not seem like such a little thing after all. She developed a rebellious talent for daily survival and began to compose erotic writing that celebrated the personal and political possibilities of sexual passion. Her involvement, in the early 1970s, with the emerging women’s movement added feminism to her political vocabulary, but Nestle has remained “queer” to this day, her vision firmly rooted in the outlaw courage of 1950s sexual memory.

“We no longer have to say that being a Lesbian is more than a sexuality. Sexuality is not a limiting force but a whole world in itself that feeds the fires of all our other accomplishments. Many of us are just beginning to understand the possibilities of erotic choice and self-creation. It is this open declaration of our sexual selves that moralists and governments have tried to silence. They know that a lesbian celebrating her desire is a symbol of the possibility of social change for all women.”

Few women in this culture speak out so publicly and shamelessly about their sexual lives; and when they do, their honesty is generally rewarded with contempt or embarrassment, both painful reminders of how effectively sexism and homophobia have silenced us all. Nestle, though, has never wavered in challenging lesbians and gay men to lay proud claim to their history as freaks and deviants. She has repeatedly insisted that cautiously waiting for some guarantee of safety before coming out and demanding the basic human dignity of sexual love is foolhardy and naive. Such boldness has often placed Nestle at the center of controversy, as in the divisive sex and pornography debates among feminists in recent years.

In “My History With Censorship,” she describes several disturbing incidents, including one in 1981, in which members of the New York-based feminist organization Women Against Pornography visited her workplace (Queens College) to warn students and faculty that Nestle was a dangerous lesbian and feminist traitor who “engages in unequal patriarchal power sex.” Some lesbians are apparently more acceptable than others. That their judges are self-described “sisters”—feminists and lesbians—rather than right-wing zealots only makes the process more painful; judging itself remains a despicable act of “hurling hate against a human target.” The “killing air” returns, and the ground on which we all stand once again shrinks.

“It is the body,” Nestle writes, “that has been most often cheated out of its own historical language, the body that so often appears as the ahistorical force that we simply carry with us until, for those of us born healthy, it tumble us to the earth of restricted movement.” Her own effort to create a historical syntax of pleasure took the form of founding, in 1973 the Lesbian Herstory Archives, still housed in Nestle’s small New York apartment. This institution has since become a valuable source of material about lives previously considered unworthy of attention and consigned to invisibility. But though Nestle has been a pioneer, she has not fought entirely alone. Many gay and lesbian history projects have sprung up in many large American cities in the last decade, kept alive mostly by non-academic historians; and their successes resemble the political victories claimed by activists who have learned and then used the histories of working people, Afro-Americans, women, immigrants, and other marginalized groups. “History is not a dead thing and it is not a sure thing.”

For Joan Nestle, the truth of breasts, hips, and thighs has informed her political understanding of the world. While her perspective is surely the product of a particular time and place, even people who have nothing in common with her sexual identity can still learn a great deal from her about the interconnections of race, class, gender, and sexuality. Nestle has used the particulars of her own life to bridge differences many fear to tackle.

“That the state has decreed out love-making a crime...should not surprise us.... Is this not the same government that refuses to stop the fascist nightmare of South Africa? Is this state that forbids our private love not the same one publicly declaring we will bring down the legal government of Nicaragua, that we will make possible the murder of men, women, and children because we disagree with their choices? Is this not the same state that brags about our prosperity while hundreds of thousands are homeless and foodless and hopeless?”

The suggestion that the struggle for sexual intimacy is connected to the struggle for just domestic and foreign policies is not the unlikely stretch of imagination it may at first appear to be. In fact, it may be our best hope for a future as full of passion as it is full of freedom. Joan Nestle would never settle for one or the other, and neither should we.

"WAR IS the health of the state."—Ran-dolph Bourne
"We have hirelings in the camp, the court, and the university, who would, if they could, for ever depress mental and prolong corporeal war."—William Blake

"Unless somebody does nothing quick, the sky won’t be all that’s up."—Kenneth Patchen

Two futures for the world are easy to imagine. One is a nuclear war, triggered by accident or escalation, followed by nuclear winter and the destruction of much the biosphere, including most or all of its human component. The other is a perpetuation of today’s status quo, with a steady destruction of the eco-sphere, a progressive depletion of natural resources, a chronic eruption of civil and regional wars, and periodic outbreaks of famine—plus an ever-hovering possibility of nuclear holocaust.

