Final Report—Christian Peterson

The research that I conducted at the Open Society Archives (OSA) from 18 May-13 July 2022 has paid numerous scholarly dividends. I will draw on many of the archival materials that I reviewed to complete my book project *Changing the World from Below: The Transnational Struggle for Peace, Human Rights, and a People's Détente*. To cite some examples, in Box 46 of the Vladimir Socor files (300-5-190), I found numerous documents that address the complexities of how private citizens across Cold War boundaries debated the merits of promoting détente "from below"/people's détente and the value of the Helsinki Accords/Final Act.[1] These private citizens in Western nations and dissenters in the Soviet Bloc forged transnational connections that allowed them to challenge the view of many mainstream Western peace activists that signing governmental agreements (i.e., détente from "above") represented the most efficacious way to promote peace. Convinced that furthering the cause of peace depended far more on transformations in human consciousness than securing arms control treaties, private citizens in groups like the Campaign for Peace and Democracy-East/West (CPD/EW) in the United States and Charter 77 (Czechoslovakian dissenters) linked the causes of peace and human rights. More to the point, they argued that enduring peaceful relations among nations would remain impossible if citizens from different countries continued to mistrust each other and policymakers used repression to evade any real public oversight. In this view, creating a more peaceful world required more governments to respect basic human rights, allowing more private citizens to make contacts with each other across Cold War borders without governmental interference, and taking more specific steps to ensure all individuals' economic dignity. Box 46 also contains an invaluable report that Vladimir Socor of the Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute wrote about how private citizens in the Soviet Bloc forged transnational links with each other designed to publicize their governments' human rights violations and promote democracy by creating civil societies that allowed them to think and act independently of the state (i.e., promote environmentalism or conscientious objection to mandatory military service).

[1] Signed by the United States, Canada, the Soviet Union, and thirty-two European nations in August 1975, the Final Act/Helsinki Accords pledged each signatory to respect the existing boundaries of each other (i.e., territorial sovereignty) unless those boundaries changed in the future through peaceful negotiations. It also called on the signatories to settle their disputes peacefully, reduce military armaments, and negotiate "confidence building measures" to reduce tensions. When viewed from this angle, the Final Act did not so much confirm the Cold War status quo as link the advancement of security, peace, human rights, trade, and human contacts in an interrelated negotiating framework best labelled as the Helsinki Process. This framework proved difficult to ignore because the language of Basket IV resulted in a wide array of follow-up meetings beginning in 1977 that allowed signatories to discuss their implementation records and undertake new commitments. The idea of détente "from below"/people's détente starts from the assumption that détente cannot just consist of governmental agreements in areas like arms control. In practice, a fundamental link exists between peace and respect for basic human rights (i.e., the importance of internal/domestic peace). Therefore, the pursuit of détente "from below"/people's détente consists of linking the tasks of curbing human rights violations, promoting peace, facilitating exchanges across borders, and reducing military armaments by holding governments accountable for their violations of the Final Act/Helsinki Accords (i.e., Helsinki Process). See Christian Philip Peterson, "Changing the World from 'Below': U.S. Peace Activists and the Transnational Struggle for Peace and Détente in the 1980s," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 22, no. 3 (2020): 180-224.

My research at the OSA has also paid other dividends. In the personal papers of Andras Hegedus (HU OSA 361-0-1), I found an amazing collection of documents created by the non-governmental group People for Peace Cultures (PPC)—Slovenia that outlined why this collection of individuals found the Helsinki Accords such a valuable tool to promote peace, human rights, and nuclear disarmament. This view manifests itself in documents that outline why PPC supported the Prague Appeal of 1985 written by Charter 77 and the European Network for East-West Dialogue's Helsinki Memorandum of May 1986, a document that explicitly linked peace, human rights, and "détente from below" because of the input of Soviet Bloc dissenters in groups like Freedom and Peace (WiP) in Poland. The arguments of PPC will help me illustrate my larger points about the strengths and weaknesses of transnational movements for causes like peace. In particular, the ways that PPC grappled with the strengths and limitations of transnational activism will help me explain one of the most important arguments in *Changing the World from Below:* While by no means easy and not always possible, private citizens can transform the status quo by drawing attention to a common set of ideas and values that give them the freedom to determine how best to define and defend their basic freedoms.

