

# **The labor reform implemented during the second government of Alfonso López Pumarejo**

*La reforma laboral implementada durante el segundo gobierno de Alfonso López Pumarejo*

*Da reforma laboral implementada durante o segundo governo de Alfonso Lopez Pumarejo*

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## **Research article**

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## **Abstract**

In this article the most relevant elements of the labor reform proposed and implemented by President Alfonso López Pumarejo during the second term of his government are studied. The reform was implemented fundamentally through Law 6 of 1945. The most relevant elements of this reform were the institutionalization and regulation of the labor movements so that, in this way, they would contribute to the stability of the economic growth and business development aimed for at that moment by the Colombian State, as well as the recognition of a set of demands and rights of urban workers, which made this reform the most advanced in Colombia in social terms during the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

**Keywords:** labor reform, social movements, unions.

**JEL:** J88, O17, J50

## **Resumen**

En este artículo se estudian los elementos más relevantes de la reforma laboral propuesta y puesta en práctica por el presidente Alfonso López Pumarejo durante su segunda gestión de Gobierno. La reforma fue implementada fundamentalmente a través de la Ley 6<sup>a</sup> de 1945. Los elementos más relevantes de la misma fueron la institucionalización y regulación de los movimientos obreros para que contribuyesen de esta forma a la estabilidad del crecimiento económico y el desarrollo empresarial pretendido en ese momento por el Estado colombiano, así como el reconocimiento de un conjunto de reivindicaciones y derechos a los trabajadores urbanos, que hicieron de esta reforma la más avanzada en Colombia en términos sociales durante el siglo XX.

**Palabras clave:** reforma laboral, movimientos sociales, sindicatos.

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## Resumo

Neste artigo, os elementos mais importantes da proposta de reforma laboral implementado pelo presidente Alfonso Lopez Pumarejo durante seu segundo mandato de governo. A reforma foi executada principalmente através da Lei 6 de 1945. Os elementos mais significativos do que fosse a institucionalização e regulação dos movimentos de trabalhadores a contribuir desta forma para a estabilidade do crescimento económico e de desenvolvimento de negócios destinado no momento pelo Estado colombiano e do reconhecimento de um conjunto de reivindicações e direitos para os trabalhadores urbanos, que fizeram esta reforma mais avançada na Colômbia em termos sociais no século XX.

**Palavras-chave:** reforma laboral, movimentos sociais, sindicatos.

## INTRODUCTION

This article studies the most relevant elements of Law 6 of 1945, through which a labor reform was implemented during the second administration of Alfonso López Pumarejo. The main purposes of this legislation were, first, the regulation and institutionalization of the unions and worker movements and, second, the acknowledgement of a set of demands and rights of the workers, which had been claimed since the end of the 1920s.

The management of López Pumarejo's government is considered to be one of the most outstanding and important of the 20th century in Colombia. The set of policies and reforms executed during his two mandates paved the way for great transformations regarding the roles of the state, the economy, industry, land ownership, public education, labor relations, among other political, economic and social aspects.

López Pumarejo was in office during two periods: the first, between 1934 and 1938, and the second, between 1942 and 1945. Of the two periods, the first was the most relevant due to the set of transformations proposed and carried out. During this period important reforms were made, such as the constitutional and agricultural reform of 1936, and the educational reform. During his second period, he faced great limitations which prevented him from continuing his reformist work in depth. Among those limitations, those that stand out are: the fierce opposition of important sectors of the economic and political elite of the time, as well as the external economic restrictions existing as a consequence of the Second World War and a decrease in the price of coffee, the main exportation product of Colombia at the time.

These obstacles created an environment of ungovernability, which was accentuated by the attempted *coup d'état* that took place in 1944. This context of conflict brought about Lopez' resignation in 1945, when he still had a year left to formally finish his second presidential term. Despite the difficulties, during his second administration it was possible to pass the labor reform, which in many aspects has been one of the most socially advanced in Colombian history and which will be the object of analysis of this article.

In order to understand the context and reach of the reform, the characteristics of the labor policy applied in the first mandate of Lopez are analyzed. In some sense, Law 6 is

the result of that policy, whose main objective was stability in labor-management relationships, which allowed the fostering of growth and economic modernization.

Afterwards, the labor legislation proposed by the government of Lopez and approved by Congress is reviewed. This analysis comprises of the presentation of the general context existing between 1942 and 1945, and the study of the central aspects of Law 6. Finally, from the aspects outlined in this sub-section, general conclusions as regards the reform are drawn.

## **LABOR POLICY DURING THE FIRST GOVERNMENT OF ALFONSO LÓPEZ PUMAREJO**

In general, the second liberal republic of between 1930 and 1946 supported the creation and organization of unions but under certain parameters that allowed their regulation by the state. The government that fostered this policy the most was that of Alfonso López Pumarejo.

The reasons for this conception were political and economic. Regarding the political, Alfonso López and the liberals sought the support of urban workers in their electoral battle with the Conservative Party for the power of the state. There was also the objective of supporting an increase in and consolidation of the influence of the industrial bourgeoisie and thus reducing the power and importance that the landowners had acquired (Moncayo & Rojas, 1979, p. 57). The predominance of the landowners constituted an obstacle to the objective of modernization and reform. With respect to economic aspects, the view of the Liberal Party in general and that of President Lopez in particular, was that the unions and their movements favored the improvement of the purchasing power of the workers. This improvement stimulated the expansion of consumption and of the internal market, creating the conditions for industry and national production to grow.

The efforts towards the institutionalization of the unions started during the government of Enrique Olaya Herrera, with the enactment of Law 83 of 1931, regarding union organization. This norm constituted a mechanism through which the state sought to establish the regulation and surveillance of said movements. This regulation of the unions was established through the power of the state to acknowledge, or not, the legal status of the unions and in their capacity to request the dissolution of any union, in those cases where their actions were outside of the law (art. 19). The state also had the power to impose fines when there were strikes that were considered to be illegal (art. 22) and, finally, to dissolve those organizations that actively participated in politics (art. 23).

During the first administration of López Pumarejo, it was not possible to implement the labor reform. There were projects on specific matters; some were approved, while others were not. In 1937, Law 40 was promulgated, which regulated the state support of working-class congresses. By the end of the first mandate, in 1938, the Ministry of Labor was created. The matters related to labor, up to that moment, were the responsibility of the Ministry for Industries.

Despite not having gotten the approval of a reform, the labor policy of Lopez between 1934 and 1938 was very active. It was characterized by the incentive to form unions and the active intervention of the government as a mediator in labor conflicts. In general, the

president supported the position of the workers in those conflicts, a situation that allowed him to gain great popularity among the working class.

