



*Manfred Grieger*

# Sartorius During the Third Reich

*A Generational Shift at a Family-owned Company  
between the Great Depression and Denazification*

Wallstein

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WALLSTEIN VERLAG

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# Introduction

The relationship between the companies and the Nazi dictatorship remains controversial owing to the great range of relationships and characteristics. At the same time, the public perception of the company's participation in armaments production, the seizing of Jewish assets in the wake of the Nazi »Aryanization« policy, and in exploiting foreign slave labor, frequently leads to moral indignation in communication conflicts.<sup>1</sup> In a world of attention economics, spectacular, outstanding and extremely disgusting news tends to attract the most interest.

The historian's sober look at the enabling factors may dissatisfy expectations of scandalous revelations. Instead, a microhistorical examination of the Göttingen-based SME Sartorius during the Third Reich may end up outlining the normal side to everyday business operations of a joint stock corporation primarily owned by members of the founding family.<sup>2</sup> The conflict between two lines of a family who competed to hold a majority stake and appoint the next CEO can be used to depict the changing power relations within the long-standing family-owned Sartorius corporation. Presenting the Third Reich as the background to economic activity serves to highlight more strongly the innate ambivalences and actual decisions in microsocial structures. After all, we can discern the reflection of social processes in Sartorius' microcosmos. It describes how the com-

- 1 Recently, the sexual abuse of female slave laborers in companies owned by the Reimann family and the Nazi Party and SS memberships of the Bahlsen brothers as well as the exploitation of above all Polish and Ukrainian female slave laborers in the Bahlsen factories caused a great media stir: »Unternehmersdynamie Reimann duldet Missbrauch von Zwangsarbeiterinnen,« <https://www.spiegel.de/wirtschaft/unternehmen/familie-reimann-akten-offenbaren-missbrauch-von-zwangsarbeitern-ns-zeit-a-1259379.html> (last retrieved: June 1, 2019); Jürgen Dahlmann: »Bahlsen-Brüder waren NSDAP-Mitglieder und SS-Unterstützer,« <https://www.spiegel.de/panorama/gesellschaft/bahlsen-brueder-waren-nsdap-mitglieder-und-ss-unterstuetzer-a-1267939.html> (last retrieved: June 1, 2019).
- 2 Ewald Hiebl & Ernst Langthaler: Einleitung – Im Kleinen das Große suchen. Mikrogeschichte in Theorie und Praxis, in: Ewald Hiebl & Ernst Langthaler (eds.): Im Kleinen das Große suchen. Mikrogeschichte in Theorie und Praxis (Innsbruck/Vienna/Bolzano, 2012), pp. 7–20; see also Angelika Eppler: Das Unternehmen Stollwerck. Eine Mikrogeschichte der Globalisierung (Frankfurt a. M./New York, 2010), pp. 19 ff.



pany was a place that both adapted to the system and maintained its distance to the regime, while growing its operations and posting a profit.<sup>3</sup>

The present study takes its place among those that critically examine the role of companies in the Third Reich and have in the past 30 years primarily focused on large corporations. Alongside companies whose brands stand for »Made in Germany«, such as Daimler-Benz and Volkswagen, monographs were prepared at a relatively early date on big banks such as Deutsche Bank and chemical companies, like IG Farben.<sup>4</sup> Truly paradigmatic for the willingness of the business elites to collaborate with the criminal Nazi regime,<sup>5</sup> from which the companies can clearly be seen to have profited, was Frankfurt-based Degussa, which played a role melting down »Jew's Gold« and through its subsidiary DEGESCH supplied the SS concentration camps with Zyklon B gas. The books by renowned professors, as a rule commissioned by the companies in question, stand in contrast to a wealth of publications by civil society and leftist-academic authors who explored the fields in which companies cooperated with the Nazi regime by drawing on investigative local studies or innovative

