

Press release

Mannheim, 27 September 2024

Südzucker reappraising its own Nazi history

On 26 September 2024, Südzucker held a scientific conference at the MARCHIVUM in Mannheim, hosted by the Frankfurt Gesellschaft für Unternehmensgeschichte (GUG), to mark the beginning of a public and active examination of the company's past during the Nazi era. Südzucker had already commissioned the Göttingen historian Prof. Dr Manfred Grieger in 2022 to conduct a scientific review of the company's history between 1933 and 1945. His study will be published by Wallstein Verlag in spring 2025. In his lecture in Mannheim, Prof. Grieger presented his research results to date for the first time to a scientific audience and Südzucker Group executives. The focus was on the company's activities under the Nazi regime. During the subsequent panel discussion, Südzucker CEO Dr Niels Pörksen stated that the company takes its historically grown responsibility seriously. On behalf of Südzucker he took a stand for democracy and against exclusion.

Prof. Grieger's lecture and study deal with the question of the degree of nazification of the company after 1933, but also with the frictions that arose with the NSDAP and its functionaries and regulatory bodies, such as the Reichnährstand. In addition, the focus is on how the company dealt with Jewish shareholders and how Jews were ousted from the company's bodies. 'It is very clear here that the company or its managers took advantage of the opportunities offered to them by the Nazi regime,' said Prof. Grieger in his lecture, assessing the behaviour of the management at the time.

Another central topic Prof. Grieger addressed is the company's actions in the war economy, and in particular its treatment of forced labourers. These were employed in large numbers throughout the group, in agriculture or in the sugar factories, and included both prisoners of war and 'civilian' Eastern European workers. By employing conscripted German Jews or Sinti and Roma, for example in the sugar factory in Stuttgart, 'the company crossed yet another line,' explained Prof. Grieger. The prevailing labour opportunism became particularly evident in the use of forced labourers: 'Companies, or rather entrepreneurs and managers, saw the state-organised provision of foreign replacement labour as an unquestioned opportunity to continue or even expand their production or business. At Süddeutsche Zucker-AG, the predecessor of today's Südzucker AG, the proportion of foreigners in the workforce during the campaign was more than half, which was even much higher than the national average of around a quarter in 1944. This showed that the

continuation of sugar production during the war was largely based on forced labour. The company was thus representative of the exploitation of unfree workers, which initially served as a temporary solution but soon also as a permanent solution to the labour shortage.'

Prof. Grieger's presentation of the study results was preceded by a lecture by Prof. Dr Dirk Schaal from the Martin Luther University Halle–Wittenberg, the former head of the Südzucker AG company archive. He talked about the 'history of sugar consumption in Germany from the late 19th to the early 20th century' and put the period covered by Prof. Grieger into a wider context.

Looking to the future responsibly with knowledge of the past

The conference was not limited to the historical examination of Südzucker's role during the Nazi era, but also focused strongly on the present and the future: At a panel discussion, which was moderated by Dr Andrea Schneider–Braunberger, managing director of GUG, Südzucker CEO Dr Niels Pörksen, Johanna Sokoließ from the Foundation 'Erinnerung, Verantwortung und Zukunft' (EVZ) and Prof. Grieger spoke about the social responsibility of companies that arises from the knowledge of their own history and their own involvement with the Nazi system.

Dr Pörksen spoke on behalf of the Südzucker Group and referred to the obligations for the present and the future: 'We are aware of our historically evolved responsibility, we accept it and we take it seriously. Coming to terms with our company's history during the Nazi era is an important and necessary step here. With knowledge of the past, we now look to the present and the future. As Südzucker Group, we firmly and unequivocally stand up for human rights and the values of the free democratic basic order. There is no place for any form of exclusion, discrimination and extremism in our company.'

Taking social responsibility and respecting human rights are integral parts of Südzucker Group's business activities. Both are central to the sustainability mission statement that was developed in recent years and to which Südzucker AG is committed. This year, the company will implement the programme 'Informed, courageous, committed! A joint initiative against anti-Semitism' of the EVZ Foundation for the first time. In this way, Südzucker AG is not only bringing its sustainability mission to life, but also taking a stand against anti-Semitism. The programme is free of charge and combines classroom and e-learning content in a blended learning format. Participants develop ways to recognise and respond to anti-Semitism and, as multipliers, are expected to bring their newly acquired knowledge into the company.

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About the Südzucker Group

Südzucker is a major player in the food industry with its sugar, special products, starch and fruit segments, and Europe's leading ethanol producer with its CropEnergies segment.

In the traditional sugar business, the group is Europe's number one supplier of sugar products, with 23 sugar factories and two refineries, extending from France in the west via Belgium, Germany and Austria, through to Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Romania, Hungary, Bosnia, and Moldova in the east. The special products segment, with its consumer-oriented functional ingredients for food and animal feed (BENEO), chilled/frozen products (Freiberger) and portion packs (PortionPack Group), operates in dynamic growth markets. Südzucker's CropEnergies segment is Europe's leading producer of renewable ethanol, with production sites in Germany, Belgium, France and Great Britain. Other products in this segment are protein food and animal feed products as well as biogenic carbon dioxide. The starch segment comprises AGRANA's starch and ethanol activities. The group's fruit segment operates globally, is the world market leader for fruit preparations for dairies and is a leading supplier of fruit juice concentrates in Europe.

In 2023/24, the group employed about 19.200 persons and generated revenues of about EUR 10.3 billion.

About the Gesellschaft für Unternehmensgeschichte (GUG)

The GUG is an internationally recognised scientific institution specialising in research in the history of companies. Founded in 1976, it connects researchers, archives and companies, creating space for scientific discussion in the form of symposia, working groups and workshops. In addition, the GUG communicates historical content to an interested public and through special offers to students. For decades, the GUG has been conducting research projects of various sizes and on different topics with proven experts.

www.unternehmensgeschichte.de

About Prof. Dr. Manfred Grieger

Manfred Grieger, born in 1960, has been an honorary professor at the Georg August University in Göttingen since 2018. From 1998 to 2016, he was head of the Historical Communication department at Volkswagen AG. His publications include, among others, 'Das Volkswagenwerk und seine Arbeiter im Dritten Reich' (1996, together with Hans Mommsen), 'Voll auf Strom. Das Wachstum der Tiroler Elektrizitätswirtschaft durch Politikförderung, NS-Zwangsarbeit und gesellschaftlichen Energiehunger' (2024) or 'Keks – Krieg – Konsum. Die Geschichte des Hauses Bahlsen, 1911 – 1975' (2024, together with Harmut Berghoff).