The Colombian Communist Party (PCC, by its acronym in Spanish) initially opposed the government of López.<sup>1</sup> However, the president's boost in popularity among the workers, made that opposition impossible to maintain. This group had opposed the former government of Olaya Herrera and even saw López as an agent of the Colombian oligarchy. Nevertheless, during López' first year of government, this view was eventually changing until they offered the president their political support. This decision was mainly motivated by the growing influence of López over the popular sectors, the fear of the radicalization of the opposition of the rightist groups in response to the reformist policy of the government (and that this would lead to a repressive government of a fascist nature) and the guidelines coming from the Soviet Union for supporting the progressive sectors of the bourgeoisie, in view of the political situation of the time<sup>2</sup>.

The political support given to López, by the communists, was expressed in the exercise of, by their own initiative, the political strategy of the *Popular Front* (Colombian Communist Party, 1960, pages 35-36)<sup>3</sup>, as from November 1935. It did not constitute a formal government, but it served as an instrument of support for both of Alfonso López' administrations, different from the experience of countries like France, Chile or Spain. The president implicitly accepted this support, though he never granted real power to the PCC in the decisions of this government (Archila, 1991, p. 291). Other leftist organizations adhered to the *Popular Front*, such as *Vanguardia Socialista* and the National Agrarian Party (from now on PAN, by its acronym in Spanish), which led the mobilization of countryside people in the region of Sumapaz, in the departments of Cundinamarca and Tolima. The urban workers and their unions offered their support, too. The alliance of the followers of López with the popular sectors was supported, within Liberalism, only by the progressive wing or the leftist faction of that party<sup>4</sup>.

The term Popular Front was mainly used by the Communist Party, and not so much by the members of the unions, and not at all by the government. For Lopez, this expression was a "ghost" that existed in the imagination of the opposition (Pécaut, 2001, p. 288). Thus, López tried to minimize the existence and the reach of this term, in order to avoid

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<sup>1</sup> In the general, the Communist Party did not accept the mediation of the government in the strikes. This attitude changed, beginning with the support that this organization offered to President López.

<sup>2</sup> These guidelines of supporting progressive bourgeois governments was established as from the 7<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Communist International, celebrated in August 1935.

<sup>3</sup> The formation of the Popular Front meant a transition in the strategy that had been applied by the Communist Party up to that time. his changed implied, therefore, the freezing, at least temporarily, of the tactic of insurrection and the popular revolution (Archila, 1991, p. 291).

<sup>4</sup> Within the Colombian Liberal Party of the time there existed two political tendencies. One was that which assumed a moderate position regarding the reformist intention of the first government of Lopez, which at that time was known as the "liberal right". Among their main representatives, there were Eduardo Santos (owner of the most important newspaper in the country, "El Tiempo", and the leader of this sector of liberalism), Juan Lozano y Lozano and Luis Cano. The other tendency was constituted of those congressmen who expressed a more radical position regarding the reforms proposed by Lopez, and they preferred more profound reforms in terms of social advancements, the limitation of the power of the Catholic Church, the intervention of the state in the economy and society, and the redistribution of land in the countryside. At that time, they were known as the progressive sector or the "left" of liberalism and among their main representatives, there were Diego Montaña Cuéllar and Gerardo Molina, who abandoned liberalism in the following years and became two of the most outstanding historical figures of the Colombian left.

a greater confrontation with the opposition. However, this did not mean the inexistence of a political alliance between the government, the progressive sectors of liberalism, the unions, the socialists, and the Communist Party. In fact, it did exist and it constituted an important base of support for Lopez' political project<sup>5</sup>.

One of the consequences of the support of the communists for Lopez was the possibility of establishing the unity of the different unions. Between the beginning of the 30s and the mid-40s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there existed two large tendencies in Colombian unions: those organizations influenced by liberalism and the unions controlled by the Communist Party. Within the Liberal Party, the influence of the *Unión Nacional Izquierdista Revolucionaria* (UNIR, by its acronym in Spanish) stood out, led by Jorge Eliécer Gaitán.

As there were differences between the communists and the members of UNIR, who had recently joined liberalism, the process was not easy. The role of the liberal left was crucial in bringing the unions together and overcoming their differences.

That Colombian unions got together was important for López, as this would facilitate their regulation by the state and would be useful as political support for his reformist government. Said support was necessary due to the opposition of the conservatives, the liberal right, the Catholic Church, the landowners and important business sectors. These sectors observed the proximity of Lopez to popular and leftist organizations with distrust. In fact, the liberal right never supported this proximity because it considered that it was dangerous for the stability of the country.

Union consolidation was effectively achieved at the Second Workers' Congress held in the city of Medellín in 1936 and was expressed in the birth of the Confederation of Trade Unions of Colombia (CSC, by its acronym in Spanish), later renamed the Confederation of Workers of Colombia (CTC, by its acronym in Spanish)<sup>6</sup>. This entity manifested itself more specifically in the formation of the executive committee of the confederation, eight liberals, four communists, three socialists and one anarcho-syndicalist (Archila 1991: 298). The formation of this union center acquired an important political and electoral significance for the president and for the Liberal Party in general. That is why from that moment the government began to financially support the realization of workers' congresses and also through the presence of some of its ministers. In the final declaration of this congress, an explicit invitation was made to the workers to support the government of Lopez Pumarejo:

Free support of the national government presided over by Dr. López as a counter-measure to the reactionary forces of the *godos* (conservatives) who, with

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<sup>5</sup> The newspaper *Claridad*, the formal means of dissemination of the National Agrarian Party (PAN), clearly expressed the thinking of the Colombian left of the period with respect to supporting López: "The groups of the left have agreed to join into a single movement (making reference to the Popular Front) in order to effectively support the democratic government of Doctor Alfonso López Pumarejo" (*Claridad*, 1936).

<sup>6</sup> The union confederation which arose in Medellín in 1936 was initially called the Confederation of Unions of Colombia (CSC, by its acronym in Spanish). This title changed to its current name, the Confederation of Workers of Colombia (CTC, by its acronym in Spanish), as from the Third Worker Congress carried out in Cali, in January 1938. However, said change was officially approved in October 1943 during the Fifth Congress in Bucaramanga (*Escuela Nacional Sindical*, 2010, pp. 2-4).

acute capitalist orthodoxy, try to prevent the worker from being a citizen in our land, with all their rights and not continuing to live the life of a pariah, or of an idiot to which they drove him, through hard times, old and past regimes. (Escuela Nacional Sindical, 2010, page 3)

The president did not reject the support of the Communist Party. The political support of popular organizations became official on May 1, 1936 during the massive Labor Day demonstration, which was attended by Lopez himself from the government palace. This act had an important impact on national politics and intensified the opposition of the right-wing sectors. In general, the left sought the support of the Lopez government to realize a political alliance with a sector of the bourgeoisie that they considered to be progressive, with the purpose of contributing to the capitalist modernization, industrialization and democratization of the society, this within the framework of bourgeois democracy (Pécaut, 2001: 282).

