Collective Bargaining for Actors' Wages: Equity Association Demands, ... 

By GEORGE S. KAUFMAN

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Equity Association Demands, Not an Eight-Hour Day, but Pay for Overtime, and Managers Refuse to Recognize the Union—Possible Effect on Playgoers

By GEORGE S. KAUFMAN

The actors—some 4,200 of them, rep-resented by their respective organizations, are hopelessly desperate, at odds. For the first time since the formation of the Actors’ Equity Association, six years ago, the actor and his business of dealing with an absent union have been standing firm and preparing to face the consequences of union-management deadlock.

The first steps toward breaking the bottleneck of formal negotiations, and initiating a round of strikes, have been taken. When it comes, moreover, it promises to be a clash which will draw the theatregoing public into the controversy by interfering in no inconceivable measure with the production of plays. Hitherto the battles between the two factions have been technical, and of interest largely to those directly involved; the extent of the present disagreement promises to compel upon warfare, and there is no telling what its ramifications may be. Whether or not it results in the loss of a single performance, the developments are certain to be interesting.

The actors claimed their demands in 1917, with their aims the amelioration of certain working conditions which they considered odious. Their negotiations with the United Managers’ Protective Association resulted, in the Autumn of 1917, in a so-called standing agreement. The agreements—bearing the names of the two associations at its head and containing an arbitration clause in which judicial power was vested in the respective organizations—were signed.

The standard contract represented an honest effort on the part of the two associations to settle their differences equitably—Sam H. Harris, President of the Producers Managers’ Association, declared that the actors were granted 92.5 per cent. of everything that they asked—and its adoption by the two organizations was celebrated by a dinner and bashed by as many as the theatrical millennium.

The agreement was to run for two years—expiring, therefore, early in the coming season. In the meantime the business of the actors continued as usual from the hands of the United Managers’ Protective Association to the newly formed and organized Actors’ Equity Association, headed by Mr. Harris, and embracing every manager of importance in the United States at one of their field meetings, held a few months ago, the managers invited a committee from the actors to confer with them upon the terms of the new agreement.

Then came the rub. Naturally both sides had asked a lot more than they were content to struggle along with, and the early parting of demands brought about an enormous.growl amor an agreed product. The actors wanted a shortening of the