

Chapter 2

The Schillings Case and the Contradictions of Early Prussian Cultural Policy, 1918-1925

In November 1925, Prussian Minister of Culture Carl Heinrich Becker decided to remove Max von Schillings from his position as *Intendant*, or administrative director, of Berlin's State Opera, the city's traditional representative opera located on Unter den Linden. Schillings was a composer and conductor who was conservatively inclined both aesthetically and politically.¹ His dismissal soon became the center of intense controversy in Berlin public opinion. The press, while grudgingly admitting that Becker's actions in firing the *Intendant* were legal, viewed the manner of the dismissal (without notice) as reprehensible. Georg Bernhard, writing in the *Vossische Zeitung*, spoke for critics across the political spectrum when he blamed the bureaucratic system of the Prussian Ministry of Culture for stifling art. Schillings was "not only a high functionary of the state, he is an artist and a personality known far beyond Europe's borders."² Ultimately, "Artistic quality is different, and requires traits of character different from those of an accountant."³ Becker's explanation was that while he valued Schillings as an artist, he considered him an incompetent administrator who was financially irresponsible and showed poor judgment in the way he managed the

¹ After Schillings's death in 1933, his widow Barbara Kemp expressed vehement opposition to attempts to portray him as a Nazi sympathizer. The only reliable biography of the composer concludes that while Schillings was not a Nazi, he was certainly a cultural anti-Semite and believed in the superiority of German art. See Christian Detig, *Deutsche Kunst, Deutsche Nation: Der Komponist Max von Schillings*. (Kassel 1998).

² *Vossische Zeitung*, November 28, 1925.

³ *Ibid.*

opera. The press did not seriously challenge these charges, but instead argued that artists could not be expected to think in terms of the bottom line, and that in any case Becker was merely obscuring his true purposes in firing Schillings. The press and the public believed there was something else behind the minister's action. They judged it to be a political move that would enable the Ministry to realize long-held plans for culture in Berlin. Becker himself insisted that the case was not political; but in fact, as this chapter will explain, it was indeed. The Schillings crisis was a turning point in Prussian cultural policy which also reveals the ways in which that policy sought to change the role of art within German society. It was to become the basis of a new German identity and to restore the morale of a defeated nation. Cultural life should reflect the republican spirit and help to shape political life in a democratic Germany.

The Schillings case also illuminates the challenges faced by Weimar democracy. Opposition to the Prussian government's plans for culture often went hand in hand with opposition to the political order in general. Although Becker's actions provoked outrage across the political spectrum, the right-wing press was the most supportive of Schillings. Some critics claimed that the minister had been unduly influenced by two colleagues within the Ministry of Culture: Leo Kestenberg, responsible for music, and Ludwig Seelig, responsible for theater.⁴ Both of these men owed their positions directly to the revolution of 1918; both were members of the Social Democratic party (SPD); and both were Jewish. This made them outsiders in the Prussian bureaucracy. Furthermore, they

⁴ See, for example, *Germania*, November 28, 1925. Seelig and Kestenberg allegedly revealed themselves as "representatives of a bureaucratic, narrow mentality".

had both worked with the Berlin Volksbühne, a theater-goers' organization close to the SPD, in its attempts to secure an opera house for its members. This left the two advisors (*Referenten*), especially Kestenberg, open to the charge that they made decisions about Berlin's opera landscape based on political bias and not on consideration of the best interests of the city's population. Becker's own actions were, however, the main point of contention. The minister had no personal involvement with musical life, but was a prominent scholar of Arabic language and history and a founder of Islamic studies (*Wissenschaft vom Islam*) in Germany. He had served as a compromise candidate between the SPD and the interests of the right. Though not a member of any party, Becker ultimately proved sympathetic to many of the ideas associated with the SPD cultural politicians with whom he worked.⁵

The Schillings crisis illustrates some of the fundamental problems of early Weimar cultural policy which were to prove fateful in the future. In particular, the policies of the newly created Ministry for Science, Art and Popular Education were too radical for some and not radical enough for others.⁶ Democratizing the structures which in the Kaiserreich had been the personal purview of court figures without professional experience had two sides. On the one hand, concrete benefits for artists were obtained, a partial fulfillment of the idea of the national theater. On the other hand, the high cultural standards demanded by this ideal were

⁵ The dates of ministers of culture are as follows: 1918-21 Konrad Haenisch (SPD) initially joined by Adolf Hoffmann (USPD); 1921-23 Carl Heinrich Becker (not a member of any party, but close to the German Democratic Party (DDP); 1923-25 Otto Boelitz (DVP, German People's Party); 1925-30 Becker returns to office; 1930-32 Adolf Grimme (SPD).

⁶ This was its official name (*Ministerium für Wissenschaft, Kunst und Volksbildung*) In practice it was usually referred to as the Ministry of Culture (*Kultusministerium*).

often challenged by the artists themselves. I will start this chapter with an examination of Becker's defense of his actions in firing Schillings, a speech to the Prussian Landtag which was later issued in pamphlet form.⁷

The importance of this document lies not only in the way it reveals the conflict between art and bureaucracy in a system determined to make state funding of the arts one of its primary objectives. Schillings and his defenders argued that the *Intendant* had been abused by politicians who did not appreciate his gifts. However, the real problem lay elsewhere. The Ministry of Culture inherited by Becker included men who knew more, not less, about musical criteria than their predecessors in the Wilhelmine era. Their problems stemmed from the attempt to reconcile the leading figures in contemporary musical life with a social project all involved took very seriously - giving individual artists a voice in how their houses should be run. This also included expanded rights for theater personnel such as chorus members and stage technicians, whose legal and financial status had been extremely low before 1918.⁸ The Schillings case demonstrates the betrayal of the Ministry's ideals by those it had wished to empower. At the same time, the affair exposed the vulnerability of cultural politicians to the power of the press. This was especially true for those who, like Kestenberg and Seelig, were regarded as political hacks with no connection to Berlin or even to Prussia. Finally, in my judgment it proved the need for central organization in Berlin's operatic landscape. Reforms undertaken immediately after the revolution had remained incomplete, a situation that C.H. Becker above all wished to rectify.

⁷ C.H. Becker, *Der Fall Schillings und die preußische Kunstpolitik*. Berlin 1925.

⁸ See Michael Walter, *Hitler in der Oper: Deutsches Musikleben 1919-1945* (Stuttgart 1995) for discussion.

Becker addressed one of these questions at the beginning of his speech. He stated that it was natural for the press, which knew nothing about the issues involved, to blame "a bureaucracy distant from art" for victimizing Schillings. The press had for the most part ignored the Ministry's presentation of its own position. Aside from asserting that his actions had been perfectly legal, Becker noted that "the whole affair...was from the beginning placed in the wrong category [*auf ein falsches Geleise geschoben worden*] because the claim was made that art was in danger. I have repeatedly explained that I have always honored and recognized the artist von Schillings."⁹ Still less, said Becker, was this a political case directed against an *Intendant* of conservative sympathies. Schillings's actions in office had led the Ministry to question his administrative competence.