- 3 Manfred Grieger: Der Betrieb als Ort der Zwangsarbeit. Das Volkswagenwerk und andere Unternehmen zwischen 1939 und 1945, in: Jürgen Lillteicher (ed.): Profiteure des NS-Systems? Deutsche Unternehmen und das »Dritte Reich« (Berlin, 2006), pp. 82-107; Knud Andresen, Johannes Platz, Michaela Kuhnhenne & Jürgen Mittag: Der Betrieb als politischer und sozialer Ort. Unternehmens- und Sozialgeschichte im Spannungsfeld mikrohistorischer, praxeologischer und diskursanalytischer Ansätze, in: Knud Andresen, Johannes Platz, Michaela Kuhnhenne, & Jürgen Mittag (eds.): Der Betrieb als politischer und sozialer Ort. Studien zu Praktiken und Diskursen in den Arbeitswelten des 20. Jahrhunderts (Bonn, 2015), pp. 7-26.
- 4 Still in an apologetic vein: Hans Pohl, Stephanie Habeth, & Beate Brüninghaus: Die Daimler-Benz-AG in den Jahren 1933 bis 1945. Eine Dokumentation (Stuttgart, 1986); for a critique, see Hamburger Stiftung für Sozialgeschichte des 20. Jahrhunderts (ed.): Das Daimler-Benz-Buch. Ein Rüstungskonzern im »Tausendjährigen Reich« (Nördlingen, 1987); revisiting: Barbara Hopmann, Mark Spoerer, Birgit Weitz, & Beate Brüninghaus: Zwangsarbeit bei Daimler-Benz (Stuttgart, 1994); cf. Hans Mommsen & Manfred Grieger: Das Volkswagenwerk und seine Arbeiter im Dritten Reich (Düsseldorf, 1996); Lothar Gall, Gerald D. Feldman, Harold James et al.: Die Deutsche Bank 1870-1995 (Munich, 1995); Klaus-Dietmar Henke (ed.): Die Dresdner Bank im Dritten Reich, vol. 4 (Munich, 2006); Peter Hayes: Industry and Ideology. IG Farben in the Nazi Era (Cambridge, 1995); Werner Abelschauser (ed.): Die BASF. Eine Unternehmensgeschichte (Munich, 2002).
- 5 Peter Hayes: Die Degussa im Dritten Reich. Von der Zusammenarbeit zur Mitritäterschaft (Munich, 2004); Jörg Osterloh & Harald Wixforth (eds.): Unternehmer und NS-Verbrechen. Wirtschaftseliten im »Dritten Reich« und in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland (Frankfurt a. M./New York, 2014).

methods. In this process, they also shed light on the »forgotten victims« of the economic prosperity experienced under the Third Reich.<sup>6</sup>

Lastly, the transition to globalization rocked the credibility of that earlier narrative by corporate Germany, whereby armaments production and the exploitation of the contingents of millions of foreign workers from the occupied territories in Europe was something that, as it were, the companies were forced to do or had to do as per instructions from the Nazis.<sup>7</sup> This trend was fostered by the fact that, with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the opening of the European borders, the large number of primarily Eastern European forced laborers moved closer to Germany, and their memories did not match the conventional rejection of any guilt by German companies and society. Indeed, the controversy after 1991 in social policy and the politics of memory on what commensurate compensation should be for slave labor took place against the backdrop of a growing interest among the general public and historians,<sup>8</sup> something that led to an ongoing boom in corporate historiography.<sup>9</sup>

6 By way of example Manfred Grieger: *Zwangsarbeit in Bochum. Die Geschichte der ausländischen Arbeiter und KZ-Häftlinge 1939-1945* (Bochum, 1986); Lutz Budrass & Manfred Grieger: *Die Moral der Effizienz. Die Beschäftigung von KZ-Häftlingen am Beispiel des Volkswagenwerks und der Henschel Flugzeug-Werke*, in: *Jahrbuch für Wirtschaftsgeschichte*, 1993/II, pp. 89-136; Witich Rossmann: *Panzerrohre zu Pflugscharen: Zwangsarbeit, Wiederaufbau, Sozialisierung, Wetzlar 1939-1956* (Marburg, 1987).