The most striking failure of the world’s national leaders is their inability to project some credible alternative to ending with a bang or ending with a whimper. Their inability has a very simple explanation: the problems humanity must solve in order to survive cannot be solved within a system of sovereign nation-states.

Such a situation should be an ideal opportunity for advocates of fundamental social change. Yet the same paralysis seems to pervade the left. There are plenty of admirable proposals to make the nuclear arms system more stable and thereby make nuclear war less likely; there is energetic support for efforts of third-world countries to disengage from imperial domination. But when it comes to conceiving of changes that might actually make the world a safe and decent place to live in, there is mostly vacuum where there should be vision.

Leftists have had discoursantly little to offer by way of a solution. Indeed, because the national framework is so
rarely questioned, there is virtually a vacuum where there should be discussion of how that framework can be transcended. Internationalism often means little more than support for revolutionaries (or red bureaucracies) somewhere else. The books reviewed here are important because they begin to open a discussion of a left alternative. They also show how far that discussion has to go.

The socialists and anarchists movements that arose in the early 19th century stressed internationalism. But as nation-states increasingly preempted political life, most leftists came to accept them as the primary vehicle for radical social change—either through reformist electoral strategies or through revolutionary seizure of state power. Notwithstanding lip service to internationalism, leftists throughout the world increasingly conformed to national contexts. They aspired to a future world of socialist nation states; meanwhile, most socialist politicians in the West supported their countries in war while Communist nation-states engaged in costly and at times bloody competition.

The obvious—indeed, at first glance the only—alternative to the nation-state system appears to be some form of world government. Yet for several reasons, some better than others, the left has not been an advocate of world government. The predominant version of Marxist theory defined war as a problem created by class domination; victory in the class struggle would lead to a socialism in which war was unimaginable because the world’s workers would have no conflicts with each other.

Since World War II, most of the world’s lefts have been aligned with one or the other of the superpowers and have regarded the opposing superpower, rather than the state system, as the threat to peace. Appeals for international law are often seen as efforts to legitimate the world’s “haves” against the “have-nots.” For those who were already fearful of the growth of state power, the idea of a world state seemed like the ultimate authoritarian nightmare. World government, or even a strengthened U.N., could only be achieved it was presumed with the support of the world’s major powers, and it was evident that in the real world they were not willingly going to give up their sovereignty to an international body.

All this sometimes makes us feel as if we are in a mind-numbing loop. National revolutions only reproduce the present nation-state system. Arms control only stabilizes militarism. States cannot trust each other enough to disarm, yet they are unwilling to cede their power to a higher authority. Is the most we can hope for to delay the moment when present processes reach their inevitable conclusion?

Richard Falk is Albert C. Milbank professor of international law at Princeton University; his book The Promise of World Order is a collection of essays informed by legal, ethical, and international perspectives. Dimitrios Roussopoulos is an anarchist writer and publisher in Montreal; the first volume of his projected two-volume work The Coming of World War Three presents a heavily documented account of the failure of arms control efforts and the history of peace movements in Europe and North America. Both see their books as contributions to the effort to transcend militarism, and it is intriguing to find a lawyer and an anarchist converging on a similar approach to this many-horned multilemma.

Richard Falk is one of the few authors I know who even attempts to project a vision of an achievable world order which can resolve the major problems of the current world order. He is aware of—indeed he shares—many of the critiques of world government proposals, and he understands that existing states are unlikely voluntarily to abandon their power. What is his alternative?

Current states, according to Falk, are both too big and too small to deal with people’s needs. A new world order must redistribute power both upward and downward. The downward redistribution will redefine the relation between states and people, with much more of governance and security controlled by local, small-scale communities. The upward redistribution will create institutions for addressing state-transcending problems—that is, problems that can only be solved on a global scale, such as protecting the ecosphere, eliminating weapons of mass destruction, and redistributing world resources.

Such institutions will require significant powers but need not resemble territorial states. They might look more like the arrangements worked out in the Law of the Sea negotiations, which succeeded (until scuttled by the Reagan Administration) in developing a widely accepted global agreement for managing what is, after all, the greater part of the Earth’s surface. The third world nations’ proposals for a New International Economic Order represents another of several such structures that have already been worked out, usually in the context of the United Nations.