In addition to the sources described above, I found numerous documents about the Helsinki Process, International Helsinki Federation (IHF), and Helsinki Citizens' Assembly (HCA) in collections like HU OSA 301-0-3 (Index on Censorship—Country Files) Box 234; HU OSA 318-0-7 (CSCE-OSCE Files) Box 5; OSA 318-0-2 (Records of the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights--Executive Director) Box 5; and HU OSA 318-06 (Files of Records of the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights-Project Files) Box 45. These documents provide rich insights about the complexities of working across borders to promote peace, human rights, détente, and disarmament. They also raise important questions about whether to emphasize the signing of governmental agreements to promote peace (i.e., arms control accords) or working for more permanent change by changing the way people and policymakers see the world (i.e., transforming consciousness my promoting detente "from below").

This issue deserves attention because the private citizens that I have studied make a strong case that governmental agreements by themselves cannot reduce the mistrust and suspicions that continue to fuel international rivalry and competition—just look at how U.S.-Russian relations have evolved during the 21st century. Private citizens can play an important role in promoting peace by facilitating the transnational travel and connections needed to break down the national barriers that sow distrust; they can also build domestic orders that respect basic human rights, help secure individual economic dignity, and hold policymakers accountable for their behavior. Yet, an HCA document reveals the basic dilemma of relying on changes "from below" to promote peace and understanding when it explains how a group of citizens tried to stop ethnic cleansing in the former Yugoslavia by sending a "peace caravan" instead of military forces. Unfortunately, this "peace caravan" did not prevent horrific massacres like Srebrenica. This document also speaks to the limits of promoting peace and détente "from below" when it laments that the universal struggle for human rights and peace at times seemed powerless to stop the atrocities fueled by movements for self-determination and the forcible removal of undesirable ethnic minorities to build more united and homogenous nation states.

The research I conducted at OSA has also yielded other results. Collections like HU OSA 300-50-1:173/1 contain excellent accounts of the various steps, including hunger strikes and public protests, that members of WiP took to promote peace and human rights in Poland during the mid to late 1980s. These documents will also help me explain how WiP helped convince the Polish Communist government to grant Poles the right to conscientious objection from mandatory military service by 1989. Box 178 of HU OSA 300-50-1 also has amazing documents describing the activities of Orange Alternative, a collection of citizens who used farcical and absurd forms of protest to undermine the legitimacy of the Polish communist authorities. I also found interesting accounts of the steps that groups like CPD/EW took to promote peace, human rights, and détente (HU OSA 361-0-1). I even found a series of documents in in HU OSA 300-40 (Hungarian Unit) that elucidate how the Hungarian Peace Council (HPC) attempted to legitimize its work and discredit the non-official peace and human rights activism of private groups like the Peace Group for Dialogue Group, which had to cease operations in 1983 because of the Hungarian government's repression of its activities. This collection of documents also gives a solid account of the transnational debates created by the decision of the European Nuclear Disarmament movement (END) to let the HPC sign the END Appeal and attend its annual meetings. Many private peace groups, including the CPD/EW, challenged this decision on the grounds that the HPC was little more than a pawn of the Hungarian government that continued to undermine the efforts of Hungarian citizens to promote peace, human rights, and détente "from below."

In conclusion, my research at the OSA will play an indispensable role in helping me write *Changing the World from Below* as outlined in my OSA Visegrad Scholarship research proposal. Besides facilitating the completion of my book project, this fellowship also allowed me to review a wide array of sources that will help me write works on the evolution of transnational activism on behalf of Baltic Independence from the USSR. For example, the Riina Kionka files (HU OSA 300-5-130) contain documents with invaluable insights about how Baltic dissenters and their supporters across the globe linked human rights, peace, and national independence. They also provide important information about the Baltic struggle for conscientious objection to mandatory military service in the Soviet Union. The issue of conscientious objection in the USSR is of particular concern to me because I plan to write an international history of conscientious objection since 1900 that pays close attention to how this issue played out in the Soviet Bloc—a topic that has not received enough scholarly attention. The subject of conscientious objection in the Soviet Bloc came up numerous times during my research, including in collections like HU OSA 301-0-3 (Box 181) and 300-5-190 (Box 146).