7 With a negatively colored judgment: Hans-Eckhardt Kannapin: *Wirtschaft unter Zwang. Anmerkungen und Analysen zur rechtlichen und politischen Verantwortung der deutschen Wirtschaft unter der Herrschaft des Nationalsozialismus im Zweiten Weltkrieg, besonders im Hinblick auf den Einsatz und die Behandlung von ausländischen Arbeitskräften und Konzentrationslagerhäftlingen in deutschen Industrie- und Rüstungsbetrieben* (Cologne, 1966); cf. Sebastian Brünger: *Geschichte und Gewinn. Der Umgang deutscher Konzerne mit ihrer NS-Vergangenheit* (Göttingen, 2017), pp. 138 ff. and pp. 308 ff.

8 Henning Borggräfe: *Zwangsarbeiterentschädigung. Vom Streit um »vergessene Opfer« zur Selbstausöhnung der Deutschen* (Göttingen, 2014), pp. 191 ff.; Brünger, *Geschichte*, pp. 138 ff. and pp. 308 ff.

9 Tim Schanetzky: *After the Goldrush. Ursprünge und Wirkungen der Forschungskonjunktur »Unternehmen im Nationalsozialismus,«* in: *Zeitschrift für Unternehmensgeschichte*, 63/2018, no. 1, pp. 7-32; Sven Feyer: *Die MAN im Dritten Reich. Ein Maschinenbauunternehmen zwischen Weltwirtschaftskrise und Währungsreform* (Baden-Baden, 2018); Christine Sämann: *Das Durchgangslager in Bietigheim. Zwangsarbeit im Nationalsozialismus – Bedeutung und Funktionen des Durchgangslagers für »ausländische Arbeitskräfte«* in Bietigheim mit seinen Krankensammellagern in Pleidelsheim und Großsachsenheim (Bietigheim-Bissingen, 2018); Manfred Grieger: *Antriebsmittel der Kriegswirtschaft. Zur ökonomischen Bedeutung der Zwangsarbeit*, in: Winfried Nerdinger (ed.): *Zwangsarbeit in München. Das Lager der Reichsbahn in Neuaubing* (Berlin, 2018), pp. 28-44.

Over the course of time, the addressed topics shifted from proving that a German corporation was integrated into the armaments industry and the Nazi system of slave labor or defining the degree to which the company, its owners, managers and employees were nazified, toward an analysis of the economic incentive scheme put in place by the Third Reich.<sup>10</sup> With the growing number of family-owned companies studied,<sup>11</sup> the question about entrepreneurial room for maneuver and the interaction among companies and entrepreneurs within the »Volksgemeinschaft« (»national community«) of Nazis that surrounded them became more pronounced.<sup>12</sup> Since companies by definition act to embrace market opportunities, they at the very least tried to come to an arrangement with the new powers to the extent that there was, in fact, a political-ideological overlap with the Nazis and its local representatives. Because in the history of family-owned companies, the company and the family histories coincide, I shall alternate between examining the company and the family members in the following chapters, and in doing so use a notion of the actor in order to elaborate on the concrete actions of the various parties involved.

In the case of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), there is the added factor that the owners were among the local dignitaries during the interwar years and in many cases active as local authorities themselves. Due to their desire for massive change, the Nazi Party, the

10 Jonas Scherner: *Die Logik der Industriepolitik im Dritten Reich. Die Investitionen in die Autarkie- und Rüstungsindustrie und ihre staatliche Förderung* (Stuttgart, 2008); Gerd Höschle: *Die deutsche Textilindustrie zwischen 1933 und 1939. Staatsinterventionismus und ökonomische Rationalität* (Stuttgart, 2004), pp. 171 ff.