As was mentioned above, one of the relevant aspects of labor policy during President López' first administration was the government's encouragement of the creation and legalization of unions. In fact, there was an increase in the number of trade unions recognized by the government between 1935 and 1938. There were 84 union organizations legalized in 1935, 38 in 1936, 157 in 1937 and 93 in 1938. With regard to the number of workers affiliated to the trade unions, this grew from 42,678 in 1935 to 94,190 in 1941 (Urrutia, 1969, p. 199). The trade unions affiliated with the CTC, and most important in the 1930s, belonged to the agricultural, industrial, transport and oil sectors (Urrutia, 1969, pages 298-303). Even so, trade unionism continued to be, for the time, "a minority expression of salaried workers" (Archila 1991: 300)<sup>7</sup>.

In spite of the above, trade unionism in the 1930s was more stable compared to the workers' organizations existing in the 1920s. It also had more specific demands, such as the eight-hour working day and the establishment of the minimum wage, although it experienced greater dependence on the state in relation to aspects such as the initiative to create and organize trade unions.

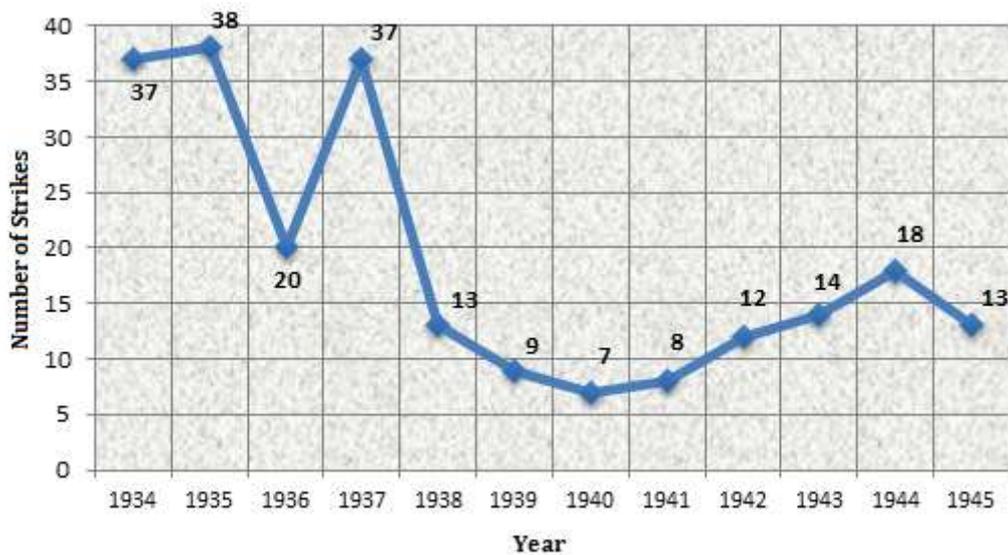
The reaction of the church and the Conservative Party to the promotion of unionism from the Government and the consequent formation of the CTC consisted of the creation of catholic confessional unions backed by business owners. This strategy was fostered by Catholic Social Action, an organization sponsored by the same church (Archila, 1991, p.307). Already, in 1939, the initial results of this strategy could be observed. Catholic Social Action had contributed to the creation of a total of seventy-three (73) unions up to that time, with a total of 10,515 members.

As was mentioned, one of the purposes of Lopez' proximity to the unions was the exercise of greater state regulation over strikes and workers' mobilizations in general. This encouraged ever-increasing governmental interference in the mediation of conflicts between workers and employers. The alliance formed at that time between the unions and the state was nevertheless in permanent tension between the radicalizing intentions of the existing strikes in important sectors of the labor base, and the control and regulation of the conflicts intended by the Government (Archila, 1991, p. 303).

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<sup>7</sup> In 1939 the union rate was less than 10% (Archila, 1991, p. 300). For that year, the CTC grouped together 40% of the acknowledged unions and 50% of the unionized population (Urrutia, 1969, p. 183).

Indeed, in spite of the influence of Lopez Pumarejo on the workers, the state did not exercise complete regulation over their protest movements. The increase in strikes in sectors where it was supposed that strikes could not be carried out, such as in public services and factory outlets, and the rise in strikes in the industrial sector, are some examples of this. Thus, between 1934 and 1938, there was an increase in strikes in relation to previous years. In 1934 there were 37 strikes, in 1935 they increased to 38, they decreased in 1936 to 20, they increased again to 37 the following year and in 1938 the smallest number was recorded for the period, with 13 strikes in total (Figure 1). This increase in labor conflict is explained by the incentive to create unions promoted by the government, the better organization of these and the unity achieved through the creation of the CTC and the general favorable attitude to the interests of the workers assumed by López in the mediation of these conflicts<sup>8</sup>.



**Figure 1.** Total number of strikes per year between 1939 and 1945.  
**Source:** Archila (1991, p.269), Ministry of Labor (1945).

The Government made an effort to take on the organization and institutionalization of trade unions with the dual objective of having better mechanisms of regulation over these and at the same time of turning them into an instrument of political support for Lopez’ political project. The attainment of union consolidation and the consequent emergence of the Confederation of Workers of Colombia (CTC) were an expression of that goal of the institutionalization of the labor movement by the López Pumarejo government.

The most important labor conflicts that occurred during the first government of Lopez Pumarejo were: in 1934, the strikes of the Magdalena river transporters (the main river of the country and of great importance at the time for the transport of goods and passengers), the Pacific railways and the workers of the banana zone, in the north of the

<sup>8</sup> In some way, the workers, mainly the urban ones, felt politically supported by the state, although there were also specific cases where the governmental authorities declared the strikes illegal. Despite those cases, the four years of Lopez’ first administration, mainly between 1934 and the end of 1936 (until the start of the “pause” in the reforms imposed on Lopez by the opposition) constitute the period when there was a greater proximity between the unions and the government.

country. In 1935 a strike in the banana zone again occurred, in addition to conflicts in the La Dorada Railway (department of Caldas), the oil workers of the Tropical Oil Company in Barrancabermeja (department of Santander) and the intensification in the same year of the strikes in the industrial sector, mainly in Bavaria, Vidrios Fenicia and the textile companies of Medellín. In 1936 strikes again affected the most important companies of the textile sector, Coltejer and Roussillon; the following year there was a major strike by the workers of the Magdalena River transport companies. There were also strikes in the public services of Medellín. In 1938 a new protest appeared on the part of the workers of the Tropical Oil Company, which concluded with a tragic toll of three dead (Archila, 1991, pages 291-298)

In addition to the increase in wages and the improvement of working conditions, strikes between 1934 and 1938 sought the legal recognition of trade unions and the right to labor bargaining. The employers expressed their opposition to the organization of these unions in their companies and to their official recognition (Pécaut, 2001, p. 249).

