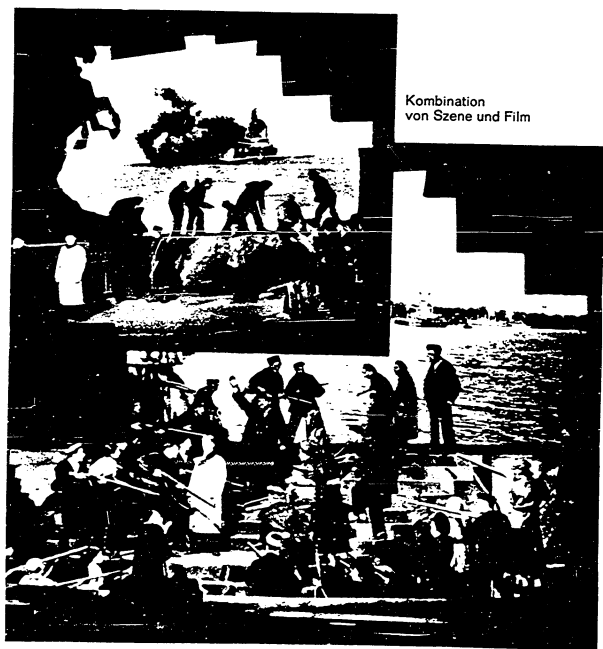


ILLUSTRATION III

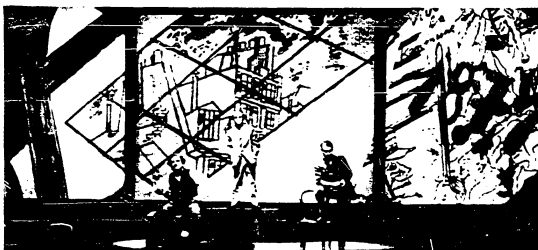
Pictured on the following page are three scenes from Das trunkene Schiff ["The Drunken Boat"] which played at the Volksbühne from 21 May to 30 May 1926. In this play Piscator used a set consisting mainly of slides drawn by George Grosz projected on screens. These drawings did not realistically portray scenes, but were sketches which vaguely indicated a location. The uppermost picture is the setting for Rimbaud's room in Paris, the middle picture, a setting showing Rimbaud in a cafe in Aden during his years in Egypt, and the lower picture is Verlaine in prison after his attempt to kill Rimbaud.

The center screen hung full front to the audience. On either side of it a screen equally tall but not as wide hinged on the center screen. At times the two side screens swung toward center stage to confine the playing area and give the sketch an additional feeling of forced perspective, as for example in the picture of Verlaine in prison. Marianne Mildenberger writes that the screens hung almost as high as a man's head, allowing the actors to make entrances by riding the turntable stage to the central acting area, but in the illustration the screens look considerably lower.¹

Grosz subsequently worked with Piscator on Schwejk.

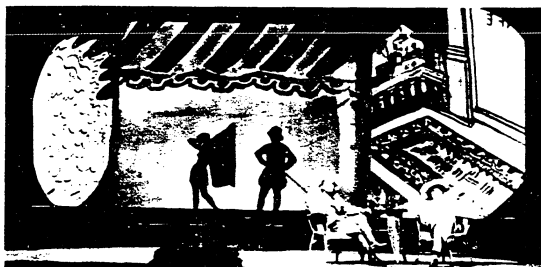
The source of these pictures was Das politische Theater, facing p. 64.

¹Mildenberger, p. 161.



Projektions-Kulissen (Zeichnungen von George Grosz)

Zimmer in Paris



Café in Aden

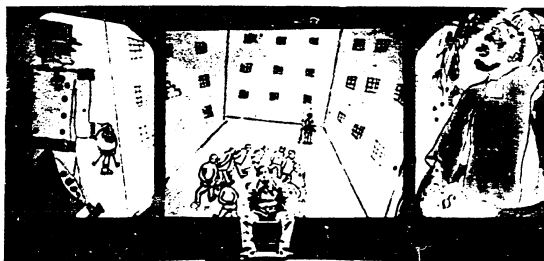


ILLUSTRATION IV

A picture of the set for Toller's Hoppla, wir leben ["Hooray, We Live"] shows the multi-level arrangement of scaffolding which resembled the cross section of a building still under construction. One high ceilinged narrow room, resembling an elevator shaft, is joined on either side by three one-room units connected by stairs. The set offered a total of seven simultaneously presented acting areas plus a small cupola attic crowning the entire structure.

Built with a substructure of three-inch steel pipe, the set measured 11 meters (c. 33 feet) wide, 8 meters (c. 24 feet) high 3 meters deep (c. 9 feet), and weighed about 4,000 kilos (8,800 lbs.).

The set of Hoppla illustrated a principle of design advocated by Piscator: Zweckbau [construction with a function], as opposed to decorative construction. Piscator wrote that he wanted the construction of the set to mirror that of the plot:

Toller had already indicated a sociological cross section in the play through his selection and grouping of scenes. So a stage picture had to be created which gave a precise and visible form to this concept: a tiered stage, with many different acting areas over and next to one another, which should signify the social order.²

² Das politische Theater, pp. 149-150. The source for the picture on the following page is Das politische Theater, facing p. 113.