11 Jürgen Finger, Sven Keller & Andreas Wirsching: *Dr. Oetker und der Nationalsozialismus. Geschichte eines Familienunternehmens 1933-1945* (Munich, 2013); Carsten Burhop, Carsten Kissener, Hermann Schäfer & Joachim Scholtyssek: *Merck. Von der Apotheke zum Weltkonzern* (Munich, 2018); Joachim Scholtyssek: *Freudenberg. Ein Familienunternehmen in Kaiserreich, Demokratie und Diktatur* (Munich, 2016), pp. 266 ff.; Joachim Scholtyssek: *Der Aufstieg der Quandts. Eine deutsche Unternehmerdynastie* (Munich, 2011), pp. 239 ff.; Mark Spoerer: *C&A. Ein Familienunternehmen in Deutschland, den Niederlanden und Großbritannien 1911-1961* (Munich, 2016), pp. 132 ff.; Jochen Streb: *Trumpf. Geschichte eines Familienunternehmens* (Munich, 2018), pp. 81 ff.

12 For the scholarly discussion of the concept of a »national community« (»Volksgemeinschaft«) see Frank Bajohr & Michael Wildt (eds.): *Volksgemeinschaft. Neue Forschungen zur Geschichte des Nationalsozialismus* (Frankfurt a.M., 2009); Wolf Gruner: *Das Dogma der »Volksgemeinschaft« und die Mikrogeschichte der NS-Gesellschaft*, in: Detlef Schmiechen-Ackermann, Marlis Buchholz, Bianca Roitsch, & Christiane Schröder (eds.): *Der Ort der »Volksgemeinschaft« in der deutschen Gesellschaftsgeschichte* (Paderborn, 2018), pp. 71-90.

Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei (trans.: National Socialist German Workers' Party), often abbreviated to NSDAP after 1933, wanted to ensure that dignitaries willing to participate could do so and thus integrated them into the new system of power. The transition at the Göttingen-based company Sartorius-Werke AG from the Great Depression and democracy of the interwar years to the economic temptations of the Third Reich and rearmament went hand in hand with profits from armaments, the exploitation of foreign slave labor and the economic utilization of the occupation of foreign territories during the war years. Additionally, the Sartorius-Werke AG case study includes a special feature: By the end of the Third Reich, the two branches of the family, defined by the brothers Wilhelm and Erich Sartorius, originally more or less equal in influence, tipped the company firmly in favor of Erich Sartorius.

Furthermore, the story would not be complete without mentioning the transition into the postwar period and the denazification of the company's executives. With the return to the economic machine by successfully shedding their former links to the Nazis through the denazification process, the overall management of the company was passed into the hands of the next generation in the person of Horst Sartorius. This change put a strain on the operational and societal recommencement of the company, although it was not to entail a replacement of the elite. In Göttingen this equally took place with the agreement of the British military authorities and the dominant political forces – the Social Democrats and the centrist conservatives. That said, creating clear spaces for interaction and restabilization was of great importance for the transition to democracy and a capitalist market economy given the special relevance of SMEs to the system. It is therefore even more important to supplement a focus on the large corporations, in particular in the heavy and metal or financial industries because of the direct influence they exerted on government policymaking, with an analysis of the political and social relevance of SMEs, which were significant more at the regional or sector level.<sup>13</sup>

That brings us to a fundamental methodological problem, as studies on family-owned companies such as Bertelsmann, Oetker or Freudenberg also resulted from the fact that the former mid-sized German companies have since emerged as major international players. To this extent, the object under discussion here, too, remains limited to a successful

13 Norbert Frei, Ralf Ahrens, Jörg Osterloh, & Tim Schanetzky: *Flick. Der Konzern, die Familie, die Macht* (Munich, 2009), pp. 505 ff.; Christoph Silber-Binz: *Pferdemenges und Adenauer. Der politische Einfluss des Kölner Bankiers* (Bonn, 1997), pp. 55 ff.

fast-growth company given that since 2015 the Sartorius group has been posting annual sales of more than 1 billion EUR.

A second problem of historiographical studies of family-owned companies is that as a rule the documentation is not satisfactory. Sartorius is no exception to this rule. The decision to establish a company archive where all surviving materials would be centrally gathered was not taken until the run-up to the company's 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations in 2020. Given this decision was made so late and that the remaining materials are spread across the various branches of the family, Sartorius company documentation is decidedly incomplete precisely with regards to the Third Reich. While supplementary secondary materials have been examined, the documentation that would have been required for a precise overall assessment is lacking, and the account has therefore had to hinge on specific focal points dealt with in as concentrated a manner as possible.

