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**LIBERALISM, WORKING-CLASS FORMATION AND HISTORICAL
MEMORY: DOCKWORKERS IN A COLOMBIAN FRONTIER**

By

LEON ARREDONDO

A dissertation submitted to the graduate faculty in Anthropology in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of
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Abstract

LIBERALISM, WORKING-CLASS FORMATION AND HISTORICAL
MEMORY: DOCKWORKERS IN A COLOMBIAN FRONTIER

By

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Adviser: Professor Marc Edelman

This dissertation is an analysis of the process of working-class formation in the Colombian frontier town of Puerto Berrío. It explores the impact of frontier conditions on gender relations and household formation, considers the diverse working communities that developed in urban and rural areas, and focuses on the significance of political identity. Based on archival research and oral history, the study considers the ways in which some events are remembered or not.

Puerto Berrío, located on the Magdalena River, emerged as a transportation hub connecting Antioquia, Colombia's coffee heartland, with river transportation and world markets. During the first decades of the twentieth century, the port attracted migrants from different parts of the country with diverse cultural and political traditions that included Liberalism and communism. They labored in numerous occupations with varied working conditions such as subsistence production, wage employment in haciendas, occupations in the informal economy, and dock work. Within this diverse world of labor, dockworkers emerged as a leading sector and enjoyed a high social status. The dissertation traces the creation of the Sindicato de

Braceros Portuarios, the dockworkers' union, and cultural practices, such as the annual celebrations of the Virgin of Carmen, the union's patron, through which dockworkers expressed their status.

The impact of frontier conditions can be more directly observed in the type of domestic arrangements that workers created. Periodic migration in search of work translated into a constant process of household dissolution and reconstitution. At the same time, the mostly single male dockworkers that concentrated in the town met their daily needs not in households, but in the large informal economy that evolved.

These diverse working communities were integrated through the political language of Liberalism. The workers' appropriation of the discourse of the modernizing elite culminated in their support for Jorge Eliécer Gaitán. Memories of the armed revolt that took place in response to Gaitán's assassination and those of a major strike in 1945 reflect the impact of violent repression and persecution during the second half of the twentieth century in the creation of particular historical narratives.

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Chapter One

Introduction

In the center of Puerto Berrío is the Workers' Square (Parque Obrero). The main feature of this square is a full size statute of a dockworker standing on a base which contains on its four sides depictions of other areas of work where non-dockers labor: navigation, agricultural work, fishing, and cattle haciendas. There are many possible meanings attached to this monument. One could read that in its depiction of major areas of work, it is a celebration of working-class labor or that it celebrates the bountiful frontier and all its opportunities. Regardless, it is clear that the Workers' Square monument conveys the significance of working-class history and culture in the region of Puerto Berrío. Moreover, with the dockworker's imposing presence rising from these other areas of work, the monument signifies the particular kinds of relationships created within various sectors of the working class. It suggests and is symbolic and material evidence of the dominance of dockworkers over other working-class communities.

With its equally imposing presence, a larger than life statue of Liberal president, Enrique Olaya Herrera (1930-1934) stands in the central square next to the Workers' Square. These monuments keep alive a tradition and time period of central significance for the making of the Colombian nation and for the role of working classes in that process. In contrast to other time periods, men and women remembering the first half of the twentieth century, and the 1930s and 1940s in particular, passionately recall the names of Liberal presidents and political leaders.

Olaya Herrera, Alfonso López Pumarejo, Jorgue Eliecer Gaitán, among others, are vividly remembered and discussed.

Colombian working-class formation was closely related to the politics of the Liberal party. Industrialization, urbanization, and Colombia's integration into world markets during the first decades of the twentieth century gave rise to new social classes. The legacy of the ways in which these classes formed and integrated into the national formation continues to shape the history of the nation. In contrast to many other Latin American countries where lower and middle classes developed their own political parties, in Colombia working classes failed to create their autonomous political representation. Instead, their interests were articulated through the two traditional political parties, and primarily through the Liberal party. Thus, the significance of a historical memory articulated around names such as Olaya Herrera, López Pumarejo, and Jorgue Eliecer Gaitán.