Originally, he had not been the Ministry's first choice for this position. Schillings was appointed in 1918 to replace the interim directorship of Richard Strauss and Georg Droyscher¹⁰ because he was the first choice of the personnel. "Against the will of the Ministry" he moved from his previous position as general music director to a position of administrative responsibility. This caused a considerable amount of friction "because Herr von Schillings increasingly conceived of himself as the representative of the personnel with regard to the Ministry..."¹¹

⁹ Becker, p.7.

¹⁰ See John Rockwell, *The Prussian Ministry of Culture and the Berlin State Opera* (unpublished dissertation, Berkeley 1971) for more discussion of the postwar transition. Droyscher was a minor administrator who assumed office along with Strauss, who had a long history at the Linden opera beginning in 1898; from 1908 to 1911 he served as general music director.

¹¹ Becker, p. 8.

Schillings, according to Becker, should have striven to reconcile these divergent interests.

This was a difficult position for a ministry whose aim had been to improve the living standards of the personnel. This was one of its social goals, which, as this chapter will make clear, conflicted with the Ministry's other plans to reshape culture in Prussia. In fact, the Schillings crisis was an indication of just how confused the original aims of the Ministry really were. Becker realized that he could not reconcile the three most important goals of his predecessors, Adolf Hoffmann, Konrad Haenisch and Otto Boelitz. These had been to improve the lives of performers; to give administrative responsibility to artists; and, finally, to secure access to high culture for lower-income people. The firing of Schillings brought all these problems to a head.

From 1918 onwards it had been clear that a new conception of opera administration was required in a republican political order. This meant that the State Opera could no longer be run as an insider affair as in the days of Wilhelm II's court. Nonetheless, as Becker noted, Schillings had greater powers than many other *Intendanten* in other cities, for example Munich and Vienna. He abused these powers through financial incompetence and a lack of acumen for business affairs, both of which became obvious during the inflation of 1923.¹² It did not help matters that Schillings relied too much on his social contacts with Berlin elites in order to conceal his lack of experience, and that he was married to Barbara Kemp, the State Opera's leading prima donna.¹³ The result was that artistic

¹² Becker, p. 9.

¹³ Leo Kestenberg, in particular, speculated that Kemp had played a significant role in Schillings's original appointment; see his *Bewegte Zeiten: musisch-musikantische Lebenserinnerungen*. (Wolfenbüttel 1961).

standards had slipped at the opera, particularly within the context of a project the Ministry considered both prestigious and symbolic of the new era of republican culture: "Through passive resistance, the Kroll Opera was not made into that which would have been possible, although Herr von Schillings initially supported the connection with the Kroll."¹⁴

The Volksbühne, for whose benefit the Kroll Opera had been reconstructed, was indeed dissatisfied. Once the Kroll had been established as an institution tied to the Volksbühne, it appeared that the State Opera had merely created competition for itself while imposing a serious burden on its own orchestra and singers. This first stab at a *Volksoper*, an opera for the people, directly run by the state satisfied nobody. Its status as a branch of another opera house, unprecedented in history, would clearly not work. By 1925, the future of one of the Ministry's major aims, *soziale Kunstpflege*, or financial support of the arts in order to make them accessible to a wider audience, was threatened. This meant a loss of prestige, both political and moral, for men who had vowed to change the status of art from a luxury to be enjoyed only by the wealthy to the foundation of a democratic German culture. For Becker, the issue of artistic independence was used somewhat cynically by the press in order to distract attention from the Ministry's goals.

Becker blamed Schillings for the decline of the State Opera, but blamed him far more for going public with his grievances against the Ministry. Had he not conducted a campaign against Becker and his colleagues, the issue might have been resolved. Instead, the growing

¹⁴ Becker, p. 10.

power of the press ensured that "the one-sided public opinion believed that in this case it must support an artist against arbitrary bureaucracy."¹⁵

A press response was unavoidable, since the State Opera was rightly seen as a public institution, but this one was surprisingly hostile to the Ministry and surprisingly supportive of Schillings. Although Schillings's contract had been renewed in 1923, his artistic policies and hiring decisions had caused the Ministry considerable embarrassment. Becker, who had served two years as State Secretary, returned to his post as minister of culture in 1925, determined to deal with the issue of the State Opera. He felt compelled to answer for the bad atmosphere created by his predecessors and also to defend the reputation of Seelig and Kestenberg, who were accused of plotting against Schillings. Both did indeed oppose him, and Kestenberg in particular had long been eager to replace Schillings or to undermine his influence. The outcry against the two advisors was, however, based on their status as republican cultural politicians, products of a new era. In his defense of them, Becker touched upon a central point in his argument; only a change in the organization of German musical life could restore to German music that primacy which cultural conservatives such as Schillings also desired. As Becker's writings make clear, he sincerely believed his project was both progressive and restorative; not only in music, but in cultural life as a whole, the republic had to foster a transformed and more authentic notion of *Bildung* which would represent the entire nation. This notion can be found in many of Becker's writings on cultural policy. For example, in a 1921 article in the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, Becker identified a "crisis of

¹⁵ *Ibid* , p.15.

Bildung " and argued for the need to redefine it along republican lines precisely because old authorities had lost their credibility due to political upheaval.¹⁶ In order to do this, however, he had to use methods displeasing to cultural conservatives; i.e. revolutionary methods. Becker thus acknowledged that his actions were political:

The consistent policy of the Ministry since the Revolution has been: first of all, to regain and preserve Germany's rank as the first land of music in the world. Secondly - and this is the decisive point - we consciously placed music in the service of education of the people [*Volkserziehung*].¹⁷

High culture was no longer to be reserved for an elite, but was to be transmitted to the entire nation, thus restoring meaning to the idea of a truly national culture, not limited by class or, for that matter, any other factor of exclusion. The concept of the *Volk* presented here is not a racialized one.

I emphasize this point because the concept of a *Volkskultur* certainly found plenty of support on the right, as did many of the Ministry's initiatives designed to secure such a culture. Not only had music obtained a completely different status in schools, private musical education had also been reformed and musicians were protected from exploitation. The Ministry position, that music was the property of the *Volk*, meant that the new cultural policy had "placed musical and theatrical art in the service of adult education, sponsored the theater-goers'

¹⁶ Becker, "Staatliche Bildungspolitik im heutigen Deutschland", manuscript in GStaPK I.HA Rep. 92, Nachlaß C.H. Becker, Nr. 1777.

¹⁷ Becker, *Der Fall Schillings*, p.24.

organizations, and that on an equal basis, supported the Kroll project and formed state touring companies."¹⁸

Becker strongly defended his advisors for their contribution to innovative cultural policy. Kestenberg and Seelig were the major representatives of a pedagogical approach to art which had long been a part of Social Democratic tradition and which had characterized early SPD-led reforms in the republic. Becker, though he was undoubtedly a centrist and a liberal, fully supported this approach.¹⁹ The Kroll Opera was the prototype of the changes intended to take place in cultural life. "This is indeed called socialization of art. It is opposed to the *l'art pour l'art* standpoint, which one may call the artistic point of view as opposed to the pedagogical. According to the former view, art is essentially an esoteric matter, intended only for the few who have a professional understanding of it...". To proponents of this view, "...experiments such as the Kroll appear ominous."²⁰ Rather than falling back on an elitist position that only those with a certain amount of musical education could comprehend opera, Kestenberg-Seelig position endorsed a "musicality" common to all.

