1) The phase in which capitalism entered about 30 years ago is often described as « neoliberalism ». Do you accept the notion? If yes, with what content?

I do accept the term "neoliberalism" for the stage of capitalism that arose around 1980. I understand neoliberalism, or the neoliberal form of capitalism, to be a coherent entity whose core features include political-economic institutions, policies, theories, and ideology, all within the general capitalist mode of production. Neoliberal ideology glorifies individual choice, markets, and private property, views society as simply a collection of individuals, and sees the state as inherently a predatory entity that is an enemy of freedom and efficiency. The dominant economic theory is a free-market version of neoclassical theory. The policies are those associated with the traditional trilogy of liberalization (freeing of firms and markets from regulation), privatization (of enterprises and state services), and so-called "stabilization," which means a sole focus on preventing inflation.

Four institutions are central to neoliberalism. First, capital is clearly dominant in its relation to labor, in contrast with the capital-labor compromise that prevailed prior to neoliberalism. Many of the specific policies of neoliberalism serve the function of reinforcing that dominance. Second, competition among capitals takes an unrestrained form, again in contrast to the "co-respective" behavior of large corporations of the preceding period. Third, financial capital becomes largely independent of productive capital, with the former pursuing profit through speculative activities within the financial sector rather than serving accumulation in the productive sector. Fourth, the state plays a relatively limited role in the economy, both as regulator and supplier of public goods, although there is not a return to the even more limited state role of the pre-1930s period, and certain state functions expand, particularly those intended to protect private property rights and the interests of capital, such as state coercive functions and new protections for so-called intellectual property.

The relations between neoliberalism on the one hand and both globalization and financialization on the other are complex, and space limitations prevent a consideration of those relations here.

2) How do you interpret the crisis in which capitalism entered in 2007? What importance do you confer on financial mechanisms? In your opinion, was the crisis caused by more fundamental “real” mechanisms?

In my view, the crisis was indeed caused by fundamental "real" mechanisms. This crisis originated in the US. Unlike the previous state-regulated form of capitalism, neoliberal capitalism in the US produced rapidly rising profit while wages remained repressed. This had two consequences: 1) an ever-present realization problem for the growing output of an accumulating economy; 2) a tendency for large asset bubbles to form, as the high profits plus the rapidly rising incomes of very rich households produced a volume of funds seeking investment that exceeded available productive investment opportunities. The speculative financial institutions of neoliberal capitalism played a key role in supporting the continuing growth of these asset bubbles. Rising asset bubble wealth enabled households to borrow to maintain or increase their living standard in the face of declining or stagnating real wages. While this made possible a series of long economic expansions by postponing the realization problem, it simultaneously created unsustainable long-run trends in household debt. Once the biggest asset bubble -- the real estate bubble -- burst, household consumption was bound to fall rapidly,
bringing business investment down with it, while at the same time the deflating real estate bubble bankrupted the largest financial institutions. Thus, the mechanism that had brought rising profits and long expansions since 1980 fundamentally broke down in 2007-08. While various features of the financial system of neoliberal capitalism made the crisis more severe, the financial crisis was not the underlying cause of the overall crisis.

3) Is the crisis over? How serious is the crisis of the euro? What kind of new development (a crisis of the dollar or of sovereign debts, etc.) could trigger the entrance into a new acute phase?

The crisis is far from over. Capitalist history can be understood as a sequence of particular forms of capitalism, or social structures of accumulation. Each form typically brings several decades of high profits and relatively stable accumulation, but the contradictions of each form eventually undermine its ability to further promote profit-making and accumulation. History suggests that the resulting structural crisis takes some time to resolve, since it requires a major institutional restructuring. Mainstream economists believe all that is needed is the right set of policies, but much deeper changes are required for recovery from the crisis.