This dissertation is an analysis of the emergence of new working classes in an expanding Colombian frontier, the process of labor organization and community formation, and the political articulation of workers' world view. I approach these processes from the perspective of workers' experiences and consider the national implications from the perspective of local developments. I will show here that the process of labor organization in the frontier context of the river-port city of Puerto Berrío is related to the process of community formation. Two important aspects of this frontier context are that diverse migrant communities of agricultural workers, peasants, and miners competed for control of local resources, and that this process was shaped by the lack of state regulation. Out of the ensuing process of

differentiation dock work emerged as a central field of conflict and dockworkers as the leading working-class sector and a sort of local labor elite. This was partly the result of labor's growing control over the labor process as dockworkers sought to define, control, and coordinate the supply of labor to the growing shipping industry through the transformation of casual employment into a formal labor market. Changes in the labor process and processes of differentiation were promoted by an intense cultural elaboration a central aspect of which was workers' adherence to the ideology of Liberalism. With this ideology workers attempted not only to legitimize their position but also to articulate a working-class culture to bring together the diverse working-class sectors and to integrate them into the national political landscape. Public monuments in Puerto Berrío's squares are, then, telling testimonies of the particular working-class culture that developed.

Puerto Berrío

Inhabited historically by people of African and indigenous descent, Puerto Berrío in the last quarter of the nineteenth century received waves of migrants from the highlands and coastal plains, becoming a region of great cultural and ethnic diversity. As strategic link between river and railroad transportation, and as a site of urban expansion owed to the growing presence of workers, the port became Antioquia's gateway and its most important city after Medellín during the first half of the twentieth century (see map B.1 and table 1.1). The important economic role of the region and the migrations into the port produced by violent processes of social dislocation continue to place the city at the center of major national processes.

Table 1.1.

Population of Puerto Berrío: 1905-1973

Year	Men	Women	Total
1905	2,414	1,664	4,078
1912	2,567	1,944	4,511
1918	3,869	2,798	6,667
1928	7,352	4,752	12,104
1938	10,532	7,527	18,059
1951	9,077	7,022	16,099
1964	14,003	13,278	27,281
1973	13,369	13,430	26,799

Source: DANE, p. 75-81.

From Medellín, Puerto Berrío can be reached by car, train, and airplane. As one descends the Cordillera Central, the thick-forested slopes give way to the open valley of the Magdalena river. A day-long train ride takes passengers through some of the oldest settlements and stations created during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This is now the least reliable and cheapest form of transportation. With access to two different roads which are paved for most of their length, hourly bus service provides an eight- or six-hour trip. One of these roads uses the Medellín-Bogotá highway opened in 1983, serving as a pull factor for the colonization and clearing of lands on the mountain slopes. Much of this colonization involved drug traffickers' accumulation of large landed properties (Medina Gallego 1990). Future

road construction, which will greatly improve transportation between the port and Medellín and other main cities, is part of national development plans to create a better roads system by using the Magdalena river valley, thereby facilitating commercial transportation within the country and between Colombia and Venezuela. Finally, public and private employees on business travel can choose among the two more expensive thirty-five minute daily flights between the port and Medellín. Less frequent bus service connects the port to other main cities such as Bogotá and to towns in the region. Much transportation activity also takes place by water, where a handful of small companies provide service to towns along the river.

These descriptions make it difficult to sustain an image of this frontier as a marginal place. The various forms of transportation are in fact suggestive of the many ways in which the region has integrated to core areas. They are also indicative of ways in which economic and social processes have shaped the region and the organization of urban space.

