The following is a transcript of a roundtable held in London on 9 July 2001 and jointly organised by *Historical Materialism* and the Politics Department at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS). The aim of the session was to bring together three prominent authors who have recently shed light on the relationship between the state and globalisation from different disciplinary and political perspectives (see references for details of these publications). With much recent critical social theory dedicated to scrutinising the relationship between the state as a political form and the socio-economic processes associated to capitalist globalisation; and with the anti-globalisation protests of Seattle, Prague, Gothenburg and Genoa bringing an added political urgency to these debates, we hope the roundtable reflects, and further contributes to the critical engagement with these phenomena.

The speakers were asked to elucidate analytically what is at play in the process of globalisation, and to consider the political consequences – particularly for the Left – of the interface between globalisation and the state. Some of the guiding questions posed to the speakers included: what is globalisation, and what is the place of the modern state in this process? How is globalisation transforming power relations in the contemporary world? Can the processes of globalisation be harnessed to projects of radical social transformation? What is the relationship between globalisation and ‘classical’ capitalist imperialism of the turn of the twentieth century? What conceptual challenges do these processes pose for critical theory, and Marxism in particular?
I. Introductory statements by the panel

Peter Gowan

I will try to directly engage with Martin Shaw’s school of political ideas, and therefore what I’m going to say is going to be less on globalisation as it’s usually understood and more on ‘liberal-cosmopolitanism’. Because, to me, the issues that Martin raises in his book Theory of the Global State, are much more issues to do with cosmopolitanism, and I would argue liberal-cosmopolitanism, in a political sense. Now, these two discourses, of globalisation and of liberal-cosmopolitanism run in parallel; and they are both radicalisations of earlier forms of liberalism. Globalisation deals with what you might call the market side of liberalism, and liberal-cosmopolitanism deals with the political side of liberalism – each radicalises their particular sphere.

Just to explain what I mean by ‘liberal-cosmopolitanism’, the general liberal view was that the Western states during the Cold War were, in defending their liberal and democratic values, having to play pretty rough, because the Communists played pretty rough, and so you did not have a strong attachment to spreading liberal values and democratic values around the world. It was much more head-to-head, gun-to-gun, and so on, against Communism. But now that Communism and the Soviet bloc have gone, this discourse says that the Western liberal-democratic states are able to, and indeed are and must be understood above all as, spreading across the whole globe liberal-democratic values and régimes. We thus have the prospect of a globe which is entirely liberalised and democratised, and – crucially – this transformation of the globe will bring with it a new kind of world order – a cosmopolitan world order – going beyond the old Westphalian world order which was characterised by the absolute rights of states. So what you have is this group of Western states pushing forward, across the globe, a new world order in which state sovereignty will be made conditional upon states respecting certain minimal rights of citizens – minimal human rights and democratic rights – and thus the old Westphalian concept of sovereignty becomes conditionalised rather like a dog licence in Britain. In other words, you can have a dog in Britain