With the exception of the company chronicle, Sartorius is a blank sheet.<sup>14</sup> Following an initial elaboration prepared by Eckart Schörle which was never published, a wealth of knowledge accumulated thanks to the long-standing dedication of the Göttinger Geschichtswerkstatt and the Göttingen Municipal Archive together with local historians on slave labor at Sartorius as well as on the slave laborers the company recruited, how they were housed and provided for, the medical care they had, and the pain and suffering they experienced.<sup>15</sup> However, the present study entered virgin territory regarding the company's development, the management's relationship to the Nazis, denazification, and the internal family conflicts between 1930 and 1950. It marks the beginning of charting this terrain, but it has not been possible to fill in all the blanks with hard and fast data.

14 Karin Sartorius-Herbst, Karl Bracht & Jörg Barankewitz: *Vom Universitäts-Mechanikus zum Global Player. Sartorius-Chronik von 1870 bis 2005* (Göttingen, 2006).

15 Eckart Schörle: *Gutachten zur Situation von »Zwangsarbeitern« bei der Firma Sartorius Göttingen während der Zeit des Nationalsozialismus* (Göttingen, 2000/ Stadearchiv Göttingen); Cordula Tollmien: »In Göttingen befinden sich etwa 6.000 ausländische Arbeiter«. *NS-Zwangsarbeiter in Göttingen*, in: Volker Zimmermann (ed.): *Leiden verwehrt Vergessen. Zwangsarbeiter in Göttingen und ihre medizinische Versorgung in den Universitätskliniken* (Göttingen, 2007), pp. 81-117; Eckart Schörle: *Zwangsarbeit in Göttinger Industriebetrieben: Sartorius und Feinprüf (Mahr)*, in: Volker Zimmermann (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 119-35; <http://www.zwangsarbeit-in-goettingen.de> (last retrieved: June 5, 2019).

## Illness, crisis, and the transition to the Nazi dictatorship

The Great Depression that started in 1929 did not affect the Sartorius-Werke AG and its subsidiary Membranfiltergesellschaft mbH (membrane filter company, one of whose cofounders in 1927 had been Wilhelm Sartorius) until somewhat later, as hospitals and labs continued to require precision and analytical balances, filters and membranes for their operations. However, in times of scarcity the clients only bought the essentials, so sales consequently sagged. The Supervisory Board's discussion of the 1930 balance sheet reveals not only that sales had slumped by more than 20 percent and earnings collapsed, but also that the »prospects« were considered »completely uncertain and unclear.«<sup>1</sup> In fiscal year of 1931, with unit sales continuing to plummet, the company booked a loss of 151,174.90 Reichsmarks and reduced the equity capital from 900,000 to 600,000 Reichsmarks to create a balance-sheet reserve.<sup>2</sup>

The helm at the company Florenz Sartorius founded in 1870 passed into the hands of his two sons Wilhelm and Erich Sartorius, whereby the former was the Commercial Director and the latter the Technical Director in charge of improving existing products and launching new ones.<sup>3</sup> In June 1932, the shareholders in the joint stock corporation were, in addition to the Göttingen-based banker Hermann Reibstein (who owned 345 shares with a nominal value of 103,500 Reichsmarks) above all members of the family: Director Wilhelm Sartorius represented 1,200 shares or 360,000 Reichsmarks of the capital stock, his brother Erich 832 shares or 249,600 Reichsmarks and Fritz Sartorius, Wilhelm's first-born