While a world order based on a system of such arrangements would not
constitute a world state, Falk and Roussopoulos agree that existing states are unlikely to be the vehicle for creating such a system, and they regretfully conclude that the existing international institutions, such as the U.N., are too dependent on nation states to be able to take such initiatives independently of them. They both turn, therefore, to what Falk calls the “third system”: people acting individually or collectively through social movements and voluntary institutions like churches and trade unions to challenge militarism and articulate new values, demands, and visions.

While sympathetic to the widest variety of social movements, Falk ultimately emphasizes the role of his so-called “citizen pilgrims,” individuals who challenge the legitimacy of the nuclear state and devote their loyalty to a vision of a reconstructed world order.

He argues that, under the “Nuremberg Principles” established at the trial of Nazi war criminals and later codified as part of international law, “Complicity in the commission of a crime against peace, a war crime, or a crime against humanity...is a crime under international law.” This, Falk suggests, lays the basis for a “Nuremberg Obligation”: “Each person in whatever societal position is called upon to avoid complicity in the crimes punished at Nuremberg even if it means violating normal domestic laws.” Where opponents of Trident missiles or of U.S. intervention in Nicaragua impede government action, “Citizens have become law enforcement agents in relation to the government.” He sees the growth of such delegitimation of the state as central to moving beyond its dominance.

Roussopoulos’ approach reflects the experience of the European peace movement, in particular European Nuclear Disarmament (END) and the Green movements. Much of his book documents the various European and North American peace movements, demonstrating how great an advance has occurred in the 1980s compared with previous movements.

Recent European peace movements, Roussopoulos points out, have been marked by a kind of globalism—from below, independent of both superpower blocs; person-to-person and group-to-group contacts cut across national borders and even across the cold-war borders between Eastern and Western Europe. What started as protest movements developed into movements of resistance, based on the use of mass civil disobedience to block the building of nuclear power plants and the introduction of nuclear weapons.

Roussopoulos presents the Green movement as the next logical step in this development, moving from resistance to social change. It has been particularly successful in linking issues and constituencies—from environmental protection and nuclear energy to feminism, disarmament, third world development, human rights, and opposition to superpower imperialism. Roussopoulos is sceptical of the Greens’ foray into the national electoral arena; but he sees their building of a local power base, leading perhaps toward an international “federation of green cities and localities,” as ultimately an effective way of challenging the legitimacy of centralized state power.

Of course, there are serious barriers to a global movement. Particular national traditions and contexts vary greatly. Issues are very different in different regions: movements in the South must address economic development and independence from domination by the North; those in the Eastern bloc must fight for human rights and democratization in order to fight for peace; those in the Northwest bear a special responsibility for resisting imperialism and the use of nuclear weapons for aggressive threats.

Falk suggests such movements can be tied together in part through the recognition that there exists a world system which frustrates efforts in all spheres. Third-world movements, for example, find that hegemony and repression are embedded in the overall structures of the world economic, political, and cultural order; imperial domination and domestic repression are entwined with the dynamics of superpower rivalry. Similarly, movements opposing nuclearism must confront structures of domination and exploitation that are embedded in the nuclear state. “Implicit in these movements, if their vision is bold enough, is a drastic, globally conceived revision of security, based on the values and aspirations of the people as a whole.” Indeed, it is such a holistic vision of a new world order, serving the common needs and interests of humanity as a whole with all its varying cultural forms and traditions, that Falk sees as the other crucial element for uniting such diverse forces into a common movement.

What is already being done to link movements in the “Third System”? That is the subject of the articles and documents collected in The Old Internationalism and the New. Historical pieces show the reality and the limitations of working class internationalism as expressed in the First, Second, Third, and Fourth Internationals; several articles debate the increasing internationalization of capital and its implications; others evaluate current and proposed approaches to international cooperation by labor, women’s, consumers, environmental, and anti-nuclear groups.

Although these materials are deliberately diverse, two strong impressions emerge. First, in the widest variety of social movements there is an awareness of a need to transcend national limitations and a tentative, experimental effort to do so. Second, this is a tremendously underdeveloped sphere of action and even of discussion. The book has a valuable bibliography, but it is striking how few of the pieces listed address the question of internationalism directly.

