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Philippines

After the State of Emergency

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A week after it was decreed, the state of emergency in the Philippines was lifted. Nonetheless, democratic freedoms remain threatened. The state of emergency was imposed in the Philippines on February 24th, 2006, then lifted a week later. The discretionary powers which the presidency, the police and the army were given correspond, with only slight differences, to the regime of martial law that Ferdinand Marcos decreed in 1972, which was the prelude to thirteen years of dictatorship.

That tells us how serious a measure it was. It provoked so much opposition that the presidency had to agree to rapidly put an end to it, which did not however mean a return to normal conditions.

The Philippine regime is in chronic crisis. This crisis was opened up more than twenty years ago, in 1984, after the assassination of the principal bourgeois opponent of Marcos.

[<https://www.internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/philcoup.jpg>]

The overthrow of the dictatorship in 1986 by a combination of military rebellion and popular uprising initiated a process of democratisation which was never completed. Indeed the tendency was reversed: towards the re-establishment of an authoritarian government, against a backdrop of the social violence of neo-liberal policies and the re-militarisation of the country in the name of anti-terrorism.

So the proclamation of the state of emergency was not an isolated act. It is part and parcel of a whole series of measures that are threatening to still further reduce the democratic space that was opened twenty years ago.

However, the re-establishment of an authoritarian state in the Philippines is running up against several obstacles, starting with the divisions within the army itself and those between the provincial political "great families" who hold a large part of real power.

The current president, Gloria Arroyo, is having real difficulty in overcoming these divisions: guilty in the eyes of the population of massive electoral fraud, she has lost all popular legitimacy. It was above all to protect her personal position that she decreed the state of emergency, relying especially on the police in the absence of sufficient backing from the army.

[https://www.internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/manilaclenched_fists.jpg]

Another obstacle is represented by popular resistance and by the depth of the social crisis. The Left retains a real ability to mobilize, in spite of the degeneration of the Communist Party (Maoist). But weakened by its divisions, it is confronted with a difficult problem. Although it has contributed to overthrowing several presidents, it is the bourgeoisie that has on every occasion imposed its solutions to the crisis.

In reality, Gloria Arroyo decreed the state of emergency through weakness; she had to lift it for the same reason. But that does not mean that the battle has been won. The parties of the radical and democratic Left in the Philippines are very much conscious of this, as their statements show - including the one by the Revolutionary Workers' Party-Mindanao (RPMM), Philippine section of the Fourth International [read it here](#).