- 1 Minutes of the Supervisory Board meeting of March 24, 1931, p. 3 (Sartorius AG, Archive, Fin 1/2 B 2); on the Great Depression and its local impact see Jan-Otmar Hesse, Roman Köster & Werner Plumpe: *Die Große Depression. Die Weltwirtschaftskrise 1929-1939* (Frankfurt a.M./New York, 2014), pp. 53ff.; Fritz Hasselhorn: *Göttingen 1917/18-1933*, in: Rudolf von Thadden, Günter J. Trittel & Marc-Dietrich Ohse (eds.): *Göttingen. Geschichte einer Universitätsstadt*, vol. 3: *Von der preußischen Mittelstadt zur südniedersächsischen Großstadt 1866-1989* (Göttingen, 1999), pp. 63-126, in particular pp. 99ff.
- 2 Sartorius-Werke Aktiengesellschaft, *Geschäftsbericht über die umgestellte Bilanz zum 1. Januar 1932 vom 29.5.1932* (Sartorius AG, Archive, Fin 1/1 A 19); minutes of the Supervisory Board meeting of May 18, 1932, p. 3 (ibid., Fin 1/2 B 2).
- 3 Sartorius-Werke AG (ed.): *Die Geschichte der Sartorius-Werke Aktiengesellschaft Göttingen/Han. 1870-1953* (Göttingen, 1953), p. 45 and pp. 51ff. (ibid., Peo 1/6 B 5).

son, 51 shares covering 15,300 Reichsmarks.<sup>4</sup> Wilhelm's side thus had a slight majority of 1,251 to 1,177 shares.

Born on August 23, 1876 in Göttingen, Erich Sartorius was a married Lutheran Protestant who lived at Nikolausberger Weg 20. After junior high school he attended high school in 1884, leaving it in 1890 with a »Mittlere Reife« certificate. In 1893, he passed his engineering exams before joining the management of his father's company in July 1914, where from his father's death until Sept. 30, 1937 he was Technical Director.<sup>5</sup>

While Erich and his wife had no children, his elder brother, Wilhelm, born July 3, 1872 had four: Friedrich (born in 1899), Lotte (born in 1900), Wilhelm (born in 1901), and Hans (born in 1904). Friedrich Adolf Florenz Erich Sartorius as the first child, born on Dec. 29, 1899 and known by his nickname »Fritz,« was deemed a possible successor for the company. Lotte, as a girl, was considered unsuitable for management according to the mores of the day and thus married an engineer from Bielefeld. The second son, Wilhelm, emigrated to the USA with his wife in the 1920s, and the youngest child, Hans, showed no interest in becoming a member of management.

Conscripted in 1917, before even having finished senior high school in Göttingen, Friedrich called Fritz survived his time on the Western front with an artillery regiment. After studying mechanical engineering in Stuttgart and Hanover, but dropping out in 1922, he joined the Körting Company in Hanover, where he worked until 1925 in »procurement.«<sup>6</sup> At his father's request, he returned to Göttingen and completed a PhD in Physical Chemistry under the retired professor Gustav Trammann in 1928.<sup>7</sup> Accepted into the company in 1928, Friedrich was prepared for his future duties by undertaking practical tasks. He focused on both the technical and commercial sides of the operations.

To claim the position of being a thoroughbred successor, Fritz Sartorius set out to marry to comply with the tradition of having an orderly family life. From Easter 1930 onwards Fritz was busy writing letters to a »very fine young lady« (so his father deemed) with a Catholic background. Although the lady had already reneged on a betrothal promise,

4 List of the shareholders present at the Ordinary General Meeting of the Sartorius-Werke AG on June 21, 1932, June 21, 1932 (ibid., Fin 1/1 A 19).

5 Military Government of Germany, Questionnaire Erich Sartorius of Jan. 15, 1946, p. 3 (Niedersächsisches Landesarchiv (NLA), Nds. 171 Hildesheim No. 8067).

6 Dr. Fritz Sartorius, Kurzer Lebensabriss unter Berücksichtigung von Erkrankungen vom 28.4.1934, p. 4 (NLA, Hann. 138 Göttingen Acc. 31/96 No. 529).