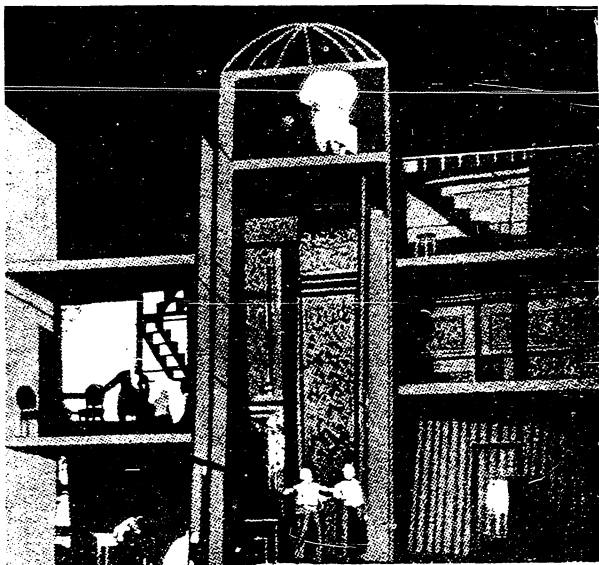


ILLUSTRATION V

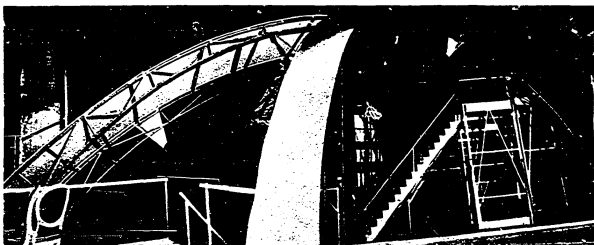
Illustration V shows three views of the Globusbühne [global stage] for Rasputin as seen from the auditorium. The uppermost picture shows the Globusbühne while it was being built. Constructed around steel supports, the entire set weighed over 2,000 kilos (c. 2 tons). With a radius of 7.5 meters (c. 24 feet) the hemisphere contained several large panels which opened, allowing the audience to view action presented within. Built on a revolving turntable, the set offered its director twelve acting areas on one construction, with the limitation that no more than two areas could be fully visible to the audience at any one time. The heavy gray fabric which covered the outside structure of the hemisphere caused one reviewer to comment on the tent-like quality of the covering: ". . . a tediously creeping turtle of gray tent covering."³ Piscator writes, however, that the fabric was actually a fairly expensive material out of which balloons were constructed. For its use on the Blobusbühne, Piscator had this material specially treated to enhance its reflective qualities, enabling film to be projected directly onto the hemisphere itself.

The Globusbühne accorded with Piscator's penchant for Zweckbau [construction with a function]. He asked specifically for a representation of the globe, a rather obvious symbol on which he

³ Alfred Kerr, Tageblatt (Berlin), 11 November 1927.

portrayed all of the world-wide occurrences connected with the Russian Revolution. ". . . the global stage had not only a symbolic meaning, but also a practical purpose."⁴

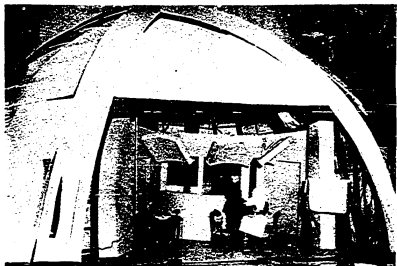
⁴ Das politische Theater, p. 168. The source of these pictures is Leon Moussinac, The New Movement in the Theater (New York: Benjamin Bloom, 1967) (originally published, 1932), plate 45.



THE MECHANISM OF THE PRODUCTION

RASPUTIN

BY GASBARRA AND LEO LANIA
 PISCATOR THEATRE, BERLIN, 1927
 PRODUCED BY ERWIN PISCATOR



THE TsAR'S HEADQUARTERS



THE SCENES ARE SET IN THE SEGMENTS OF A REVOLVING HEAISPHERE. VARIABLE PROJECTIONS OPENINGS REVEAL STAGES ON WHICH THE ACTION OF THE PLAY PROCEEDS EITHER SUCCESSIVELY OR SIMULTANEOUSLY.

A ROOM AT YEAKHOV-KELD

PHOTO STUBB, I

ILLUSTRATION VI

The following drawing of the Globusbühne for Rasputin appeared in the February 1928 issue of Die Scene: Blätter für Bühnenkunst ["The Scene: Magazine of Stage Craft"].⁵ The drawing in the upper left corner is a front elevation, a schematic of what the audience might see. The sketch in the upper right corner is a side view, a schematic of what a stagehand might see looking at the set from the wings. The bottom left drawing is a floor plan or top view of the lower level of the Globusbühne before intermission. The bottom right drawing shows the set's arrangement after intermission. The center picture is a detail of area four.