Two examples of the mediation of the government in labor conflicts were the president's personal intervention in the strikes of the United Fruit Company workers in December 1934 and in the Tropical Oil Company a year later. In both conflicts the government pressed for and got a considerable increase in wages. This type of mediation was frequent during López' first administration, actions that contributed to the political support of workers and unions for the government (Pécaut, 2001, pp. 251-252).

The decrease to thirteen in the number of strikes by the end of the administration of López Pumarejo in 1938 suggests a relative success in the attempted state control of social protest, through the institutional channeling of the different demands of these movements<sup>9</sup>. However, as of 1937, businessmen began to pressure the government to restrict the right to strike, given the increase in labor disputes. For this reason, a bill was presented which specified the sectors where, because of their importance, the carrying out or duration of strikes was to be limited. This was a call from the state to the unions to restrict the use of strikes and to look for other alternatives to resolve the conflicts. At the second Labor Congress held in Cali in January 1938, the unions opposed this bill, but at the same time they expressed their support for the government in the need to restrict the use of strikes. The unions gathered there expressed that only those strikes that made use of the requirements established by law for their realization would be supported (Urrutia, 1969, pages 174-176).

The reformist intention of the president generated great polarization between the block that supported him and the one that was against his government. The level of tension between these blocks was so intense that it threatened to transform itself into civil conflict. This context of growing confrontation, together with the electoral failure of those sectors of liberalism that supported Lopez' political project in the congressional elections of April 1937 (the progressive wing of the Liberal Party), influenced the government's decision to interrupt the implementation of new reforms. The defeat in the elections signified a demonstration of the great power of the opposition. The

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<sup>9</sup> This institutional channeling was intended to be established through the implementation of social reforms proposed by Lopez, the organization and creation of influenced unions and, to some extent, controlled by the state, and the mediation that the government carried out in many of the conflicts of the time.

mobilization of the urban masses led by Lopez had not succeeded in defeating the traditional electoral machinery (Pécaut 2001, 286).

Despite the "pause" in his reformist intentions, popular organizations (PCC, PAN, socialists, trade unions, urban workers and the population in general) decided to continue to support the president's administration. With this support, they also sought to "preserve at any price the fragile political unity they had just obtained through the government" (Pécaut 2001: 283).

The industrialists initially seemed to have supported the president's administration, as well as the labor policy and approach to trade unions. They required the organization and support of the workers in order to counteract the influence and power of the landowners and the commercial sectors linked to them (Moncayo & Rojas, 1978, p.53). This was the situation at the beginning of the first Lopez government.

Nevertheless, as of 1937 there was a decline in the productivity of industries and also a tendency towards the reduction of the profit rate. This situation forced employers in this sector to seek a reduction in workers' wages (Moncayo & Rojas, 1979, p.59). This context was aggravated as from the beginning of the Second World War. This conflict led to a rise in the imports of capital goods and the closing of international markets for exports (this accentuated the decline in wages and the rise in unemployment).

Faced with this economic reality and the limitations of the industrial development of the time, the industrialists begin to see the continuity of a project of social reforms, which in the beginning they had supported, as an inconvenience. This is one of the reasons why they were pressing the Lopez government to stop the reformist policy. In the words of Moncayo and Rojas, "the arrest of the process is fully articulated with the interests of the bourgeoisie who, forced by circumstances, must abandon the promotion and sponsorship of the trade union protest activity, in order to not alter the conditions of the profit rate and so as not to unravel the conditions already created and established"(1979: 60).

From the perspective of these actors (the industrialists), the president, in addition to stimulating the organization of the unions (an organization with which they initially agreed), went further and gave them greater political capacity by accepting the alliance between these and the Communist Party. Also, the industrialists considered that the realized reforms, although not radical, went beyond what was tolerable. For this reason, as from 1937 the industrialists considered that Lopez's reform intentions, with which they agreed at first, had acquired characteristics that they did not agree with and that is why they gradually withdrew their support until they became part of the opposition along with other sectors of society (landowners, the Conservative Party, the Catholic Church and the liberal right). From that moment, the industrialists began a battle in each one of their companies against those unions that were created by the initiative of the state (Pécaut, 2001, page 283).

In this way, they manifested their disagreement with the implementation of the social reforms proposed by the Lopez government. Whenever a labor law bill was submitted that included some kind of benefit to workers (such as the obligation to pay severance payments or workers' participation in company profits), they immediately started a campaign to pressure the government to withdraw those proposals or to have them

rejected by congress (Pécaut, 2001, p.283). This is the fundamental reason why it was impossible for the president to obtain approval for any reform in the labor field during his first administration.

This attitude of the industrial bourgeoisie also implied a rejection of the existence and consolidation of unionism that would be generated through the issuing of social laws. The existence of trade unions and their political strengthening were unacceptable to all employers and landowners. The opposition observed from its perspective that the government, under the pretext of controlling popular organizations and the left in general, was getting the opposite, that is, feeding and strengthening the "communist menace." In short, one of the greatest fears of the elites of the day was the risk of the "politicization of the masses" that the president was supposedly stimulating (Pécaut 2001: 285).

With the defeat of Lopez in the parliamentary elections of 1937, the right wing sector of liberalism again assumed control of the party. By assuming this control, the liberal right denied the possibility of any involvement of trade unionism in politics. This sector of liberalism, which triumphed with Eduardo Santos in the presidential elections of 1938, conceived the trade unions and popular organizations in general as a simple electoral instrument that would serve to defeat conservatism electorally and, therefore, demanded the abandonment of any pretension of constituting a specific political force<sup>10</sup>.

The role of grassroots organizations was then limited to giving their votes in the electoral processes in favor of liberalism and controlling the proliferation of strikes among its affiliates. Popular organizations accepted this new political juncture and continued to express, even under these conditions, their support for the government and for liberalism in general. Given these circumstances, there was no possibility of building an independent labor movement.

During the Congress of the CTC in January of 1938 the workers accepted the limitation on strikes suggested by the government. This same decision was assumed by the Communist Party. The reason was the fear that these strikes would be used as a pretext by the opposition to definitively destroy the political rapprochement reached between popular organizations and the Liberal Party in general and the Lopez government in particular. From that moment, any affiliated union had to obtain the permission of the Confederation to be able to carry out a strike.

