**Pope Benedict, Fritz Gerlich and „Der Gerade Weg“ (The Straight Way) -**

**A newspaper against Hitler**

After Cardinal Ratzinger’s election to the Papacy and in particular during his recent visit to the Auschwitz concentration camp, people wondered how the young Joseph Ratzinger lived through the era of National Socialism.

An interview in the London Times[[1]](#footnote-2) helped to shed some light on this question, as the Pope himself gave important insight and references to the Catholic environment that shaped his youth and his perception of National Socialism. He made further references to these formative years in his book “Salz der Erde” (Salt of the Earth)[[2]](#footnote-3).

But it was his family’s reading of the anti-nazi newspaper, “Der Gerade Weg”, which played a central role in these memories[[3]](#footnote-4). In this newspaper, Fritz Gerlich debates in a critical and polemical way the emerging Third Reich and its protagonists, especially Adolf Hitler. This newspaper, which Gerlich had started with the help of influential friends, developed a large readership and was published with a circulation of 100,000 copies in 1932/33.

 “Der Gerade Weg“ was not only read by the opponents of National Socialism, but also by those affiliated with the Nazi Party; even Adolf Hitler carefully observed the work of his adversaries in journalism. A photo shows him reading a January 17, 1932 issue at his desk in Berlin’s Kaiserhof Hotel.

Fritz Gerlich was born in Stettin, northern Germany, in 1883. After his schooldays in Stettin he moved to Munich in 1901 to study history at the local university. He finished his studies with a Ph.D. in 1907 and started working as a civil servant in the Bavarian state archives.

Gerlich became politically active in the leftist- and national-liberal spectrums both before and during the first World War. These affiliations helped gain him a position on the list of the German Democratic Party (DDP) for the elections to the first parliament of Weimar, and also brought him into contact with the leading personalities of Bavarian politics and business.

In 1920, he became Editor-in-Chief of the “Münchner Neueste Nachrichten”, the newspaper with the largest distribution in the south of Germany and precursor to the present “Süddeutsche Zeitung”. In this position, he not only became one of the most influential journalists in Southern Germany, but he also bore witness to the early history of Adolf Hitler and the rise of the NSDAP (National Socialist German Workers Party).

In 1923 Gerlich met Hitler three times privately. He would later be summoned as a witness in the high treason case before the Munich court that tried the so-called “Hitlerputsch”, the failed coup d’état by Hitler in 1923.

In 1927, Gerlich left the „Münchner Neueste Nachrichten“, converted to Catholicism and in 1930, founded the weekly newspaper „Der Gerade Weg“ with the support of influential friends.From this time forward, he wrote (supported by his friend the Capuchin Friar P.Ingbert Naab) in a sharp manner against the great “isms” of his time, namely:

* National Socialism
* Communism
* Antisemitism

„Der Gerade Weg“ (which was called „Illustrated Sunday“ until 1932) was at first printed in a publishing house in the Schellingstraße in Munich. The editor’s office of the “Völkischer Beobachter” (the Nazi periodical of Hitler) also resided in this building and it was due to the proximity of these two offices that Hitler and Gerlich were mutually informed about the editorial plans of the “other side”.

When the National Socialists seized power in Bavaria on March 9, 1933, the SA (battle troop) assaulted the editor’s office of „Der Gerade Weg“ in Munich, mistreated Gerlich and arrested him. On June 30, 1934 – on the occasion of the so called “Röhm-Putsch” – Dr. Fritz Gerlich was killed in the Dachau concentration camp.

Despite the reputation achieved by Fritz Gerlich in the scientific literature of resistance against National Socialism, Gerlich and his newspaper remain unknown by the wider public. As a result, “Der Gerade Weg”, can only be studied in a few archives and libraries. However, with the continuing interest in contemporary history and also in the resistance against the Nazi regime, it became possible to re-introduce Gerlich’s work into the annals of world history. The [www.gerlich.com](http://www.gerlich.com) website was established to make Gerlich and his life accessible to the general public.

**Literature:**

The life of Gerlich has been written up by the historian Prof Rudolf Morsey and in a dissertation by Dr Michael Schäfer. These works also include some as-yet unknown but extensive documents from Gerlich’s legacy, currently owned by Dr Max Hoefter.

Every week, one additional issue of „Der Gerade Weg“ will be published on the website, www.gerlich.com.

1. The Times Online, April 22, 2005 [http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,7-1579160,00.html](http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0%2C%2C7-1579160%2C00.html) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Page 54 and following (Salt of the Earth is published by Ignatius Press, San Francisco. The UK distributor is Family Publications, 0845 0500 879, [www.familypublications.co.uk](http://www.familypublications.co.uk) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. See also an Interview by Peter Seewald April 20, 2005, <http://insightscoop.typepad.com/2004/2005/04/benedict_xvi_on.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)