The Magdalena river flows in a northward direction and separates the departments of Antioquia and Santander. Puerto Berrío is clustered along the west bank of the river with some outlying villages located along the roads and railroad that reach the port from the west. The central area of the port is dominated by the two main squares described above. The tall and thick trees of the Parque Olaya Herrera provide plenty of shade for the people in transit through the port or on business at the seat of the local government; employees and politicians in informal gatherings and street vendors also enjoy the shade. Facing the municipal building on the west side of the central square stands the statute of Olaya Herrera. The south side of the square has

a bust of Simón Bolívar facing one of the oldest buildings, which was formerly where government offices were located and is now occupied by offices of the XIV Military Brigade. The southeast corner leads to a small hill where the XIV Military Brigade is located in what was formerly the Hotel Magdalena. One of the largest buildings in the port, this hotel remains the main symbol of wealth and prestige of the time period when the life of the port revolved around river transportation. The local library, railroad offices, and a bar face the east side. The square is surrounded on the north side by offices of bus companies and cafeterias. A large portion of this side was occupied by the Olaya Herrera theater, another landmark from the same time period as the hotel. The theater was recently demolished to construct a several stories high commercial center for retail stores and a financial center, soon to be the headquarters for almost all the banks of the port. A sculpture of a woman surrounded by animals and plants, a common monument found in Antioquia's towns and which celebrates nature's bounty and fertility in the expanding frontier, can also be seen in the center of the square. Next to this monument, and as a reminder of the significance of railroad transportation, is a recently installed locomotive.

The northwest corner of the central square or Parque Olaya Herrera leads to the Workers' Square, a large open area that includes a small playing area used for soccer, basketball, and other public events. There is also a large atrium and the port's main church as well as the above noted workers' monument.

There are about four blocks from the squares to the river. This is the oldest part of the port. This section, plus about five additional blocks along the river, is where most of the commercial activity of the port takes place. The area is occupied

mostly by restaurants, hotels, bars, clothing stores, *proveedoras*,¹ and all sorts of businesses from stone work and coffin making to national and international communication services. The streets closer to the river contain sections with street stands that provide all sorts of repair work and prepared foods. The area outside of this commercial section is made up mainly of residential units, most of them consisting of one floor houses made of cement and bricks. Further out, one can find neighborhoods in more precarious condition with dirt streets and houses constructed primarily of wood. Some of these neighborhoods originated from the recent arrivals of people fleeing from violence in rural areas. Reminiscent of the emblematic slogan of late nineteenth-century Latin American liberalism, one can also find large murals in the central part of the town depicting the National Army as a force bringing “order and progress” to the region.²

Puerto Berrío’s organization of space, public monuments, infrastructural construction projects, presence of the military, and new neighborhoods of people displaced from rural areas by violence reflect a long history of contentious politics. Two examples, discussed in more detail in latter chapters, highlight this history. First, while the dockworkers’ union was a major local institution during the 1930s and 1940s, the union lost its status in the 1950s and had effectively disappeared years before a handful of remaining dockworkers sold what was left of the union

¹*Proveedoras* is the local term used for food stores. These are the equivalent of a supermarket. They are generally small to medium family businesses that function at the same place of residence and provide food and all sorts of household supplies. In the 1990s, two large supermarkets opened. These are not referred to as *proveedoras*.

² This slogan can be found in many of the national symbols of the region’s countries. See for instance the Colombian shield or the Brazilian flag.

headquarters during the early 1970s. Second, while during the 1960s and 1970s the guerrilla organization FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) dominated the region and communist leaders controlled the local council, by the late 1980s the guerrilla presence and communist influence had been practically erased and Puerto Berrío had become one of two national centers of right-wing paramilitary activity. Through violent repression of social movements, forced disappearance, torture, and assassinations, the national army and paramilitary organizations physically erased the communist and popular movements (Comisión Andina de Juristas Seccional Colombiana 1993).

Conducting fieldwork in regions with ongoing conflicts presents a series of challenges that range from the mechanics of establishing one's presence in the region and the establishment of rapport with informants to the management of relations and alliances as a researcher may be moving among contending factions in highly charged political contexts (see Hale 1994). It is to be expected that the recent history of violent political repression in Puerto Berrío shaped this work in particular ways. Clearly, because the most radical elements have been assassinated, forced out of the port, or silenced, they are the least likely to be heard directly in the oral narratives I collected. Also, establishing connections in and visiting rural areas was difficult, and it was not until the final stages of my research that I was able to do so.