On the surface such a position may appear anti-intellectual or indeed anti-artistic, but in fact it was far from an embrace of the purely

¹⁸ *Ibid* . The last-named initiative refers to the *Landesbühnen*, intended to bring theater to rural areas which could not support a theater of their own. These are discussed briefly later in the chapter.

¹⁹ John Rockwell's characterization of Becker as a "liberal holdover" and *Vernunftrepublikaner* (someone who supported the republic based on a rational consideration of its benefits) is unfair because it does not account for his espousing policies more traditionally found on the left. If Becker was not enthusiastic about the republic, it did not prevent him from working effectively for it once it was established. As I argue in this chapter, the "truly radical" cultural policy Becker supposedly blocked remains a chimera.

²⁰ Becker, p. 25.

instinctual. Although Becker mentioned the youth movement and "lay musicians" as important creative forces, they were also recognized as such by contemporary critics and even some composers, many of whom were searching for an alternative to musical life as it had been understood in the nineteenth century.²¹ The Ministry's principles were really at odds with two phenomena; the vestiges of the artistic regime of the Kaiserreich, and those sectors of the avant-garde who had no interest in how their work might be received by an audience. Becker's characterization of this position as *Artistentum*, implying that it described all artists, made it easier for the defenders of Schillings to portray the former *Intendant* as a victim of bureaucracy.

A *change* in cultural policy, as Becker himself pointed out, had not really taken place, because the monarchy had had no policy worthy of the name. The role of the crown as financial and political protector of the opera was gone. While *Intendanten* and general music directors might resent their loss of power and their subjection to the Ministry of Culture, the fact remained that they still held, for the most part, positions of considerable power and influence. Thus, it was not revolutionary change which had brought about the Schillings crisis and its associated discontents. Rather, the crisis was the result of incomplete change. The transition from a monarchical to a republican system had not been accomplished at once, but took place gradually because of the necessity of keeping bureaucratic structures intact. As was the case elsewhere in the Prussian civil service, there had been no purge of officials. The

²¹ For example, critic and administrator Paul Bekker, originally favored by Kestenberg for the post at the State Opera; see his *Das deutsche Musikleben* (Berlin 1916) for an early account of how musical life could become more democratic. There is little space in this chapter to discuss composers. See chapter 4 for a fuller account.

Hohenzollern family had not been officially dispossessed of the operas and theaters until 1925, so that the budget for culture was not handled directly by the Ministry.²² This situation, however, had to come to an end: "The current compromise between the old and the new system is in the long run impossible and intolerable."²³ Because competing conceptions of art confronted one another in Prussian cultural institutions, a clearly defined policy and a decision about why art was needed in the republic had to be made explicit. Becker, upon his return to office, articulated such a policy. He made it plain that he considered the status of art to be high indeed. It could not be underestimated, because nothing less than the identity of the republic and of the nation was at stake: "Is a conscious cultural and artistic policy still possible for the state? Is all its effectiveness perhaps nothing other than the results of a constellation of different powers? He who believes in the German future, and in the cultural legitimacy of the German republic, will not leave these things to chance..."²⁴

Culture, then, was of crucial importance in establishing a new German identity, centered in the capital of Berlin. No longer an imperial capital, the city had to come to terms with a new situation. The old cultural elites who controlled the State Opera and other institutions which had become subject to the state in 1918 could no longer take power, influence or money for granted. Becker reminded his audience that, after all, the existence of state subsidies for high culture was by no means uncontroversial. That the *Künstlerschaft*, the artistic community, received

²² Officially the cultural budget up to that time was under the supervision of the Ministry of Finance; see Rockwell, p.169.

²³ Becker, p. 29.

²⁴ *Ibid*, p. 31.

funding at all was entirely due to his ministry. With privilege came also responsibility.²⁵ Artists such as Schillings did not simply find themselves unable to accept bureaucratic control. It was the concrete policy of the Becker ministry that they found unacceptable. In order to clarify this issue, it is necessary to examine the policies and practices of Becker's predecessors and the ways in which they structured the Ministry of Culture after 1918.

The Formation of the Ministry of Culture and the New Concept of *Bildung*

It was clear in the immediate post-revolutionary period that the state's role in sponsoring art had to be clearly defined. This meant, first of all, that cultural institutions would be under one roof. The Kaiserreich had possessed only one vaguely defined art department (*Kunstabteilung*) which dealt with the visual arts. Responsibility for other art forms was scattered among other ministries. In particular, the subjection of theater to the authority of the Ministry of the Interior meant that it was defined as a matter of public order, not of cultural uplift. Remediating the status of theater meant returning to the humanist *Bildung* - oriented conceptions of Ludwig Devrient. Indeed, it was no accident that Devrient's proposal for the national theater, a product of the revolution of 1848, was republished in 1919 by the actors' union, the *Genossenschaft deutscher Bühnenangehörigen*, as an explicit plea for the Prussian authorities to realize his vision, which was based on the idea of theater as one of the foundations of a national culture. Devrient had proposed the takeover of

²⁵ On the change in policy from the Ministry's early days see also Detig, p. 254.

theaters by the Ministry of Culture, as well as suggesting a republican structure of theater management in which the personnel would choose its own director; subsidies which would place theaters on the same level as schools; state-sponsored training of actors due to the profession's ability to promote republican virtue; and constructing the theater as a site of national festivals.²⁶ Above all, the performing arts had to be made independent of capitalism and the profit motive.

The Ministry took this aim very seriously. The office of Minister of Culture was at first shared by Konrad Haenisch (SPD) and Adolf Hoffmann from the USPD, founded in 1917. The latter was composed of members of the more radical wing of the party which had opposed voting for war credits. Until the USPD left the coalition government in Prussia in January 1919, it served as an important factor in defining cultural policy. Hoffmann, a former textile and metal worker born and raised in Berlin, served as the main voice of cultural radicalism, but the evidence for this comes mostly from the realm of education, not the arts. Often portrayed by the press as crude and ignorant due to his working-class demeanor and heavy Berlin accent, he managed to alienate the coalition partners in the Center party with his anticlericalism and ideas for reforming the school system. Officially, he was also responsible for theaters, but initially he interfered little with their organizational structure. His colleague, Haenisch, favored a smooth transfer of theaters to the control of the Ministry of Culture, which would guarantee their artistic freedom. Haenisch took a greater interest in defining the role of culture in the new republic; since Hoffmann left office so early, it is hard to agree with John

²⁶ Ludwig Devrient, *Das Nationaltheater des neuen Deutschlands*. Berlin 1919.

