

THEATRES UNITE TO WIPE OUT AGENCIES; FIX 10C. PREMIUM

**Central Office in Times Square
to Sell Tickets to All
Houses.**

BIG BROKERS ARE DOOMED

**Producing Managers' Associa-
tion Adopts Drastic Plan to
End Speculation.**

JOSEPH LEBLANG IN CHARGE

**Fee of a Dime to Be Lifted by Pur-
chase of an Annual Card
for \$1.**

A new and revolutionary plan for the handling of theatre tickets, which is counted upon to eliminate absolutely all speculation and high premiums, was formally adopted by the Producing Managers' Association at a meeting held yesterday afternoon. The new plan calls for a central office for the sale of tickets of all theatres, at a uniform premium of ten cents a ticket.

Yesterday's action of the managers will practically wipe out the ticket agencies as they exist today. Although the central office idea had been considered by a managerial committee last week, it was understood that it had been dropped in favor of another and less radical plan, and its adoption by the managers yesterday came as a complete surprise.

The step taken by the managers will change the entire business methods of the theatres, and will alter the procedure for the theatre patron who desires to purchase seats. The main points of the new arrangement are these:

A central ticket office located in the Times Square district, with branches throughout the city and in neighboring towns, at which seats will be sold for all theatres during the day, at a premium of ten cents a ticket. By the purchase of an annual card for \$1 this charge will be removed.

The sale of tickets in the individual box offices, as usual, at certain time.

The putting of the plan into operation as soon as possible, probably within a month.

The possible elimination of Joseph Leblang's cut-rate ticket business, which has recently assumed huge proportions.

Based on Leblang's Plan.

The new plan was originally put forward by Mr. Leblang, and is an adaptation of the ideas that he found successful in the selling of tickets at cut rates. One idea that the Leblang agency is now using, for example, is the dollar card, entitling one to purchase for a year. Mr. Leblang will be in general charge of the central office plan and will work out the details with a committee of managers.

In wiping out even the fifty-cent premium, which has been long recognized as lawful, the managers are taking the most radical step since they came together as an organization. It is because all other attempts to eliminate speculation have failed, said a producer last night, that the organization is preparing to make a clean sweep of the present ticket system.

When the central office plan was being considered last week, Mr. Leblang declared that it would require about \$1,000,000 to underwrite it. That it is being entered into in earnest is indicated by the fact that Mr. Leblang yesterday expressed a willingness to give up his cut-rate business at any time that the managers indicated. The combination of excessive premiums and cut rates, according to most observers, has worked the most evil in the theatre.

Thirty of the fifty-three members of the Producing Managers' Association attended yesterday's meeting, and only two votes were cast against the central office plan. Lee Shubert, who controls more New York theatres than any other individual, voted in favor of the plan and declared that he had authority to voice the approval of A. L. Erlanger, who is at present out of town. Representatives of practically every New York theatre were present.

Large Agencies Doomed.

It is recognized by the managers that it will still be possible to speculate in tickets in a small way, by purchasing them at the central office and then re-

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selling. But this procedure, known to the trade as "digging," could not be duplicated often enough to support any of the larger agencies, and it is accordingly believed that they must perish soon after the new plan goes into effect. They could continue to exist only if they operated as branches of the central office.

Another radical result of the new system will be the doing away with the so-called "buys," by which the brokers took over a certain number of seats for a particular play for a period of weeks. Often payment is made for these seats in advance, and sometimes the money thus obtained is used to finance the production of the play. Under the new arrangement, of course, there will be no one left to make a "buy." Yesterday's announcement by the managers makes no mention of the "buys" now in existence, which would have to run their course before the central office plan could become completely operative. Many of these "buys" are for periods of eight weeks, and, in one or two cases, longer.

A formal statement given out by the managers by Brock Pemberton, after yesterday's meeting, said:

"The proponents of the central agency plan contended that it was the most scientific way of marketing the theatre's commodity—tickets—that the vast majority of the public resented having to pay 50 cents advance for seats, and that by convincing the public that the managers were trying to place their seats in the public's hands at practically the box office price they would do a great deal to win back the interest and sympathy of the public in the theatre. It was held by the supporters of this plan that it built for the future more surely than would the adoption of a plan to try to regulate the present system, and that, while it might take a little more time to put it into operation, in the long run it would be better for the theatre.

All Angles Considered.

"The subject was discussed from all angles. The restoration of the box office, with its queues in the case of successes, was suggested, but it was generally agreed that modern traffic conditions had made shopping for tickets among the theatres themselves so difficult as to be almost impossible."

Speaking of the central agency, the statement continues:

"The association as a body may hold stock in it, or the stock may be apportioned among the theatres represented in the ratio of their seating capacities.

"The action of the association yesterday finally disposes of the problem of ticket speculation. Only the details remain to be worked out and the completed plan put into operation. This is the first time, at least in the recent history of the theatre, that the managers have combined to try to eliminate the agencies which sell at a premium. All other efforts have been in the direction of regulating these agencies and in so doing recognizing the validity of the 50-cent service charge. The fact that only a very small portion of the theatre-going public does not resent this charge was stressed many times at the meeting."

There are a total of twenty-two recognized theatre ticket brokers in New York, who have well over a hundred stands in various parts of the city. In many cases huge rentals are paid, and it was pointed out last night that they are facing large losses under the new arrangement.

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