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Abstract

Between 1919 and 1933 large portions of the Berlin theater community attempted to relate their artistic work to leftist political goals. This dissertation concentrates on four lesser known types of leftist political theater: the *Kulturtheater* concept, Leopold Jessner's republican Staatstheater, Karlheinz Martin's empathetic stage, and Friedrich Wolf's medicinal drama. Herbert Jhering's theater criticism is examined both to reveal the motivations behind much of the theater community's interest in leftist politics, and to illuminate the theater politics which shaped the context in which artists formulated and defended their views. Sources include archival material, theater journals and daily newspapers, and photographs.

Developed as the intellectual basis for actors' efforts to fight exploitation in the theater industry, the *Kulturtheater* concept envisioned a network of government funded theaters offering productions aimed at schooling the adult population in the feelings and habits of mind necessary for a democratic and socialist Germany.

After the 1918 Revolution, the *Kulturtheater* movement was initially successful in Prussia. Political opposition from the Center and völkisch parties, however, eventually reversed most of the movement's gains. The debate over the fate of the Kroll Opera illuminates both this opposition and

the inherent contradictions within the *Kulturtheater* philosophy itself.

Building on the *Kulturtheater* movement's core ideas, Leopold Jessner and Karlheinz Martin created their own brands of leftist political theater. Jessner's republican theater sought to promote allegiance and enthusiasm for Weimar democracy, whereas Karlheinz Martin's empathetic stage attempted to transmit a socialist ethos and provoke critique about the process of revolution itself. The writer Friedrich Wolf believed that the theater could both rectify present social injustices and act as a form of collective healing for the social ills caused by capitalism.

The examination of these four practitioners' work and Herbert Jhering's criticism reveals three significant points. First, creation of a viable political theater was a central concern for key theater artists throughout the Weimar period. Second, the *Kulturtheater* movement was the basis for the entire political theater phenomenon. Finally, interest in leftist politics was motivated as much by artists' professional concerns as it was by transitory political events, or an abstract commitment to social justice.