The desire of the left was therefore to maintain that implicit alliance which existed with the Liberal Party and the national bourgeoisie that was strengthened during the first administration of Lopez, even though much of this bourgeoisie was against it. Although the workers and their different forms of expression were aware of the restrictions

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<sup>10</sup> This pretension of the liberal right can be appreciated in a part of the declaration of the National Directorate of the party on the 31<sup>st</sup> January, 1938. In this moment, liberalism is already controlled again by this sector, after the triumph in the elections to Congress of 1937: "The party, in harmony with its programs, stimulates the unionization of all the workers associations and supports the unions as a legal instrument of action and cooperation in the process of work, without intervention in electoral battles and without political aims. (...) The Directorate considers that, apolitical unionization is accepted by the party, the pretensions of purely political elements to direct and control the unions should not be tolerated. At the same time, it estimates that the democratic organization of Colombia cannot be different from the unionized liberals (...) Liberalism has no ideological affinity with communism and condemns class struggle, and any political instrument that acts outside of the Republican system..." (El Tiempo, 1938).

imposed by the existing political environment, they nevertheless considered that support for the government was "the only possible political expression" in order to maintain popular mobilization in favor of democracy and against fascism (Pécaut, 2001, p.292). It is for this reason that the left as a whole (Communist Party, socialists and CTC) decided to support Eduardo Santos in the 1938 presidential elections so as to "defend democracy" from the supposedly fascist threat of the Conservative Party<sup>11</sup>. By emphasizing the defence of democracy, given the current situation, these sectors gave more importance to political alliances than to social transformations. In general, this alliance with the left and the unions allowed liberalism to appropriate the urban vote in its electoral confrontation with conservatism.

## **THE IMPLEMENTATION OF LABOR LEGISLATION. GENERAL CONTEXT.**

The formulation and approval of a labor reform was only possible during the second administration of López Pumarejo. This aimed to resolve the existing conflicts in the relations between workers and employers, and thus create an environment which allowed the stimulation of growth, economic modernization and industrial development.

The study of this includes, firstly, the presentation of the context existing between 1942 and 1945 regarding the mobilization of the workers, unions, their support of the government and in general the predominant political environment at that time. These aspects, along with the labor policy developed during the first López government, influenced the conception of the reform.

Subsequently, the central elements of Law 6 of 1945 are studied. The most important aspects of this norm are related to two main themes, the regulation mechanisms of the worker and trade union mobilizations, and the recognition of a set of workers' rights, inexistent until that moment in the legislation.

During the Government of Eduardo Santos (1938-1942) attempts were made to provoke a division within the trade union movement, which had achieved unity through the CTC during the previous government of Lopez. This division was intended to exclude the Communists and Socialists from union governing boards. This is how the Santos government encouraged the absence of liberal trade unionists in the fourth Congress of the CTC held in Barranquilla in 1940. Also, Decree 1485 of 1942 was issued, which further limited the right to strike and established practically forced conciliation in labor disputes, a conciliation that benefitted the interests of employers. The restrictions imposed are reflected in the decrease in the average number of strikes carried out. During the first administration of Lopez that average was 29; already in the Santos administration the average was reduced to 9 strikes (Minister for Labor, 1939, 1940, 1941, 1942).

After these attempts at division, the unions unified again in 1941 to join Lopez' presidential campaign and later support his second government. During his second

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<sup>11</sup> Pécaut considers that the conception of the Communist Party, the socialists, the unions and the liberal left that Laureano Gómez and the Conservative Party were fascists was completely wrong (2001, p.293). Conservatism was, for the time, a political organization of the right, with strong ties to the Catholic Church and without any relation to the political ideas of Hitler or Mussolini.

administration, the difficult political context created by the opposition along with the economic difficulties arising from the Second World War, made the president assume a more moderate political attitude to the continuity of the reforms. Even so, the laborers and urban workers and their unions, the Communist Party, the socialists and left-wing political organizations in general, continued to express their support for the government. The president, once elected in 1942, was in a complex situation because he had to satisfy the interests of the workers who manifested their permanent support and, at the same time, to not provoke a reaction from businessmen, landowners and merchants, who doubted his ability to contain the mobilization of popular organizations.

In this period, there was also less interference by the state in the mediation of labor disputes and in support of workers in their demands<sup>12</sup>. However, there was continuity in the policy of fomenting the formation of unions and their legalization. In 1942, thirty-eight trade unions were legalized, seventy-nine in 1943, one hundred and eighty in the following year and four hundred and fifty-three in 1945 (Moncayo & Rojas, 1979, p. 63, Urrutia, 1969, 63). In 1946, when Lopez had already resigned, the number of officially recognized unions fell to one hundred and sixteen. Only in December 1942, six months after the start of the second government, did the total number of unions increase from 742 to 809 organizations with 102,023 affiliates (Archila, 1991, p.333), with an important participation of industry workers. In 1945 the unionization of government workers arose through the formation of the Colombian Federation of State Workers, an organization that would play an important role in trade-unionism in later years. Trade unions were also created during this period in the judicial branch, in the banks and in the education sector.

During the second Lopez government, the Communist Party again reactivated the strategy of the Popular Front. Through it, while supporting the president, it also pressed for social and economic reforms. Given the international political context of the time, this party decided to temporarily postpone its project of revolution and support the government. In 1941 that organization changed its name to that of the Democratic Socialist Party (Archila, 1991, p.341).

At that time the Lopez government accepted the support received from popular political organizations, but preferred to keep a cautious distance so as to not further exacerbate the already difficult political context. However, this approach, specifically with the communists, allowed the establishment of diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union for the first time.

During 1942 twelve strikes were carried out, in the following year fourteen, eighteen in 1944 and thirteen took place in 1945 (Figure 1). The main strikes occurred in the railways, river transport on the Magdalena River, the gold mines of Segovia in the department of Antioquia, land transport, among others (Archila, 1991, pages 335-338).

The lower number of strikes during President López' second government in relation to the first could be explained by several factors. These include the limitations of foreign trade at the time, in the face of the difficulties created by the Second World War, the

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<sup>12</sup> In general, the government assumed an intermediary position between the interests of the workers and businessmen in the labour conflicts which occurred between 1942 and 1945. This position is different to the attitude assumed between 1934 and 1938. In that moment, there was a tendency within the government to favour the demands of the first group.

support among the workers for the cause of the allies in this conflict and mainly for the political adhesion of these to the personal figure of the president. One expression of this support was the acceptance by unions of the regulation and limitation of the right to strike. This limitation included the prohibition of work stoppages in public services. This official tendency to try to restrict strikes is explained by the strong pressure from industrialists, but also by the need to control the strikes in strategic sectors such as transport. The strikes which occurred in 1942 and 1943 were encouraged by the same businessmen and constituted at that time an opposition strategy to try to destabilize the government. In fact, the atmosphere of political confrontation was intense in those years and had its maximum expression in the attempted *coup d'etat* of 1944.

