

# The Biography between Life and Myth



**Lukáš Fasora: Josef Hybeš (1850–1921): život, dílo a mýtus** [Josef Hybeš (1850–1921): Life, Work, and Myth], Prague: NLN 2017, 232 pp.

Lukáš Fasora's "Josef Hybeš" is the author's third book about the working-class movement. After "Dělník a měšťan" [Laborer and burgher] and "Stáří k poradě, mládí k boji" [The old ones to the meeting, the young ones to battle] comes Josef Hybeš with the subheading of "Život, dílo, mýtus" [Life, work and myth]. However, the myth is the main topic of the work.

Josef Hybeš was an important figure in the early Austrian Social Democratic movement in Brno and its immediate vicinity. Hybeš (originally a weaver) took part in the founding of the Social Democratic party of Austria in 1874. For the rest of his long life he worked tirelessly for the party promoting Socialist ideals. Due to his unselfish way of life and his charitable practices he became a living legend. Thanks to his presence at the very beginning of the movement and his long life he also became the Nestor and the "Guardian of the tradition" of the movement and the party itself. In the last months of his life Josef Hybeš supported the newly established Communist Party of Czechoslovakia which led to legitimization of the party but, on the other hand, also to Hybeš's inclusion in the pantheon of Communists personalities.

The book is divided into fourteen chapters. In the introduction the author analyzes the concept of the Myth, mainly based on the work of Itamar Even-Zohar. He also cites a number of examples from German, Polish, French and Serbian historiography. The second chapter gives a broad overview of the literature, sources and overall state of research on the topic. Nevertheless, as Fasora had to deal with an absence of a classical biography of Hybeš, he wrote a short summary of Hybeš's life in the third chapter. The next four chapters are focused on the personal myth itself. Fasora divides the myth into four different layers (the weaver, the philanthropist, the internationalist and the revolutionist) and analyzes each of them separately, but also in connection with each other. The author primarily focuses on how different parts and layers of the myth were developed, accepted and operated by different social and political milieus. Other four chapters deal with the formal and structural side of the myth. The first one deals with the periodization of the myth, the second with the spatial and territorial aspects, the third with changes of the myth over time, and the fourth with the institutions which provided the background for the development of the myth — especially journal *Rovnost* and *Muzeum dělnického hnutí Brněnska* [Museum of the Working Class Movement of the Brno Region]. The subsequent chapter is entitled *Map of Socialist Biographic Myths in Brno and the Nearby Region*. The author examines in it other local myths important for the working-class movement and myths that were particularly significant for the Communist Party. Fasora divides the myths into three groups: myths of the pioneers, myths of the disciples and myths of the followers. The last chapter deals with performative and commemorative acts in the public space dedicated to Hybeš and his legacy.

Fasora's work is largely focused on Moravia and the city of Brno. This can be seen in "Josef Hybeš" as well. However, in this work it causes a little imbalance. It is certain



that those parts that have something to do with Brno, which are the most common ones in the book, are underpinned by archive research, but we cannot say this about all parts of the book, especially those dealing with Vienna, Dašice, Hodonín, Rosice, Oslavany and Třebíč. When writing about those topics the author often uses only secondary literature and sometimes displays certain bias. Also, Fasora's evaluation of institutional treatment of the Hybeš myth is somewhat curious. The author became so fond of the idea of the Hybeš myth that he reproaches the Communist regime and its institutions for not working enough and in the right way with the myth. Nevertheless, the majority of the book is useful as it gives the reader a good overview of Hybeš's life and his myth, especially the greatest part of the myth located in Brno. Apart from the classical theoretical structure of the work dealing with the personal myth there are also some inspiring thought-provoking new approaches which are not, unfortunately, much developed, for example the concept of the landscape or space of traditions of the working class movement in southern Moravia.

Fasora's book is a remarkable contribution to the ongoing research on the working-class movement in the Czech historiography. Although some noteworthy concepts are just sketched out and some parts are only vaguely supported by primary sources (perhaps due to a lack of time or Fasora's "Brno-centrism"), the author provides us with an insight into the local working-class movement, its leader and hero and his transformation into a legend and a myth. The book also explores the institutional development and usage of the myth for self-legitimization by the Communist Party and its institutions. While some uncertainties remain, such as the evaluation of other working-class movement centers, the influence of the myth on society during the Communist era, Hybeš's life in Vienna, or the concept of a space of traditions of the working-class movement, these are promising stimuli for further research.

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