During the first half of Rasputin, area one (see circled numbers on the floor plan) served as Wyrubowa's room in Zarskoje Selo; area two, the three emperors' scene; area three, Rasputin's room; area four, the conference room of the industrialists; area five, the field headquarters of the Czar; area six, Count Jussupow's room. During the intermission stagehands rearranged the acting areas, changing area one (Wyrubowa's room) to the apartment of the Czarina in Zarskoje Selo; area four (the conference room of the industrialists) to a room in Jussupov's house and clearing areas three, five and six for crowd scenes. Minor changes in the settings were also made during the performance.

⁵ Julius Richter, "Rasputin, nach der Aufführung der Piscator-Bühne, Berlin" ["Rasputin, according to the production of the Piscator-Bühne, Berlin"]. Die Scene, XVIII (February 1928), 41.

As shown in the side view, the crown of the entire hemisphere could be raised, revealing a large motion-picture screen and enabling crowd scenes to be played across most of the second level of the set.

ILLUSTRATION VII

The projections for Schwejk did not consist of realistic photography but animated cartoons by George Grosz. Several of Grosz's sketches appear on the following page. The caricatures make wry comment on the social situation of the war years while serving as visual background for the play.

The action of the play begins with a sketch of a pencil drawing a cartoon of German and Austrian military generals holding hands, an unshaven preacher balancing a cross on his nose and a personification of death with a cat-o-nine-tails overlooking the scene (first sketch, upper left hand corner). After Schwejk's reception of his induction notice, the animated pen drew a hairy hand heaping gold coins upon a figure with the head of a phonograph (top line, middle drawing). The figure types reams of propagands ("Gott strafe England" [May God punish England], "Jeder Stoss ein Franzos" [A Frenchman with every shot]), while a fountain pen gives a military salute and screams "Hurrah!" Perhaps the most celebrated sketch showed Christ dressed in a gas mask and combat boots while hanging on the cross and holding up a small crucifix. The caption reads "Maul halten und weiter dienen" [Shut your mouth and obey orders]. This picture earned for its artist a charge of public blasphemy by the government. Grosz attempted to take refuge in the ambiguity of the sketch, claiming that he intended the caption to be the words of a

military general to Christ. The prosecution argued that the audience took the caption as Christ's words to the soldiers of World War I. A German court found Grosz guilty after a long and much publicized trial, and fined him 400 marks.⁶

⁶The source for these sketches was Henning Rischbieter, ed., Bühne und bildene Kunst im XX. Jahrhundert ["Stage and Pictorial Art in the Twentieth Century"] (Velber bei Hannover: Friedrich Verlag, 1968), p. 179.

ILLUSTRATION VIII

The set construction for Der Kaufmann von Berlin was possibly the most elaborate to appear in any of the Piscator-Bühnen. Although no available picture clarifies completely the rather confusing stage picture as described by extensive reviews, the following pictures and sketches may illustrate the set's massiveness.

The photographs show two unidentified scenes in performance, but the architectural sketches next to the photographs are more informative. In both sets of sketches, the top drawing is a floor plan (top view) of the set and the bottom drawing is an isometric (side view showing depth). The uppermost sketch indicates three platforms which were hung parallel to each other from the theater's grid. Each platform measured 14 meters x 2 meters (42 feet x 6 feet), ran parallel to the proscenium wall and could be flown out of sight. Notice the stairways connecting the levels. In addition to the three hanging platforms, notice the two treadmills which are raked at a slight angle on the revolving turntable. The lower sketches show a different scene, this time with the treadmills next to each other and only one level (apparently the one farthest upstage) visible to the audience. Notice the large staircase which has been moved into position.⁷

⁷The source for this picture is Bühne und bilden Kunst im XX. Jahrhundert, p. 147.

Fiscator considered one level of the set as representing the proletariat (which he also referred to as the tragic element in the play), one representing the middle class (a tragic-grotesque element) and a third for the upper and military classes (a grotesque element).⁸

⁸Das politische Theater, p. 253.

VITA

Alfred Joseph Loup III was born 13 September 1944 in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, where he received his elementary education. He attended high school at St. Joseph Seminary, Covington, Louisiana. Following his freshman year at the junior college division of St. Joseph Seminary, he transferred to Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge where in January 1966 he received a Bachelor of Arts degree in English. In 1969 he was awarded a three year NDEA grant by the Speech Department of Louisiana State, which conferred on him a Master of Arts degree in August 1968. He spent the summer and fall of 1969 researching materials available in Berlin for the present study. Since September 1970 he has been employed by the Theater Arts Department of the University of Michigan, Flint, as a full-time lecturer.

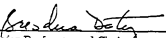
EXAMINATION AND THESIS REPORT

Candidate: Alfred Joseph Loup III

Major Field: Speech

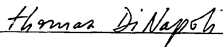
Title of Thesis: The Theatrical Productions of Erwin Piscator in Weimar Germany: 1920-1931

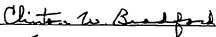
Approved:


Major Professor and Chairman



Dean of the Graduate School

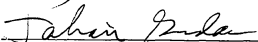
EXAMINING COMMITTEE:











Date of Examination: _____

August 28, 1972