Notwithstanding the agreement reached regarding the restriction on strikes, when the government presented a bill in 1943 to regulate that decision, the workers expressed their opposition. This opposition was directed not so much at the president but at the Minister for Labor of the time. In the end, this project was temporarily withdrawn and the minister was forced to resign at the request of Lopez himself. The situation described reflects the ongoing tension in trade union organizations over two apparently contradictory positions. On the one hand were the pressures from the labor base to not stop carrying out protest movements in specific cases of labor conflicts. And on the other, the commitment of unions such as the CTC to support the president politically and to try to limit strikes in order not to introduce an additional factor of instability at a critical political moment for the government.

One of the factors that explains the constant attack of the right-wing opposition on the president was his relatively close relationship with the trade unions and popular organizations and in general with sectors of left, such as the Communist Party. This "attack on Lopez was in the end an offensive against these popular sectors" (Archila, 1991, pages 339-340). In the specific case of businessmen, they did not share with the popular organizations and the unions, political support for the government, nor for the restrictive economic measures implemented in the face the difficulties generated by the Second World War.

The pressure of industrialists, as well as the idea of the liberal state to achieve the institutionalization of protest movements and unions through state regulation, explain one of the most salient aspects of the labor reform of 1944, that of the establishment of more mechanisms to regulate the right to strike<sup>13</sup>. In this way, businessmen managed to limit the struggle for rights that could lead to real increases in workers' pay and, therefore, affect their profits in a context of economic difficulties (Moncayo & Rojas, 1979, p. 340).

In spite of not being a workers' government, at that moment the only sector that supported the president's administration was the left, that is, the urban workers and their unions, the progressive liberal sector, the Communist Party and the socialists. This situation was paradoxically different from the one that existed during the twenties. "If at that time the subversion that threatened the state came from the left, by the mid-forties the left was the only support for the state remaining against the increasingly aggressive right-wing opposition" (Archila 1991: 340).

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<sup>13</sup> The most efficient regulatory mechanisms to union activity were implemented as from the end of the first López government through Decrees 2342 of 1938 regarding surveillance of the unions, and Law 96 of the same year, which created and organized the Ministry for Work, Hygiene and Social Welfare.

When, in 1944, Alfonso Lopez tendered his first resignation of the presidency, the unions and the communists convened on May 15 for a national civic strike to prevent the senate from accepting this resignation. This strike received significant support from the popular sectors and effectively achieved its purpose and the resignation of the president was not accepted (El Espectador, 1944). This same support, expressed in massive popular demonstrations, prevented the success of the attempted coup of July 1944.

In an attempt to appease the opposition, Lopez tried to find new allies and it is in this context that the approval and promulgation of Law 100 of 1944 appears, which was favorable to the big agricultural owners. However, this legislation was also a form of negotiation with Congress so as to approve both the labor reform of 1944 and the constitutional reform of 1945.

The labor reform expressed Lopez' concept regarding state regulation of the unions and the worker-employer conflicts. For him, this regulation played a fundamental role in the prosperity of businesses and of the national economy. The following words from the president published in the liberal newspaper "El Espectador" expressed that idea:

...the opposition has claimed that I am the inventor of a monstrous instrument of class struggle. The unions that existed were planned, ordered, stimulated and protected by the law. But they were not within the law. They proceeded irregularly and revolutionarily. (...) The liberal government succeeded in having the unions act within the law, submitted to it, and that the workers and farmers have since then become jealous of the full enforcement of existing labor laws, instead of being its adversaries. (...) To have convinced the employers and workers, the representatives of capital and labor, that they could directly discuss their conflicts, and that they were in no way the agents of two social classes in conflict, but those with common interests in the prosperity of their companies, was certainly not easy (...). (El Espectador, 1942).

As noted in the previous quotation, one of the purposes of governmental action was to resolve and stabilize the relations between workers and businessmen, thus contributing to the existence of an environment conducive to growth and economic modernization. In this context, it was essential to translate these objectives into existing legislation. Hence arose the need to implement labor reform.

Thus, after the attempted coup of 1944, Lopez decided to present congress with a draft legislation on that subject. At that time, there existed, both in the senate and in the chamber, an environment of solidarity a little more favorable towards the Government, mainly within the liberals. This situation was used by the president to get approval for his last two reforms, the constitutional reform of 1945 in addition to the labor reform discussed here. In any case, this temporary relative favorability was not enough to ease the existing context of confrontation. That is why, faced with the threat of this confrontation becoming practically a civil war, López decided to resign definitively before congress in the middle of 1945<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup> In fact, since the attempted coup in July of 1944, the left and the unions assumed a more belligerent attitude in defence of the government and confrontations began to appear in different cities between them and groups from the opposition.

## **THE IMPLEMENTATION OF LABOR LEGISLATION. THE CENTRAL ELEMENTS OF THE REFORM**

After the attempted coup of July 10, 1944, the government, backed up by the extraordinary powers of the state of emergency, enacted two temporary labor decrees<sup>15</sup>, 1778 and 2350 of 1944. Decree 1778 temporarily prohibited strikes as being incompatible with the declaration of a state of emergency and established in their place compulsory arbitration. Already Decree 2350 advanced a set of regulations on the struggle for demands to give a response to the pressures from workers.

On the state of emergency and the temporary prohibition of strikes, a prohibition that would be eliminated later with the enactment of labor reform, Lopez justified its implementation by the difficult political and economic situation of the moment. Specifically, he said:

The government proceeds with the certainty that if the state of siege was lifted before there are provisions that regulate, in an orderly, prudent and efficient manner, the relations between capital and labor, and without the administrative authorities having been able to contain the rising cost of necessary products, unprecedented social unrest, a wave of strikes and disorder would be unleashed, which has been prevented by the provisional measures indicated (. . .). (El Tiempo, 1944)

In the words of the same president, the new labor legislation that was proposed by the Government at that time had as its purpose:

To offer the country a statute that solves existing or potential conflicts, many of which come from years ago, embittering and uselessly complicating, due to a deficiency of the law, the relationships of employers and subordinates. The existing laws are insufficient, contradictory, and ineffective in preventing such conflicts, and so do not lead toward outcomes of justice, except with exasperating slowness. (El Tiempo, 1944)

As can be seen from these words, one of the main goals of the government with the labor reform was to complete the institutionalization of labor conflicts by establishing resolution mechanisms, through mediation and government regulation.

Decree 2350 was temporary, because it was issued based on the powers of the state of emergency. Therefore, it had a time limit on its validity. This is why the content of this norm was presented as a bill to congress. Once the discussion process was completed, this bill was approved as Law 6 of 1945, which established the labor reform. The main objectives of this reform were the development of mechanisms for the regulation and institutionalization of trade unions and workers' mobilizations and the recognition of a set of demands and rights of the workers that had been claimed by them since the end of the 1920s.

