

Book project 'Miele im Nationalsozialismus' (lit. trans.: 'Miele under National Socialism') – Statement by Markus Miele and Reinhard Zinkann

Gütersloh, November 23, 2023. Miele, the Gütersloh family company, manufactured ordnance for the Wehrmacht in the years before and during World War II and, in doing so, employed forced labourers and prisoners of war – this has been known for long time. It has also, in part, been documented in greater detail. But what precisely was produced by Miele, to what extent and under what circumstances remained unexplored to date.

To redress this, the two founding families, Miele and Zinkann, which still wholly own the company, commissioned a scientific study in autumn of 2020 into the role played by Miele during the NS era. We were able to win over Dr. Andrea Scheider-Braunberger as project leader and author. Since 1996, she has been Managing Director of the Business History Society GUG, and counts among the most eminent international experts in this field.

Almost three years later, Dr. Schneider-Braunberger has now completed her research and published the results. Her book 'Miele im Nationalsozialismus – Ein Familienunternehmen in der Rüstungs- und Kriegswirtschaft' (lit. trans.: 'Miele under National Socialism – A Family Business in the Armaments and War Industry') has been published by Siedler and has been available since November 24 from book shops (ISBN 978-3-8275-0188-2).

Here is the statement given by Dr. Markus Miele and Dr. Reinhard Zinkann, great-grandsons of the founding fathers and fourth-generation Executive Directors of the Miele Group:

'This book represents the first comprehensive appraisal of Miele's role in the years of National Socialism, ahead of the celebrations to mark 125 years of Miele and in time to be included in a befitting way in our new chronicles which are due to appear next year.

The decision to commission this book was deemed necessary by the shareholders' committee, called the Family Council at Miele, and by the Executive Board as discussions with our forebears and former employees over the years left us with the impression that by no means all events at Miele between 1933 and 1945 had been recounted with precision. Much was quite simply not properly recorded in the chaos of war and the post-war period or was lost along the way.

With hindsight, we know that we relied for too long on the word-of-mouth accounts handed down within the families and the company. In the end, we were surprised by many details in the book and even dismayed – above all that Miele produced ordnance of various kinds to a far greater extent than we had believed for decades.

At the same time, the author attested to an inner distance between our grandfathers and the NS regime – and to their efforts to make the insufferable situation of the forced labourers at least somewhat better in certain respects. They, according to the author, strove to combine what in their view was economically necessary with what was right from a humane perspective.

It is up to the individual to morally evaluate these occurrences from today's perspective. Here, too, the book by Dr. Schneider-Braunberger makes a valuable contribution. We would like to thank her on behalf of the entire Executive Board and our families for her commitment and her meticulous and illuminative research work – and for publishing the results in book form. More than ever before, this goes hand in hand with a clear denunciation of any form of force, racism or anti-Semitism'.

Please address any further questions regarding the contents of the book to Dr. Andrea Schneider-Braunberger at the Gesellschaft für Unternehmensgeschichte (GUG; lit. trans.: Society for Business History; Tel.: 069 – 97 20 33 14, e-mail: ahschneider@unternehmensgeschichte.de).