Rockwell's heroicizing view of the minister: "Opera in Berlin, like so much of German social, economic, cultural and political life, could have been seized and bent to true revolutionary purpose, and so Hoffmann argued within the Ministry of Culture. But instead, only a timid gradualism prevailed."²⁷ Because the monarchy had engaged in rhetoric about freedom of culture, yet exercised "strict controls over its public manifestations"²⁸, Rockwell argues, the SPD/USPD ministry ought to have done the same. Yet it is hard to see what a more radical opera policy would have looked like. Should the State Opera have been devoted to socialist works, of which few if any existed? What this statement probably means is that the bureaucracy ought to have been more effectively purged. This is a point made by many historians of the Weimar period involving all aspects of government, not simply culture. Efforts to create a bureaucracy more favorably inclined to the Republic were limited due to the constitution's explicit protection of the rights of civil servants. However, in Prussia more progress was made towards realizing this goal than in any other state.²⁹ The fact is that the Prussian government had little choice but to work with those officials who had the most experience, and to try to win them over to the Republic. In the case of opera, a

²⁷ Rockwell, *The Prussian Ministry of Culture*, p. 48-49.

²⁸ *Ibid*, p.48.

²⁹ See Jane Caplan, *Government Without Administration: State and Civil Service in Weimar and Nazi Germany* (Oxford 1988). Contrary to earlier accounts which viewed the SPD's actions in leaving the civil service largely intact as oversight or as a fateful and inexplicable error, Caplan argues that in fact it was "a deliberate policy choice" because the new government needed the support of the existing administration. Only the USPD supported a radical reform of the bureaucracy. (p.20) Of all the German states, Prussia alone developed an identifiable policy of democratization; the SPD in particular tried to fill many senior posts with people committed to a party. See also Richard Breitman, *German Socialism and Weimar Democracy* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina 1981) for more on the SPD, whose policies, the author argues, were quite successful by the mid-1920s.

republican policy did develop, and conservative opposition gained ground only slowly. In part this was due to the fact that people of many political stripes gave lip service to the idea of a *Volksoper* and to the education of the masses. Other moves, such as the appointments of the advisors for music and theater, were perceived as far too radical. Cultural conservatives charged that the new appointments had few roots in Prussian tradition, but represented instead "the entire intelligentsia of the East".³⁰ Leo Kestenberg, though he was an appointment of Hoffmann's, remained in office until the forcible dissolution of the Prussian government in 1932. It is important to remember that he was able to do this, and to realize many of his programs, only because of support from the supposedly less radical Haenisch and Becker.

Haenisch, with his middle-class background and university education, was in fact perceived as far more dangerous than Hoffmann precisely because he was more polished, but advocated the same controversial views. Directly after the revolution, Haenisch found himself involved in a struggle with the Ministry of the Interior over the question of responsibility for theaters. He had no doubt as to the correct solution. In a document issued on June 29, 1919, Haenisch posed two questions: first, "Is the theater...an opportunity for amusement and enjoyment on the part of the propertied classes...or is it a cultural institution, one which belongs to the entire people?"³¹ Secondly, "Does the state exist solely in order to guarantee its citizens order, safety and police protection, or does it also

³⁰ See *Die Karikatur*, October 1, 1921. Haenisch himself was criticized for excessive radicalism and alienation of his coalition partners; see articles collected in BArch-SAPMO N2104/482, Nachlaß Konrad Haenisch.

³¹ GStAPK I. HA Rep. 90, Staatsministerium, Nr. 2405, Bl. 32.

have the obligation to serve the general good?"³² Assigning to the state a role in promoting culture went beyond the merely preventative concept Haenisch associated with the Ministry of the Interior's position. On the other hand, the Ministry of Culture, should it take over responsibility for theaters, would merely act to recognize an established fact: the state had always, officially or unofficially, played a role in the promotion of culture. Court theaters had long received subsidies of over ten million marks per year from state governments. Individual cities had founded their own theaters. Haenisch exaggerated the extent of communalization that had already taken place before 1918. He was, however, right to point out that high artistic standards had always required subsidy. As discussed in the previous chapter, high culture was never a money-making enterprise, which led to the SPD's Wilhelmine-era complaint that capitalism was inimical to art because it fostered kitsch.

Court theaters had passed into state hands not through official confiscation - this was continually emphasized - but through prompt action taken to ensure that the theaters would not have to shut down. Until matters could be settled with the Hohenzollern, the state's responsibility for the theaters was legally defined as "conducting of business for an unknown individual or some similar relationship preserving the rights of the crown."³³ This interim solution kept the theaters intact by stating that the contracts of their employees remained valid. Despite the legal definition, however, it was fairly obvious that the exiled monarch could not possibly have any further influence on the development of theatrical culture. Essentially, the state was ensuring the continuation of theater's

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*, Bl. 17.

representative role. Only the Prussian state, Haenisch argued, could reorganize the finances of the former court theater so as to ensure equitable distribution. Berlin, the capital of both Prussia and the nation, could not be the sole recipient of subsidies. The theaters in Kassel and Wiesbaden had likewise become Prussian state theaters. Too much attention to Berlin might well cause resentment in less well-funded parts of the state. It was thus necessary to ensure the participation of the city government in financing all state theaters.³⁴

Haenisch's Ministry of Culture indeed gained control of the theaters, though not without a struggle from Wolfgang Heine, Minister of the Interior. Disturbed by the prospect that theaters might change too radically, he wrote to Haenisch in October 1919: "...The temptation to work using pedagogical tendencies, even if they are "popular pedagogical" ones, would be deadly poison for art. I know that plenty of experimenters are now making themselves heard, und many of them sit in your ministry. The idea of socializing theater, permitting only state and communal theaters and somehow repressing the others...every kind of council idea and participation of the personnel in artistic questions, especially that of hiring, all of this means a terrible danger for art."³⁵

Though this fear of excessive radicalism and artists' councils was misplaced, the Ministry's plans did contain pitfalls. When given the choice, the personnel acted in a conservative rather than radical direction, by choosing Schillings to head the opera. Haenisch was also rather naive about the question of funding. The responsibility of the Berlin city

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Nachlaß Konrad Haenisch, BArch-SAPMO N2104/134; Heine to Haenisch, October 13, 1919.

government for cultural life was a sore point, and would remain so throughout the republican era. Berlin had its own opera, the Charlottenburg institution known as the German Opera House, which after the formation of greater Berlin in 1920 could no longer assert its independence of the metropolis.³⁶ As early as 1919 the Charlottenburg opera requested a takeover by the city; by 1925, after a severe financial crisis, it officially became the City Opera (Städtische Oper). Berlin repeatedly showed reluctance to fund what were regarded as Prussian state institutions, and this with some justification. The Reich government contributed very little to culture, resulting in an ongoing battle between city and state over the question of *soziale Kunstpflege*. In financial hard times, each tended to blame the other for not doing more to bear the burden of funding culture.