When reviewing the minutes of the discussion contained in several of the Annals of the Senate of 1944, it is observed that several modifications were introduced to the original bill presented by the government. These changes limit the reach of the labor rights originally set out in the government's proposal and also provide for greater restrictions on the right to strike (Senate, 1944, 1945).

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<sup>15</sup> These two decrees were only in force during the time of the state of emergency.

Law 6 of 1945 institutionalizes the existence of an organized union within a company, better known as grassroots union or a company union. This type of union organization would be the legitimate subject through which the protest movements could express their different aspirations. The measure aimed to reduce the importance of union federations (such as the CTC), transferring the discussion of demands to the organizations of each particular company. In this way, the reform grants the power of collective bargaining and the direction of strikes, preferentially, to the unions of each company, to the detriment of the union federations.

In this way, the reform weakened the capacity for action of the strongest and most dynamic groups existing at the time, such as the National Federation of River, Maritime, Port and Air Transport Workers (Fedenal, by its acronym in Spanish) and the single confederation, the CTC. The norm also allowed the interference of non-unionized workers in the declaration of a strike and extended the sectors considered as "public service".

In this sense, federations could not submit lists of demands if there existed grassroots or company unions. With this the state wanted to avoid the politicization of the workers' struggle, a politicization which was more possible at the level of these union federations than at the level of each particular union. There was thus an attempt to exclude these (the federations) from negotiations during the development of labor disputes.

The bill presented by the Lopez government (Decree 2350 of 1944) established the union jurisdiction for the founders and members of the board of directors of the unions. Already in the process of discussion in congress, the scope of this initiative, which would favor the strengthening of trade union organization, was restricted. The law finally approved, recognized this jurisdiction, but established a system by which it could be unrecognized. This system later became an instrument that would be used by businessmen to thus, be able to exclude the most combative leaders from the movements (Moncayo & Rojas, 1979, p. 63).

In the labor reform implemented by Law 6, union parallelism is prohibited, that is, the existence of more than one union within the same company. This measure aimed to avoid a common practice of the time, which consisted of the formation, by employers, of parallel unions favorable to their interests. These parallel organizations weakened the struggle of workers affiliated with the original union that promoted strikes and mobilizations (Giraldo, 1994, p. 100) The reform stipulates that, if there is more than one union in the company, the one with the largest number of affiliates persists.

In the original draft, it was pointed out that the declaration of a strike was within the power of the unions, regardless of the proportion of workers of the company they contained. In the text of the law that was finally approved, this power is restricted. It establishes that if the union does not have as affiliates at least half of the total of all the workers in the company, a strike would only be legitimate if it was declared by half plus one of the total workers of the firm.

Law 6 restricts the right to strike in those organizations that provide a public service. According to article 50 of the norm, they are considered public services, in addition to public administration and the judicial body, "land, water and air transportation

companies, and water, electricity and telecommunications companies (...) public hygiene, public sanitation, and welfare institutions such as hospitals, clinics, asylums and hospices. " Also "milk plants, marketplaces and slaughterhouses belonging to public entities". The latter were not considered in the original bill and were added during the discussion of the bill in Congress.

The scope of the restriction on the right to strike in public service companies is explained in article 51. This indicates that these entities "cannot suspend or stop work except by permission from the government, or by giving notice to the latter six months in advance ...". When a strike occurs in an organization defined by the norm as "public service," whether it is private or not, "the government is authorized to assume its management and take all necessary measures to re-establish suspended services and ensure their maintenance "(Article 52). This means that if a strike is approved and carried out in a public service entity, the state may even replace private managers (in the case of a non-state company) and develop all necessary measures to resume continuity of the service interrupted by the protest. This power, granted to the state by Law 6, practically implies the prohibition of strikes in any entity that provides a public service, be it of a state or private nature (Moncayo & Rojas, 1979, p.73).

In addition to the aspects related to the regulation of trade unionism, Law 6 of 1945 introduces for the first time in Colombian legislation several advanced elements on labor regulation, workers' rights and the social obligations of employers. These aspects meant an important advance in the existing labor standards of the time.

These elements begin in paragraph 1 of the third article where it is stated that "hours of work may not exceed eight hours a day nor forty-eight a week ...". However, in the case of livestock activities, these maximum hours will be nine hours a day or fifty-four a week. The limitation does not apply to agricultural activities or to domestic service.

Paragraph 3 of the aforementioned article regulates the payment of overtime. Thus, "when work is performed between eight and twelve o'clock at night, it must be paid with twenty-five percent on top of the value of day work; and when it is done between midnight and four o'clock the next morning, it will be paid fifty percent on top of the same value. "

Article 4 indicates that the government may establish by decree the minimum wages for any economic region or any professional, industrial, commercial, livestock or agricultural activity in accordance with the cost of living, the working methods, the systems of remuneration or the economic capacity of the businesses. These decrees may be issued before commissions in which employers and workers are represented in equal numbers.

Law 6, in article 5 prohibits wage differentials based on "sex, age, religion, political opinion or trade union activities". It also prohibits employers from "imposing on workers any religious, political or electoral obligations" or impeding the exercise of the right to vote. In paragraph 1 of the same article, the law also prohibits the payment of wages in kind. The reform also establishes the obligation to pay Sundays and public holidays to the worker.

In relation to employers' social obligations, the reform states that they must guarantee workers medical, pharmaceutical, surgical and hospital care in case of illness or accidents in the workplace. When the illness is non-professional and outside the working environment, companies are obliged to pay assistance for up to one hundred and eighty days for proven incapacity equivalent to 75% of the salary during the first ninety days of absence and half for the remaining days (article 17). The norm also orders the payment of indemnities for occupational illness or accidents during the working day, work incapacity for up to eighty days and the right to paid annual leave for fifteen days (article 12).

In article 14 the law establishes the right to retirement for all workers who are fifty years of age after twenty years of continuous or discontinuous service. It also provides the invalids pension for an "employee or worker who has lost his ability to work in any occupation or trade" (article 17). Similarly, article 12 gives companies the obligation to pay for each year of work in the case of permanent workers, and every three years for non-permanent workers, monetary assistance intended to cover the needs of the employee when he is laid-off (payment of layoffs).

Law 6 recognized the employment contract as an autonomous legal entity and the legal predominance of the written contract. It also favored mechanisms for the negotiation of workers' petitions. Regarding the institutional organization of social security, the norm authorized in article 18, the creation of the Social Security Fund for National Employees and Workers. This institution would be formally created in 1946 with the name of the Colombian Institute of Social Insurance.