7 Friedrich Sartorius: Ätzerscheinungen am Kupfereinkristall (Leipzig, 1928; Göttingen: Univ. Diss. 1928).





View of the Sartorius-Werke factory grounds in Weender Landstrasse in Göttingen in the 1930s

his father agreed, but Fritz's chosen one suddenly broke off contact in early July 1930, and no engagement came to be.

Deeply hurt by the experience, Fritz was completely changed at home and »also raised some eyebrows in the company«, such that his father no longer let him go to work. Fritz Sartorius thought his bride-to-be was residing in Hotel Krone in Göttingen, where »Jesuits« had turned her against him. While his father Wilhelm tried to keep him at home, this only led to a brief improvement in his state of mind.<sup>8</sup> On the evening of July 10, 1930, Fritz Sartorius went to Hotel Krone and became embroiled in a fierce argument with some men there. The police had to be called, and he was arrested and taken by two criminal officers and his father, who had been hurriedly summoned, to the closed ward of a local institution, the mental hospital Provinzial-Heil- und Pflegeanstalt Göttingen.<sup>9</sup>

8 Provinzial-Heil- und Pflegeanstalt Göttingen, case history Dr. Fritz Sartorius, initial admission: July 10, 1930, pp. 2f. (NLA, Hann. 155 Göttingen Acc. 2004/008 no. 00988).

9 Ibid., p. 2.



When he arrived, the doctor in charge deemed that because of his »schizophrenic state« he should be »admitted to a closed institution.«<sup>10</sup> The initial anamnesis revealed that Fritz Sartorius had had to repeat a year of high school and had returned from war »extremely nervous,« or so his father reported. Fritz Sartorius stated that he had a few weeks earlier already sensed the gradual build-up of an agitated state and the fixation that his father wished to sell the »works« to Deutsche Bank, and he had therefore argued with his father. By the end of the month, his condition had stabilized, and at noon on July 30, 1930 he was »discharged, improved« with a transfer slip to the Dr. Ferdinand Wahrendorff'schen Heil- und Pflegeanstalten care institution in Ilten, stating the diagnosis was »schizophrenia (acute attack with agitation)«. The medical report stated that, owing to the delusions which he had suddenly had, he had »in all probability« suffered from »an acute burst of schizophrenia«. The doctor in charge felt he had »improved sufficiently« that, while still requiring medical treatment, there was no longer any cause to keep him behind lock and key. The doctor judged that, given the illness, it was »after all possible«, »that later agitated states of a similar kind may reoccur.«<sup>11</sup>

At second glance, the episode of Fritz Sartorius' illness proved to have been preceded by a longer period of emotional agitation. Nevertheless, the fact that he had completed a PhD in physical chemistry can be read as an indication of his intellectual and mental faculties rather than of a chronic disease. Although Fritz was able to return to work in the company after only a few weeks, the illness could not be kept secret nor did it spare his capabilities. Although it was unclear from the medical point of view what the further development would be and whether his stay in the clinic would be an one-off event, the psychiatric diagnosis, which alternated between »schizophrenia« and »manic-depressive confusion«<sup>12</sup> certainly impacted the question of succession.

Parallel to the illness, Erich Sartorius canceled the informal agreement we can assume had existed between the brothers to establish Fritz as the successor at the helm of the company. Erich, although he had no children of his own, responded in 1931 to the changed situation by relying on the instrument of »acceptance of a child« as foreseen Section 1741 ff. of the German Civil Code and adopted Horst Richter, who as a 21-year-old was a legal adult and whose parents therefore did not need to approve the

10 Medical report (Ba./Z) of July 10, 1930, p. 2 (ibid.).

11 Doctor's certificate of July 30, 1930 (ibid.).

12 Provinzial-Heil- und Pflegeanstalt Göttingen, Case History Dr. Fritz Sartorius, Initial Admittance: July 10, 1930, p. 1 (ibid.).