However, as Portelli (1991) found in Italian working-class narratives of historical events, mistakes, suppressions, distortions, and exaggerations are part of remembering and re-ordering history to give meaning to both past and present. From this perspective, the contradictions in people's recounting of events become sources

for exploring consciousness (Thompson 1988). The recent history of Puerto Berrío constitutes a central force shaping workers' narratives about history, politics, and themselves. When I first began fieldwork, I feared people would be reluctant to talk to me, let alone to talk about workers' movements and social struggles. I thus emphasized the "historical" nature of my study and told them that I was interested in learning about the history of Puerto Berrío. This immediately produced animated narrations about a golden age of abundance, large ships constantly arriving in the port, dockworkers, and "the zone" (the prostitution zone). Similarly, people freely discussed the violent history that took place following the "golden age." But, although when discussing the dramatic revolt that unfolded in 1948 in response to the assassination of Jorge Eliecer Gaitán, statements such as "everybody participated" were common, only in a very few cases did people discuss their actual role in those events. As conversations moved closer to the present, they would simply say "afterwards was when things turned bad." Few people offered any conversation or made references to the events that shaped life in recent decades. Some, however, talked about their sons who had been killed or daughters who had been forced out of the port. Others jokingly would say "nobody gets killed here now," while on one occasion, as it was getting dark and late, the old man with whom I was talking warned me to be careful on the way out and then in a very low voice recalled atrocities committed by the death squad organization Muerte a Secuestradores - MAS (Death to Kidnappers).

As Gould found among Nicaraguan *campesinos*, present concerns influence the construction of oral histories. Gould's informants tended to compare and contrast

the post-1979 present with the pre-revolutionary past. Campesino testimonies of their encounters with the Sandinistas during the 1920s and 1930s were recounted through the lens of the 1979 Sandinista revolution. Similarly, campesinos were not initially forthcoming with their brighter perspectives on the early years of the Somoza regime, which had been overshadowed by the regime's subsequent tyranny (Gould 1990: 9-10). In a similar way, we can expect that workers' memories of communism in Puerto Berrío are influenced by present concerns resulting from military and paramilitary oppression. The violent response at mid-century against organized labor and Liberal reforms is another element that tends to create idealized memories of a peaceful and united past.

This dissertation explores the continuities and changes in the history of working-class politics. Part I is a discussion of the frontier concept through the examination of the Mid-Magdalena river region, where Puerto Berrío is located, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. After considering the region as a whole, we will discuss the emergence of Puerto Berrío as a vital transportation link for Antioquia, Colombia's coffee heartland and leading industrial center. Emphasis is placed on conditions of migration, work, gender relations, and social reproduction faced by the various working classes that participated in the formation of the port. Looking at dockworkers in the context of the region and the diverse working communities, which included hacienda laborers, railroad workers, colonists, workers in public works projects, and laborers in a myriad of informal occupations that migrants sought in the growing urban center, we can then see the particular status dockworkers achieved. Part II looks at dockworkers in particular and the processes

through which they became a leading sector of the working classes in the region. It does so by examining the emergence and consolidation of the dockworkers' union during the 1930-1950 time-period. It will also consider the importance of changes in the labor process and labor decasualization for the consolidation of the dockworkers' movement. The section ends with a look at the Magdalena river workers' strike of 1945 which disrupted the export economy. Part III focuses on the significance of Liberalism for working-class culture and on how the national elite responses to the emergence of these new classes shaped oppositional and leftist politics during the second half of the twentieth century. The final section of this chapter outlines the approach I am following for the study of working classes.