Why, in an era when “think globally, act locally” has become a widespread slogan, is there so little global thinking from the left? The answer lies in part in the left conventional wisdom that oppression is the sole cause of war and that overcoming capitalism and imperialism is the necessary and sufficient condition for peace. In reality, some of the most gruesome conflicts of recent years have been between Communist states—notably Vietnam, China, and Cambodia. Many capitalist states, and even many highly repressive states, for instance in South America, seem to be able to live without major international conflict. This is not to deny the importance of oppression and injustice, or even their role as causes of war, but rather to argue the need to rethink our entire conceptual framework.

Problems which cannot be solved within a national framework—notably environmental, economic, and security problems—are now cascading into consciousness. It is the inability of the nation-state structure to solve these problems that will ultimately force the
development of something new. We should be asking how to make that something new as liberatory as possible—and how to bring it about in time.

If we think of a world-wide movement on the scale of the European nuclear disarmament movement at its peak, with tens of millions of participants and hundreds of thousands of people ready to go to jail, deeply rooted in local communities in many countries, sharing a commitment to meeting the common needs of humanity and dedicated to imposing law on a lawless collection of state managers, we can begin to get a sense of what it would take to give us an alternative to ending with a bang or ending with a whimper.

There is nothing to keep such a movement from pressuring national governments to adopt policies that will at least reduce the chances of the bang. In theory (and if we ignore the actual power of national security elites), it would be possible, without abolishing the nation state system, to develop a “defense” policy based on common security, defensive military systems based on minimal deterrence, an end to intervention, and demilitarized “zones of peace” in various parts of the world. And it would be possible by international agreement to address world problems of environment, population, resources, and development. Jesse Jackson has shown that the American public is now willing to listen to such non-military approaches to national security.

But, as Falk argues, it is far from clear that in the real world such a program of moderate reform will prove easier to achieve than a more fundamental restructuring of the world order. Both Falk and Roussopoulos warn against the dangers implicit in looking to conventional politics for a significant transformation. Both trace the history of “arms control” efforts, showing that for the past forty years they have primarily been a way to lull the public while the arms race accelerated. As Falk puts it, “There is a genuine danger that certain partial demands of anti-militarist groups for enhanced security can be satisfied, while at the same time actually stabilizing the overall structures of militarism.”

A disturbing illustration of this danger is found in a New York Times Op-Ed piece by Sen. Joseph Biden on Feb. 3, 1988. After warning of West German interest in getting rid of short-range nuclear arms, he argues that “Washington must display a clear readiness to negotiate some reductions in short-range arms, perhaps starting with unilateral cuts (warranted anyway, for sound military reasons), to build public support for needed modernization.” In other words, arms control negotiations and even unilateral arms reductions should be used to soften up the public to accept what the military actually wants.

Despite the danger of such manipulations, it is important to recognize that American policy makers will be pressured toward peace by the new context of the 1990s, a context defined by investment banker Peter Peterson: “The awkward but enduring fact is that, taken together, the claims of our various national interests and global obligations will far outrun our available resources to sustain or defend them.... Given these economic constraints and our urgent need for resources to invest in our own economic future... It is very much in our national interest for essential defense expenditures to decrease as a percentage of GNP.... We find ourselves in a situation in which both [U.S. and Soviet] societies may be able to relieve growing and conflicting pressures in allocating resources for consumption, investment, and defense.... A comprehensive arms control agreement could be in the independent interest of each country.”

Surely such a development is to be encouraged. But it is not clear that the best way to encourage it is simply to give political support to those national leaders who would pursue such a deal. The alternative, implicit in the work of Falk and Roussopoulos, is to continue developing a movement which questions the fundamental legitimacy of the present world order and which proposes credible and humane alternatives.

It was fear of the European peace movement that led to Western proposals for an INF agreement. It is fear of German withdrawal from NATO arrangements that has led the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff to support such an agreement. It is largely fear of Solidarity-style revolts that has led to Gorbachev’s “counter-reformation” with its moves to reduce international tension.

There is a specter haunting national leaders—the specter of peace. Nothing will move them faster or farther than the fear expressed in President Eisenhower’s famous statement that “Some day the people of the world are going to want peace so badly that the governments will have to get out of their way and let them have it.” Our inability to envision an alternative to the nation-state system is part of what keeps us enmeshed within it.