Company founder Florenz Sartorius with his wife and four sons (from left) Erich, Wilhelm, Julius and Florenz Jr. After Julius had died in 1918 during the last year of the war and Florenz Jr. had resigned from the board of directors, Wilhelm and Erich managed the company.

matter.<sup>13</sup> The adoption meant that his foster son, who had been accepted into the family since 1916 and was a nephew of his wife, Frida nee Höfgen<sup>14</sup>, forthwith bore the name Sartorius and, on returning from Lausanne, entered the company as an intern. Fritz's psychological disorder was considered a threat to the survival of the family-owned company in its guise and on the part of Erich Sartorius led to the decision to expand the family ranks. This was probably something he had already intended to do and a move quite common among the propertied middle class to change the course of inheritance.

13 See Paul Matiba: *Annahme an Kindes statt. Gesetzliche Bestimmungen, Verordnungen und Verfügungen für Preußen* (Berlin, 1932); Anneke Napp-Peters: *Adoption – das alleinstehende Kind und seine Familien. Geschichte, Rechtsprobleme und Vermittlungspraxis* (Neuwied, 1978).

14 Verbally communicated by Christoph Sartorius to Hartmut Berghoff on July 6, 2019.

His uncle Erich confronted Fritz Sartorius and his father Wilhelm with family-owned companies' strict side.<sup>15</sup> In the interest of a successful change of generation at the helm and of a beneficial future, Erich was willing to ignore family ties and personal loyalties in order to coopt a person he viewed as a more suited potential CEO into the family. With the adoption, agile engineer Erich caused a clear, painful breach in the unstable family balance. To this extent, Fritz's psychological disorder caused a change in the history of Sartorius which was to have its full effect during the Third Reich. What was felt to be an affront to Wilhelm's side of the family led to an open dispute that was to still have an influence in the postwar period because of the later actions of a disappointed Fritz.

The rise of the Nazis occurred at a time when Sartorius faced a contraction in business owing to the crisis.<sup>16</sup> At the end of 1926, a Berlin branch had been opened, only to be closed on Sept. 17, 1932, followed by that in Frankfurt on Nov. 1, 1933.<sup>17</sup> The shift in the balance of power in society was also reflected in the fact that Erich Sartorius, who in the interwar years had been a member of the Deutsche Volkspartei (DVP, German People's Party),<sup>18</sup> was disconcerted by the Great Depression and tended increasingly to seek an authoritarian way out of the social conflicts, such that, although already 56 years old, on April 26, 1933 he applied to become a member of the NSDAP. His application got approved on May 1 of that year. He was assigned party membership No. 3.124.680 and was a member of the Göttingen

15 On the question of succession in family-owned companies, see Christina Lubinski: *Familienunternehmen in Westdeutschland. Corporate Governance und Gesellschafterkultur seit den 1960er Jahren* (Munich, 2010), pp. 170ff.; Gert Kollmer-von Oheimb-Loup & Clemens Wischermann (eds.): *Unternehmensnachfolge in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (Ostfildern, 2008).

16 On the emergence of the Nazi dictatorship in Göttingen, see Michael Römling: *Göttingen. Geschichte einer Stadt* (Soest, 2012), pp. 241ff.; David Imhof: *Becoming a Nazi Town. Culture and Politics in Göttingen Between the World Wars* (Ann Arbor, 2013), pp. 187ff.; Cordula Tollmien: *Nationalsozialismus in Göttingen (1933-1945)*, in: Rudolf von Thadden, Günter J. Trittel & Marc-Dietrich Ohse (eds.): *Göttingen. Geschichte einer Universitätsstadt, Bd. 3: Von der preußischen Mittelstadt zur südniedersächsischen Großstadt 1866-1989* (Göttingen, 1999), pp. 127-273, in particular pp. 127ff.

17 Entries in the Commercial Register for Sartorius-Werke AG of Dec. 14, 1926, Sept. 17, 1932 and Nov. 1, 1933 (NLA, Nds. 725 Göttingen Acc. 156/95 no. 33, Sheets 249 and 251f.).

18 Stephanie Günther: *Unpolitische Kommunalpolitik? Die Deutsche Volkspartei in der Weimarer Republik* (Marburg, 2011); Ludwig Richter: *Die Deutsche Volkspartei 1918-1933* (Düsseldorf, 2002).