The Making of Working Classes

Particular forms of capitalist development outside Europe and the "failure" of the working classes to act in prescribed ways called into question an exclusively structural or evolutionary approach to working-class formation. Showing that the presence of capitalism is often associated with subcontracting and the combination of new technologies, old skills, and artisan production, rather than with a widespread expansion of wage labor and the replacement of old skills by new technologies, several works challenged an earlier emphasis on the homogenizing character of capitalist development (Reddy 1984; Samuel 1977; Wolf 1982).

Taking into account the nature of capitalist development outside Europe and North America, Hanagan and Stephenson (1984) highlight three characteristics of industrialization in non-core countries shaping the development of the working class

in specific ways. Sectors undergoing industrialization in non-core countries are more isolated from the national economy and dependent on foreign capital than those in core countries. In addition, in non-core countries, the rural conditions producing proletarianization are more immediately the result of legal enactments and national-level politics (*ibid.*, 9). The implications of these characteristics, Hanagan and Stephenson continue, are that the proletarianized labor force is concentrated in a few large industries producing for a world market. Excluding investment in long-term capital-intensive assets, the pattern of core investment, non-core capitalist expansion occurs mainly in the exploitation of natural resources and plantation agriculture characterized by “boom-bust” cycles of development and the “instability” of the labor force. The result is constant relocation of workers from declining industries to growing ones or to agriculture. Finally, the state’s active role in the process of proletarianization has translated into politicized rural populations and the powerful influence of rural political movements on working-class politics (*ibid.*, 9-11).

This characterization contrasts the extensive development of domestic industry and artisan production in Europe before industrialization with their weaker presence or early destruction in non-core countries. Merchants’ inroads into simple-commodity production and the long-term decline of rural industry meant that the already proletarianized labor force joining the industrial proletariat had little chance to maintain a position in rural industry. This process points to the significance of artisans as a main social force resisting industrialization in Europe. While it may be the case that, compared to Europe, artisan production in non-core countries was not as extensive, it is also true that core regions of pre-Columbian civilizations in Latin

America continued to exhibit strong artisan traditions during the colonial period and into the twentieth century. Similarly, artisans were in several cases a significant influence shaping the politics of the first workers generations (see Sowell 1992). In contrast to Europe, however, wage labor in non-core countries was often combined with labor in petty commodity production or non-capitalist modes of production on which workers relied in times of crisis. The intense debates of the 1960s and 1970s on modes of production in Latin America serve precisely to point to the diverse social formations emerging from the encounter of labor with global markets and capital. While these debates tried to fit complex realities into rigid typologies, some of the resulting studies show the combination of old and new skills, wage labor, petty production, and peasant production that often accompanied capitalist expansion.³

As Hanagan and Stephenson point out, this structural background to industrialization helps explain the general direction of political influence. Whereas in Europe, artisans were at the forefront of resistance and urban movements were more likely to have had an impact on rural politics, in non-core countries rural political movements had a greater impact on working-class politics. Yet, processes of working-class formation and politics need to be examined in the context of the particular social, cultural, and historical trajectories of the people that constitute the

3 For some of the key works on modes of production see Dobb, "The Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism;" Sweezy, "The Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism;" Foster-Carter, "The Modes of Production Controversy." Regarding the application of this framework in Latin America see Assadourian, *Modos de Producción en América Latina*; Cardoso, "On the Colonial Modes of Production of the Americas;" Quintero Rivera, "Background to the Emergence of Imperialist Capitalism in Puerto Rico." Examples of field studies include Cook, *Zapotec Stoneworkers: The Dynamics of Rural Simple Commodity Production in Modern Mexican Capitalism*; Scott, "Peasants, Proletarianization and the Articulation of Modes of Production: The Case of Sugar-Cane Cutters in Northern Peru, 1940-69;" Smith, "Socio-Economic Differentiation and Relations of Production Among Rural Based Petty Producers in Central Peru, 1880-1970." For reappraisals of the modes of production concept see Cook, "Production, Ecology, and Economic Anthropology: Notes Toward an Integrated Frame of Reference;" Roseberry, *Anthropologies and Histories*, chapter 6; Wolf, *Europe and the People Without History*, chapter 3.

working classes.