Until the structural crisis is resolved, we will see continuing stagnation and a possible relapse into downward movement of the economy. At this time, the remarkable return of austerity policy in Europe and the US might push to global economy back into recession. The euro crisis is, in my view, a result of the pressure from the structural crisis on the euro zone, as the sharp recession led to big fiscal and current account deficits in the less competitive euro zone countries. The capitalist class is attempting to use the fiscal crisis -- a product of their system's structural crisis -- to destroy the remaining pockets of working class strength and economic rights particularly among public sector workers.

4) What will be the impact of the crisis on the course of capitalism? Can we expect that the tendencies that prevailed prior to the crisis will be prolonged, or can we anticipate a deeper transformation of the functioning of capitalism (concerning free trade, the free mobility of capital, a stronger government intervention, re-regulation, etc.)?

If the current crisis is a structural crisis of neoliberal capitalism, this implies that neoliberal capitalism can no longer at this juncture effectively promote capitalist profit-making and accumulation. If, as I expect, the current efforts by capital and its political representatives to revive, and even deepen, the neoliberal form of capitalism do not succeed from the point of view of capital, then we can expect to see efforts by capital to develop a new institutional form of capitalism. This is likely to involve a stronger state role in the economy, but there are various possible forms this might take.

If working class and popular movements remain relatively weak, we might see a fascist, or more mildly statist, form of capitalism emerge, with a continuation of the neoliberal form of capital-labor relation. However, unlike neoliberal capitalism, the realization problem would be solved, not by household borrowing, but by rising state spending. If working class and popular movements grow in strengths in the coming years -- which is possible under the conditions of this crisis -- then a social-democratic form of capitalism might develop, based on capital-labor compromise. However, a strengthened popular movement would also place on the political agenda a possible transition beyond capitalism toward socialism.

5) How do you assess the current “balance” of power in the political sphere? In the world and, more specifically, in your country? What should we expect from a “new Left”? What kind of risks do you see coming from the Right?
Some 30 years of neoliberal capitalism undermined the left, which is weak in most of the high-income countries including the USA. The fact that in some countries the a traditionally left-of-center party is in office during this period of a shift to austerity further weakens the left. Obviously right-wing movements have been growing in many high-income countries. This could form a popular base for a statist or fascist reorganization, which would be very dangerous, bringing both internal repression and the possibility of war. The left must get organized and promote both an immediate popular reform program and a vision of moving beyond capitalism, if we are to avoid a dark period in history ahead. The old phrase "socialism or barbarism" takes on real meaning in this period.

6) Reference is often made to a diminished hegemony of the United States. Do you believe in the establishment of a new multipolar (or bipolar) world?

US military hegemony continues unabated, but diminished US economic and political strength no longer provide a basis for a unipolar world dominated by the US. The disappearance of the state socialist system removed a key factor that had pushed the other powerful capitalist states to be willing to follow US leadership. In addition, a serious problem of internal political dysfunction is currently undermining the US role in the world. However, there is no other country that is rich and powerful enough to produce a bi-polar world at this time. It appears that we are left with the emergence of a multi-polar world, which in the capitalist era has historically been associated with rising conflict and war.

7) Do you think new trajectories, alternative to neoliberalism, are now taking shape within other countries (as in Latin America, China, Arab countries), opening new avenues?

The political leadership in some Latin American countries has decisively moved away from neoliberal capitalism and is striving to find a new socialist alternative -- Venezuela, Bolivia. Some other Latin American countries have left of center leadership but have not yet found a coherent path outside of neoliberalism. China, in my view, never adopted neoliberalism, which does not mean simply movement toward a market economy. China developed a form of state-managed transition from state socialism to capitalism run by a Communist Party, which has been quite effective for economic development within the current global system. However, China's model is not directly relevant for states that had not been under Communist Party rule. Furthermore, China's model today faces serious obstacles, stemming from its own contradictions -- foreclosure of its previous demand model of reliance on rising exports, obstacles to shifting to a domestic-demand-based growth model, and a growing protest movement based on its super-exploited workers and oppressed peasants. It also faces large political divisions among those favoring the current model, those who want to implant the US model, and those who want to move in a socialist direction. The political-economic direction that will follow the important revolutions in the Arab world cannot yet be foreseen.