Another problem arose because the importance of Berlin threatened to drain funds from the rest of Prussia. For this reason the state was committed to funding traveling theaters in the provinces, particularly in border areas where German culture was allegedly under threat. In order to ensure some level of artistic quality in the traveling theaters, politicians of all parties agreed that there should be a central state organizing body known as the *Preußische Landesbühne* (Prussian State Stage). Founded in 1922, the Landesbühne's cultural-nationalist goals were continually cited, not least in the debate over the proposed closing of the Kroll Opera, as reasons why Berlin culture was overemphasized and overfunded. This emphasis on the needs of the provinces posed a severe problem for the

³⁶ For its history, see Detlef Meyer zu Heringdorf, *Das Charlottenburger Opernhaus von 1912 bis 1961.: Von der privat-gesellschaftlich geführten Bürgeroper bis zur subventionierten Berliner "Städtischen Oper"* Berlin 1988.

definition of *soziale Kunstpflege*. Which people were its true recipients, the urban working class or the rural population without access to a regularly operating theater? The Landesbühne found many defenders on the political right, for example Otto Boelitz of the German People's Party, who succeeded Haenisch as Minister of Culture. However, it was by no means an exclusively right-wing organization. It involved a cooperation with the Volksbühne, now an important partner of the state in its cultural policy, with the "Christian-German" Bühnenvolksbund, a theater-goers' organization founded in 1919 to counteract the Volksbühne's influence.³⁷ This organization did not rely on a lottery system; better categories of seats were more expensive. This caused the Volksbühne to frequently attack its rival for reinforcing the class system. Indeed, the two organizations attacked one another in the press at every opportunity, but in the case of the Landesbühne they were partners.

This was one indication of the SPD's acceptance of cultural nationalist ideas. It is important to emphasize, however, that these were consistently thought of in terms of openness and liberation. Haenisch, in his argument for the theater as a cultural institution, emphasized once again that in Germany, the demand for a national theater had always accompanied revolution or political reform. In his *Neue Bahnen der Kulturpolitik* (1921) Haenisch explained that his aim was to create a truly national culture in contrast to that of the Wilhelmine era, which had

³⁷ The only study of the Bühnenvolksbund, a 1997 dissertation by Gregor Kannberg, points out that its programs did not in practice differ very much from those of the Volksbühne. This was because relatively few explicitly Christian plays existed for the organization to promote. Its political base was quite diverse, with support coming from the Center, the German People's Party, and the far-right German National People's Party. See Gregor Kannberg, *Der Bühnenvolksbund: Aufbau und Krise des Christlich-Deutschen Bühnenvolksbundes 1919-1933*. Cologne 1997.

abused art. This had to be done by "...bridging the significant gap between 'Gebildeten' and 'Ungebildeten' and through new methods, not prescribed from above but self-created and self-taught, to achieve a unified German people's culture and through this to a national cultural consciousness embracing everybody..."³⁸

In order to bring this about, Haenisch expected that the state would have to rethink its entire idea of what sort of people ought to be involved in administration:

Especially in light of the dreadful artistic philistinism of the completely unmusical Wilhelmine era, in which the policy was to command art and artists like military recruits, which viewed art as nothing but a means of breeding loyal monarchical sentiment, it is necessary to again instil in the entire administration the necessary respect and modesty of artistic creation and of artistic personality.³⁹

Art, in other words, should not be a means of compelling loyalty to the state, whether to a monarchy or to a republic. It was to be considered valuable for its own sake and ought to be supervised by artists themselves. Unfortunately, this principle could not be easily reconciled with the project of creating a unified national culture, which the minister had declared to be the chief task of the republic. Only an overly idealistic view of cultural politics could ignore this. Haenisch, like so many others, relied on a vision of art as a creator and preserver of the *Gemeinschaft* in order to support his claims. This vision arose directly from his understanding of the art work of the future as embodied in the works of Richard Wagner:

"To bring art and the people closer to one another in the rightly

³⁸ Konrad Haenisch, *Neue Bahnen der Kulturpolitik*. Stuttgart 1921. p.108.

³⁹ *Ibid*, p.151.

understood sense of the beautiful ideas of Pagner and Hans Sachs in the "Meistersinger": that was the goal."⁴⁰

The center of this effort was to be the revival of the Kroll Opera, which had been in ruins since the war had interrupted previous plans to rebuild it. The project of transforming the Kroll into the new *Volksoper* with reduced prices, so that less wealthy Berliners might attend, was the pet project of operatic reformers, who considered it the best example of the new artistic policy in Prussia. Opera ought to be "popularized", a word, Haenisch was careful to add, "used in the best sense."⁴¹

The Ministry needed artists who were genuinely committed to this task. If artists were to have positions of responsibility, they could not simply pursue an art for art's sake course, as this would do nothing to promote an explicitly republican culture. Unfortunately, as this chapter will go on to argue, there were not enough such artists available. The story of the Kroll shows most clearly why many of the Ministry of Culture's original aims were too utopian, rather than being too timid or too conservative. While rejecting the nineteenth-century musical world as having been too individualistic and estranged from everyday life, cultural politicians such as Haenisch fell into a nineteenth-century trap: the myth of the organic community as exemplified by Wagner's construction of Nuremberg, in which artist and citizen were supposedly one.⁴² In fact, neither artists nor the public conformed to these expectations, something which was not in the least surprising. The vision of civic culture which

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p.159.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, p.162.

⁴² For the implications of this myth, see Arthur Groos, "Constructing Nuremberg: Typological and Proleptic Communities in *Die Meistersinger* ", in *19th Century Music* Vol. 16, No. 1, summer 1992, pp. 18-34.

inspired the Kroll project also contained no clear idea of the people who were its intended beneficiaries.

The Volksbühne and the Kroll

Since the reunification of the Freie Volksbühne and the Neue Freie Volksbühne just before the war, the organization had grown in size and prestige. The postwar period was especially fruitful, as it grew to nearly two hundred chapters nationwide and officially became the Verein der deutschen Volksbühnenverbände e.V. The national seat was in Berlin, which supervised all chapters. The formal structure of Volksbühne membership was also codified. The highest instance was the Volksbühnentag, which met each year in a different German city.⁴³ Delegates at this decision-making body were in turn responsible for choosing the board of the Volksbühne. Until 1933 the national chairman and major power in the organization was Siegfried Nestriepke.⁴⁴ Born in 1885, Nestriepke had worked as a journalist and belonged first to the USPD. Upon rejoining the SPD in 1919, Nestriepke promoted the socialization of theaters and lobbied for a national theater law, which never materialized.⁴⁵ Because theaters in the postwar world could not make nearly as much money, Nestriepke and the Volksbühne perceived

⁴³ On this, see Albert Brodbeck, *Handbuch der deutschen Volksbühnenbewegung* (Berlin 1930) and Siegfried Nestriepke, *Geschichte der Volksbühne Berlin, I. Teil: 1890 bis 1914* (Berlin 1930). Nestriepke never completed the second part of his history.

⁴⁴ Biographical details can be found in Walther Oschilewski, ed., *Siegfried Nestriepke: Leben und Leistung* (Berlin 1955).

⁴⁵ Many of his pamphlets from the early 1920s deal with the issue; see *Theater-Etats: Anleitung und Musterbeispiele* (Berlin, undated); *Die Forderungen der Volksbühnen an das Reichsbühnengesetz* (Berlin 1926); and *Die Theatergemeinschaft der Zukunft: Volksbühnenbewegung und Sozialisierung des Theaters*. (Berlin 1921).

that their moment had arrived. Socialization of theater was now not only a moral but also a practical issue.