The labor reform created the Special Labor Jurisdiction. The purpose of this jurisdiction was to decide on "disputes arising, directly or indirectly, from the execution of the employment contract between employers and employees, between employees only, between professional associations of employers and employees, or between employees and their professional associations (...)"(article 58). It will be exercised on a permanent basis through the Labor Courts, the Sectional Labor Courts and the Supreme Labor Court as the final instance of decision (Article 59). The creation of this jurisdiction constituted an additional effort by the state to institutionalize the peaceful resolution of labor disputes.

Although labor reform established mechanisms for the state control of union activity, employers generally disagreed with those measures that benefited workers. They argued that these measures would mean an increase in labor costs and therefore a decrease in their profits. This situation led to greater opposition from these businessmen and, thus, to increased pressure on the government (Giraldo, 1994, p. 101). This context of permanent and growing conflict led to the definitive resignation of the president in July 1945.

As mentioned above, the approval of labor reform in Congress was made possible by several factors. The atmosphere of solidarity with the government among the liberal majority after the attempted coup, the pressure of the unions and as a form of compensation for the government's acceptance of Law 100 of 1944 on agrarian issues. In the Congress of that time there was an important representation of the big landowners and that was why there was this compensation.

Those aspects of the reform that favored workers could be interpreted as a way for the president to reciprocate for the permanent support for his government by these and their unions (Molina 1986, 170). This support, along with that of the liberal left and that of the Communist Party, was fundamental to halting the coup attempt of July 1944. Nevertheless, it is also true that within a conception of modern society such as the one that López wanted to implement for the Colombian case, the granting of labor rights and the establishment of employers' social obligations was important within it. Therefore, labor reform, like the other reforms implemented by López, was in part a consequence of the intention to modernize Colombian society. expressed as from his first administration between 1934 and 1938.

## **CONCLUSIONS: THE BALANCE OF THE LABOR POLICY AND REFORM IMPLEMENTED BY LÓPEZ PUMAREJO**

The policy and labor reform applied during the two administrations of Alfonso López Pumarejo had as a main objective the modernization of the relations between workers and employers, as well as the creation of labor institutionality that allowed the establishment of mechanisms of state regulation of trade unions and labor movements.

In this way, the state sought to channel the protests of workers along the path of institutionality, wanting to avoid confrontation and polarization. The purpose was to contribute to an environment of labor stability that would favor economic growth, the development and modernization of the economy and industrialization, pillars of the president's intended reforms. From a governmental perspective, "the union's mission is to foster an environment of understanding with companies, and thus cooperation in order to achieve effective industrial development for the benefit of the Colombian economy" (Minister of Labor, 1945, page 382).

It also sought to contain the atmosphere of protest and permanent conflict among workers during the 1920s. Precisely the fear of a radicalization due to the proximity between left-wing sectors, trade unions and the state led to important sectors of the economic and political elite of the moment trying to break away from the proximity present in the Lopez government (Archila 1991: 36).

The modernization of labor relations, in addition to the institutionalization of workers mobilizations, also implied the recognition of a set of workers' rights and the establishment of the social obligations of employers. These rights had until then been denied by the different governments, a situation that had generated the emergence of violent protests in different regions of the country.

The president sought to create mechanisms for negotiation and the resolution of conflicts between workers and employers. From the governmental perspective, the increasing industrial productivity observed since the mid-1930s would make possible an increase in real wages (Kalmanovitz, 2003, p.359). This increase would stimulate an increase in domestic consumption that would favor the growth of industrial production. The achievement of these aims would in general allow an improvement in labor relations in companies and the non-radicalization of conflicts within organizations.

López sought support from the workers for his political project of the modernization of the Colombian economy and society, in order to face the opposition of sectors such as

landowners, the Conservative Party and the Catholic Church. One of the instruments used to channel this support was the state stimulus to the mobilization of the population in the cities and the creation of unions. The controlled creation of trade union organizations also served as an instrument for regulating labor and social movements.

The industrialists at first considered the alliance between the state and the unions as useful. From 1937, however, the limitations of industrial development that led to a stagnation of productivity and the profit rate, coupled with the fear of a radicalization of that alliance in the presence of the Communists, caused this sector to withdraw its support of the proximity between the Lopez government and the left.

In general, the governments of the second liberal republic, chiefly the two of President López, achieved greater regulation of trade unions and workers' protests than the conservative regime that existed until 1930. However, that tutelage was not complete and absolute. For this reason, despite the existence of mutual support among the Lopez government and the unions and the urban workers, this did not imply the disappearance of the social contradiction and therefore of the strikes as mechanisms of pressure.

During his second administration, President López tried to maintain a complex balance between the demands of the workers and the interests of businessmen. Given the conflictive political context and the economic difficulties of the moment, the government could not clearly support the workers, as it generally had during the first administration between 1934 and 1938. Despite this reality, the left in general, the Communist Party, socialists, trade unions and the liberal left never withdrew their political support for Lopez Pumarejo. In fact, it was the only sector that continued to support the president at the time of his final resignation.

The conception of the labor policy of Alfonso López was expressed in the reform implemented through Law 6 of 1945. This law was the basis of the first Labor Code. In it here were elements favorable to workers, such as the recognition of a set of rights, the establishment of collective contracting and union protection. However, it also sought to strengthen the state's tutelage and regulation over trade unions. This further limited the right to strike. It also favored the development of grassroots or company unionism rather than trade unions in the industrial sector and union confederations (Archila, 1991: p. 347).

As with land reform, in labor reform Lopez adopted an intermediary position between the interests of workers and employers. He satisfied the interests of the latter by establishing greater mechanisms of state oversight of the protest movements and the declaration and conduct of strikes. And it also satisfied the workers by granting a set of rights and prerogatives that did not exist until that moment and that they had been requesting for many years. These prerogatives contemplated in the labor reform constituted an important advance in Colombian labor legislation.

Between 1934 and 1945 the working class was still in the process of building its identity. The attraction and sympathy generated among the urban workers by President López' discourse and reform intentions "left an indelible mark on the Colombian working class" (Archila 1991: p. 309). This social class found in the liberal state an endorsement to make their demands heard. The growing polarization that existed at that

time influenced the support of the workers, and of the left in general, for the administration of the two governments of López Pumarejo

Despite the increase in the mechanisms of state regulation of trade union activity, Law 6 of 1945 is nowadays recognized by the unions as a "historic agreement" of workers with the government of López Pumarejo, through which trade unionism was able to "gather and secure in a text with the force of law the demands that the workers had raised and achieved through their struggles of more than twenty years" (Escuela Nacional Sindical, 2010, page 5). This is why "the first government of Alfonso López will be remembered by generations of workers as the most favorable for the class" (Archila, 1991, p. 297). Even considering its limitations, observed from a historical perspective, the reform implemented during the second Lopez administration constitutes the most progressive and socially advanced labor legislation in the history of Colombia.

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