State and communal control of the former court theaters was largely accomplished by around 1925. The other main ingredient of socialization, Nestriepke argued, could be accomplished by allowing the Volksbühne and similar organizations a role in theater management. He demanded "the founding and financial support of artistic communities, to whom several stages and lecture halls would be allocated and which would be provided with funding, in order to guarantee to each of its members a theatrical or concert offering every two weeks, either free or for a moderate monthly contribution."⁴⁶ At the same time, the theater would be guaranteed a significant number of occupied seats. In this way, Nestriepke and his colleagues hoped that a more intimate connection between theater and public would arise. Drawing on the tradition of the national theater, he believed that "...the origin of the theater is of a social nature, since ancient times it has attempted to influence the communal sentiment, to change it, to control it. Without this direct relationship to the community, theater can have no lasting effect."⁴⁷

The socialization efforts of the Volksbühne were bound to be limited. They never had much power or influence over the day-to-day operations of German theaters, although many chapters had official arrangements with state and communal theaters entitling members to a certain number of seats. In Berlin, however, the situation was different. Not only had the Volksbühne controlled its own theater on Bülowplatz since 1914, it also had ambitious plans to secure opera performances for

⁴⁶ Oschilewski, p. 49.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p.59.

its members. This was the reason for its interest in the restoration of the Kroll. Kestenberg, who had long been an unofficial advisor to the Volksbühne, encouraged the effort. Financed through members' contributions, the rebuilding proved costly, complicated and politically controversial due to the involvement of an impresario by the name of Otto Wilhelm Lange and his own opera project, the Great People's Opera (Große Volksoper). The story of Lange's struggles with the state and the Volksbühne illustrates the precarious nature of a privately funded opera house in the Republic. It could flourish only under highly unusual circumstances such as the disastrous inflation of 1923, and it was not likely to survive long due to the absence of political support. Lange was not a representative of republican culture, thus his decline was almost inevitable.

Lange's conception of a *Volksoper* was shared by Volksbühne members, but from the beginning it was unclear how his project was "of the people." Founded in 1919, the opera advertised itself as a "symbol of the love of art of Berlin's population."⁴⁸ While following in the footsteps of Hans Gregor and the Komische Oper by introducing the Berlin public to unusual repertory and keeping theatrical values high, the Große Volksoper intended to keep ticket prices low in order to ensure that people in all walks of life could attend. Lange's opera, temporarily housed in the Theater des Westens, was set up as a joint-stock company in which members held shares of up to 5%. This entitled them to opera performances on a regular basis.⁴⁹ In addition, the Große Volksoper agreed to contribute funds for the Volksbühne's ongoing renovation of the

⁴⁸ Pamphlet in GStAPK, BPH Rep. 119 (neu), Nr. 727.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

Kroll in exchange for participation once the house was open for business. Originally the Kroll was scheduled to reopen in 1922, at which time the stockholders would be able to obtain regular seats. In the meantime they were offered seats at the Linden opera which were less than satisfactory. Lange judged them to be the worst seats in the house, offered at extortionate prices.⁵⁰

The Große Volksoper was artistically ambitious and could boast a distinguished roster of performers. The leading conductor was Fritz Zweig, later universally praised for his achievements at Klemperer's Kroll. Sadly, its disintegration was largely due to Lange and his economic policies, especially in the context of the inflation. The state did not consider his opera a worthy project. Operas designed as joint-stock companies proved themselves unviable by 1925 at the latest, as the case of the City Opera also showed. Without state or communal subsidies, high culture could not be sustained. In the case of the Kroll, the state became involved to a much greater extent than Kestenberg or his colleagues in the Ministry of Culture had originally planned. By 1923 rebuilding had come to a halt. The disastrous effects of the inflation which devastated Germany in that year meant that the Volksbühne ran out of financial means. Its attempts to continue had been supported in 1921-22 by two large loans from the Große Volksoper.

In such a situation it was not surprising that Lange, still without a theater of his own, began to feel entitled to the Kroll as the Volksoper's permanent home. Lange claimed to be supported by funds from abroad, particularly from the United States, which would have placed him in a far

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

better financial position than either the state or the Volksbühne. The nature of these funds was, however, never made clear, and the state for its part was suspicious of the Volksoper. Seelig recalled during the Kroll investigation in 1931 that the Ministry had feared an "Americanization" of German art, which was directly opposed to the project of national cultural renewal sponsored by the state.⁵¹ The state thus opted to bail out the Volksbühne and to deny the Große Volksoper any role in the reconstructed Kroll.

Lange, in appealing to the Landtag to support his own institution, argued that four operas were impossible to support in Berlin and offered to take over the state's responsibility in providing seats for the Volksbühne.⁵² However, his claim that the Volksoper was "a musical sister of the Volksbühne" did not convince the Ministry, which suspected Lange was actually trying to swallow up the opera which the latter organization still rightfully regarded as its own.⁵³ The state preferred to help the Volksbühne, whose goals were clearly "social" and less identified with the profit-seeking enterprises of the bygone Wilhelmine era. An unsigned article in the *Blätter der Staatsoper* presented the state's position: Schillings and the leadership of the State Opera had supported Lange until it became clear that his plan was excessively ambitious. Allegedly he foresaw a theater with 4500 seats. The deal with the Volksbühne had been made independently, and it was actually the Volksbühne who had done the Große Volksoper a favor by allowing it

⁵¹ Preußischer Landtag, Kroll Untersuchungsausschuß, column 166.

⁵² The four being his own, the City Opera, the State Opera on Unter den Linden, and the Kroll as a future branch of the State Opera. See "Die Legende vom Anspruch der Großen Volksoper auf Kroll", *Blätter der Staatsoper*, May 1923.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

any space. Thus Lange had always been wrong to portray his opera as the designated occupant of the Kroll. He had assumed "that in view of the progressive devaluation of the currency, predictable financial difficulties on the part of the Volksbühne would offer him the opportunity of extending his sphere of influence."⁵⁴ The Große Volksoper, argued the Ministry, was no opera of the people except in name. It did not follow social principles but supported the "star system" and performed "sensational" works at a high cost. Clearly, it could not be trusted with the Kroll. The Volksoper had neither a legal nor a moral claim to the building: "It [the opera] made use initially of a great social idea, only to deny this idea when it no longer needed to use it as a slogan."⁵⁵ A true *Volksoper* would not rely on sensation, but would have a mission of serving the national interest. It would present primarily German art and would realize the task the Ministry had set itself; to revive German culture in a republican context.

The state's actions in this case were no doubt partially based on fear of competition. With criticism of Schillings and the State Opera growing ever louder, the Große Volksoper posed a threat because it could be viewed as a worthy artistic alternative. However, the actions of the state were primarily political and ideological. Far from pursuing a "non-political" artistic policy, the Große Volksoper affair shows that the Ministry of Culture pursued a clear political line which in this case led to the rejection of Lange's claims and the acceptance of the Volksbühne's. The latter organization was considered an agent of republican culture; thus the state decided that its efforts deserved compensation. The

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

Volksbühne's claim to the Kroll were rightly honored despite the financial assistance Lange had provided. Lange could not prove that he was financially solvent, and after one of his backers left him in the lurch the state could afford to write him off as a charlatan. John Rockwell suggests that Lange was explicitly tied to the right, which made him even more disreputable in the eyes of Kestenberg and his colleagues.⁵⁶ He did have connections to right-wing politicians, including Julius Koch of the German National People's Party (DNVP) who later sat on the board of directors at the City Opera and thus enthusiastically supported the idea of closing the Kroll. Rockwell is puzzled by the failure of Otto Boelitz, then Minister of Culture, to support Lange, but Boelitz's lack of action in this matter demonstrates more than personal passivity (though this was certainly a feature of his time in office). Lange was unacceptable not primarily because of his personal politics, but because he threatened the project of *soziale Kunstpflege*. His project did not fit the state's requirements.

However, even after the fall of the Große Volksoper, which was forced to close in 1925, the artistic profile of the new republican opera remained unclear. Its dependent status as a branch of the State Opera was the major problem, which led the Ministry to reconsider its plans once again.

Operatic Stagnation in Berlin: 1923-25

Conductor Otto Klemperer had gained renown for his work in Cologne and Wiesbaden, where he attempted to modernize the opera

⁵⁶ Rockwell, p. 118.

repertory and also collaborated with visual artists to create striking productions far removed from prewar tradition.⁵⁷ Klemperer attracted attention above all in Berlin, the logical next step in his career. Before 1924 he had conducted negotiations with the Große Volksoper, very briefly with the Deutsches Opernhaus, and finally with the State Opera itself.⁵⁸ All these negotiations had, however, come to nothing, as Klemperer's plans for sweeping reform of opera were incompatible with the realities of musical life in Berlin at that time.

It is this last-named case, that of the 1923 negotiations with the State Opera, which merits particular attention. Leo Kestenberg almost certainly was behind the effort to secure Klemperer as opera director to fill the post vacated by Leo Blech, who had held it since 1906. Kestenberg's unstated aim was to undermine the conservative Schillings, who was already unpopular with the press, by bringing the reputed radical Klemperer on board.

Unfortunately, the talks foundered due to Klemperer's dictatorial demands, which were unprecedented in German operatic history. He wanted the title of general music director, which would be unique to him; he would have at least partial control over repertory, hiring and firing of singers and orchestra musicians; he would have the right to direct a work about twice a season, for which he would choose the set designer; and he reserved the right to refuse to conduct an opera if he felt it had been insufficiently rehearsed or included artists not subject to the GMD's

⁵⁷ Notably Ewald Dülberg, who later accompanied Klemperer to the Kroll; for these phases of his career, see Heyworth, *Otto Klemperer: His Life and Times*.

⁵⁸ Lange went so far as to list Klemperer as a guest conductor for the 1923-24 season, although he in fact never signed a contract with the Große Volksoper. See Große Volksoper documents in GStAPK, BPH Rep. 119 (neu), Nr. 727.

discipline.⁵⁹ Many of these demands foreshadowed the ones he would later make at the Kroll. A unified ensemble was to fulfill a strictly defined program designed by one man. The work was not to be disrupted by the distractions of the star system: "Only guests who agree with the general music director in questions of style and concept will be considered."⁶⁰

Most outrageous, however, were Klemperer's demands that the public itself be redesigned to suit his taste:

The subscription concerts are the responsibility of the general music director alone...Further care must be taken to renew the notoriously conservative concert public through cancellation or non-renewal of subscriptions. The current subscription public seems to the GMD little suited to the task of understanding the problems of present-day musical issues.⁶¹

This rejection of the concert public implied that there was an ideal public to be found that would respond to Klemperer's ideas. Klemperer's plans for musical renewal aimed to replace sloppy and insufficiently rehearsed routine performances with an ensemble opera which would concentrate on a few works at a time. These ideas were laudable, but the conductor never had any conception of his intended audience. He could not change the public either in 1923 or later. His contempt for those who would ultimately decide on the fate of his plans knew no bounds. This was the major obstacle to the project of reintegrating art into communal life, of which Klemperer, for all his delusions, was also a part.

Schillings was understandably aggrieved by Klemperer's arrogance, though he diplomatically praised the idea of appointing him. Klemperer

⁵⁹ GStAPK, BPH Rep. 119 (neu), Nr. 2587, Bl.118.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

believed he was in the position of a savior and had been called "to the sickbed of a seriously ill person", though he had no personal experience of the State Opera's difficulties. He also did not neglect to mention his offers from the other Berlin operas.⁶² Unsurprisingly, Schillings concluded that a contract with Klemperer under the above-mentioned conditions would seriously threaten his own position as *Intendant*. "I am not suited for the role of an artistically educated bureaucrat," protested Schillings, noting that negotiations with Klemperer would only make sense if the latter were willing to submit to his authority. In this matter, Schillings could rely on the support of the entire personnel. Additionally, Klemperer's conviction that the State Opera had reached a nadir of artistic achievement which only he could reform did not bode well for future cooperation with Schillings. The new GMD ought to accept Schillings's ultimate authority and should be willing to cooperate with Fritz Stiedry, a conductor who had been at the State Opera since 1914. With Blech gone, Stiedry considered himself most qualified for the position of GMD.

Schillings unsuccessfully negotiated with Alexander von Zemlinsky in Prague and with Bruno Walter before making his final choice for the job. It aroused the wrath of the entire Berlin musical press. The thirty-three-year-old Erich Kleiber seemed too young and inexperienced to be GMD. In Mannheim, his previous post, he had not been a success.⁶³ Most critics were convinced that Schillings and the Ministry had acted incompetently in hiring a relative unknown who was more of a self-

⁶² *Ibid*, Bl. 121.

⁶³ Many articles on the Kleiber controversy are contained in GStAPK, I.HA Rep. 92, Nachlaß Becker, Nr. 7411.

promoter than a musician.⁶⁴ In particular, they criticized the treatment of Stiedry, whose seniority at the opera ought to have played a larger role in Schillings's decision. Schillings proposed to Stiedry that he be satisfied with the title of "first *Kapellmeister* " but this led to the latter's resignation. Stiedry stated to the press that he did not believe Kleiber was qualified for the position of GMD. While theater personnel did not object to Kleiber, the press still felt it had been set up (via a press conference called by the Ministry to float the issue of the Kleiber hiring, even though the decision to hire him had already been made) and that Schillings was poisoning the atmosphere at the opera by his high-handedness.

While the parent institution experienced this conflict, the Kroll project was no less affected. Schillings was accused of deliberately neglecting the new opera, which finally managed to open on January 1, 1924. The building was completed by Oskar Kaufmann, who had also been responsible for the Volksbühne's Bülowplatz theater. The Kroll was the only assignment Kaufmann ever received from the state.⁶⁵ It had become one of Germany's largest opera houses, with 2200 seats.⁶⁶ It soon became clear, however, that the theater of the people was not serving the people. Its status as stepchild proved intolerable. The State Opera did not have the resources to ensure high-quality productions at both houses.

⁶⁴ A typical comment came from Max Marschalk in the *Vossische Zeitung*, date? "Kleiber understands how to make a production of himself in a very intrusive way...He conducts for the public to an extent that we do not accept here. He affects greatness and passion, but is nonetheless just a neurasthenic, who proves at every moment that he lacks a true relationship to art and an understanding of it born of productive strength." Marschalk was not the only critic to associate Kleiber with hysteria, suggesting anti-Semitic stereotypes (although the conductor was not Jewish).

⁶⁵ Antje Hansen, *Oskar Kaufmann: Ein Theaterarchitekt zwischen Tradition und Moderne* (Berlin 2001). A frequent criticism of Kaufmann's designs is that they are too kitschy and escapist, a criticism also made of the Volksbühne's aesthetic preferences, as discussed in Chapter 3.

⁶⁶ *Blätter der Staatsoper* 3/7, May 1923.

Operating seven days a week in two theaters forced singers to shuttle back and forth between the two, sometimes on the same evening. The prestigious works of Wagner and Verdi were generally reserved for the wealthy public at the house on Unter den Linden, whereas the Volksbühne was fobbed off with stale and sentimental works such as d'Albert's "Tiefland" and Thomas's "Mignon".⁶⁷ The organization became increasingly dissatisfied. Suspicion that Schillings was deliberately letting the Kroll suffer, in order to prevent competition with the Linden house, grew steadily over the course of the 1924-25 season. Under these circumstances the Ministry made yet another approach to Klemperer, now conducting in Wiesbaden. Kestenberg initiated the proceedings. His freedom to act was expanded considerably by the return to office of Becker in 1925.

As noted above, Becker held Kestenberg and his projects in high esteem, and was also himself firmly committed to the project of *soziale Kunstpflege*. Becker believed that Schillings's mismanagement of the State Opera had had disastrous consequences, especially for the Kroll. As outlined at the beginning of this chapter, the firing of Schillings came about so that the Ministry would be more free to pursue its social aims. He was replaced by a temporary committee consisting of Kleiber, producer Franz Ludwig Hörth, and Edgar Winter, an administrative official. Hörth argued strongly for the independence of the Kroll.⁶⁸ Becker's long-term goal was to appoint Heinz Tietjen, *Intendant* of the City Opera, as *Generalintendant* of all three Berlin operas. This procedure revived an

⁶⁷ Statistics can be found in *Blätter der Staatsoper* 7/7, September 1926.

⁶⁸ In a memorandum which appears to have been lost, although it is referred to in the hearings preceding the closing of the Kroll.

office that had become defunct with the forced resignation of Georg von Hülsen-Haeseler in 1918. Tietjen's appointment was finalized in 1926 and a so-called *Interessengemeinschaft* (relationship of common interest) was established between the State Opera and the City Opera. The purpose of this was to set up a working relationship whereby the management of both operas could discuss repertory and avoid redundancies or simultaneous premieres.⁶⁹ In theory, this was a good idea, since it provided for cooperation among the three operas. Though several authors condemn the *Generalintendantz* as an antiquated institution which should not have been revived⁷⁰, the real problem was the personality of Tietjen, whose manipulative actions and abuse of power did much to undermine the Ministry's plans, particularly in the case of the Kroll. Immediately after Schillings's dismissal, Kurt Singer, future *Intendant* of the City Opera, had already warned that considering Tietjen's character, any attempt to give him greater responsibility would be a mistake.⁷¹ This proved correct, even though genuine financial and artistic problems plagued the Kroll from the beginning.

⁶⁹ A problem which continues to affect the Berlin opera scene today. Suggestions that the three operas confine themselves to specific time periods or types of opera have not been accepted, as they were not in the 1920s. For a contemporary example of the debate, see Frederik Hanssen, "Die Hauptstadt braucht auch in Zukunft seine Opernhäuser - es kommt nur darauf an, die Profile radikal zu ändern" in *Der Tagesspiegel*, September 7, 2000. Here the author suggests that the State Opera remain a representative house, the opera in Charlottenburg (today the Deutsche Oper) be satisfied with its role as a *Bürgeroper*, and that the Komische Oper, founded in 1949, find its place as a "stage for the Volk", for newcomers and people who know little about opera. What these class categories mean in the twenty-first century is anybody's guess.

⁷⁰ See discussion in Rockwell, op. cit., and in Christl Anft, *Ernst Legal, 1881-1955. Schauspieler, Regisseur, Theaterleiter. Ein bürgerlich-humanistischer Künstler im gesellschaftlichen und ästhetischen Strukturwandel der ersten Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts*. Berlin 1981.

⁷¹ *Vorwärts*, November 27, 1925.

Conclusion

The Ministry was not out of danger in 1925, nor was the Kroll project. Schillings's departure raised a host of issues that would continue to affect the Kroll as an independent institution. While the Schillings case and its implications are widely recognized as a turning point in Weimar cultural politics, I do not agree with all of the conclusions drawn by those who have discussed the episode. To sum up this chapter I emphasize the following points:

The rhetoric of an "unpolitical" cultural policy in Prussia may well have been the legacy of the *Bildungsbürgertum* tradition. This does not mean, however, that the Ministry's policy, in the Schillings case or elsewhere, was genuinely unpolitical, or that it was responsible for the problems encountered by the Ministry in implementing its plans. The Schillings case did indeed lead to attacks from the right and to scapegoating of some leading figures in the Ministry, notably Kestenberg. It is worth noting, however, that the person most responsible for supporting *soziale Kunstpflege*, Becker, stood firmly within the liberal tradition of *Bildung*. He wished to update, not reject, this tradition. Becker jettisoned the policy pursued by his predecessors, notably Haenisch, which envisioned the spontaneous emergence of a national community based on integration of art and the *Volk*. As the Schillings case shows, artists were not always the best people to deal with such issues, and they could not be persuaded overnight of the significance of *soziale Kunstpflege*. For these reasons, I reject John Rockwell's thesis of insufficient radicalism within the Ministry and his assessment of Becker as a quasi-reactionary figure who worked against more authentically

republican policies. In fact, it was the republican conception of culture which Becker did most to support.

Further, the Schillings case shows that administrative oversight of opera was necessary. The revival of the *Generalintendanz* was indispensable to the coordination of the three opera houses. In theory, there was no reason why greater Berlin could not support three opera houses, provided they had somewhat different profiles. In practice this situation proved difficult, even during the relatively stable years between 1924 and 1929. The Kroll Opera had the clearest profile of the three and ultimately attained both first-rate artistic standards and a more diverse public. In its first season, however, the opera failed to justify its promise. Otto Klemperer, trying out his ideas about opera reform for the first time, had as many problems with cultural bureaucracy as Schillings. The issue, once again, was the independence of artists and the extent of their responsibility to the state. In this way, the Schillings problem became the Klemperer problem, although the artistic and political issues concerned were different. This will be the subject of the next chapter.