With an emphasis on the diverse forms of capitalist penetration into handicraft production and the active role of pre-capitalist traditions, values, and communities as sources for working class resistance to industrialization, E. P. Thompson's (1963) study of the English working class established a perspective on working-class politics based on workers' historical traditions and an approach to the past as an active force shaping consciousness. However, given the particular forms of capitalist development in Latin America and the emergence of communities as "capitalist precipitates," Roseberry (1989) presents a more complex approach to proletarian consciousness. In this approach the past can become a source of both positive and negative evaluations of the industrial experience. Moreover, in their creation of community and political consciousness, emerging working classes often rely on political discourses emanating from expanding states. Nash's (1979) study of Bolivian miners highlights the need to move away from dichotomies that would, for instance, present the past as an obstacle to change or view forms of resistance as an essential critique of capitalism. She argues for the need to view working class formation and politics as the result of specific historical circumstances. Her approach takes into account a structural analysis of dependency while looking at workers at home, and work, and in communities, unions, and history. In this case, Nash argues, the strength of miners' identity with pre-conquest beliefs intersects with modern political ideologies and provides the basis for self-determination and the maintenance of community. Related studies by historians also seek to bring agency to bear on the structural analysis of labor in Latin America, examining processes outside of the union hall and imbuing

social history with a concern for power (French and James 1997; Chomsky and Lauria-Santiago 1998).

Following Roseberry's and Nash's lead, this analysis of working-class politics in Colombia takes into account the circumstances produced by particular forms of capitalist development, the ways in which traditions and modern ideologies intersect in the maintenance or creation of community, and workers' experiences at work and outside of the work place.

The "boom-bust" cycles of development, the dependence on foreign capital and international markets, and the emphasis on the exploitation of agricultural and natural resources bring special significance to the issue of frontiers in the process of proletarianization in Latin America. Labor historians have looked at the formation of the working class primarily in large urban centers and in countries such as Argentina, Mexico, and Brazil, all of which had comparatively extensive industrial development. But, in addition to the growth of urban industry, capitalist expansion is most commonly associated with extractive industries and the production of agricultural commodities in hinterlands and new areas of settlement and colonization. In this context, I use the concept of frontier to refer to those regions characterized by the expansion of capitalist relations of production amidst the presence of non-capitalist social formations and relations of production. These are areas poorly integrated into the institutional framework of their respective nations and are viewed as lacking cultural legitimacy. From this perspective frontiers are not only social and economic spaces but also ideological constructions.

A great deal of anthropological research takes place, in fact, in frontier regions

and shows the significance of labor transience and a wider range of alternatives to wage employment for the surfacing of specific forms of domestic arrangements, sexual division of labor, gender relations, and politics. Studies of Andean working communities have shown the limitations of disaggregating social relations of production from the entire process of social reproduction. As Smith (1989: 158) found among the Huasincanchinos, social reproduction implies investment in cultural and political resources and necessarily includes cultural and political struggles. In addition, social reproduction is shaped by household dynamics and their differential trajectories, which are molded by the fate of the particular sectors of the economy into which they are integrated (*ibid.*, 13).

One of the salient conditions affecting the developmental cycle of households in Puerto Berrío was the periodic migration created by the boom and bust cycles of various economic sectors. Each migration in search of new jobs created challenges for the stability of households. In contrast to most workers in the region, dockworkers enjoyed a level of job stability that should have enabled them to create more stable households. Yet, they tended to be single males who met their daily subsistence needs in the informal economy rather than the household. In the same way that variation in household compositions provides clues to the complexity of Huasicancha political history, the analysis of variation in conditions of reproduction among the working peoples of Puerto Berrío should help illuminate political processes.

Babb and Smith approach households as a complex and changing set of relations that mobilize commoditized and non-commoditized relations in the process of making a living. In these cases households are multi-occupational enterprises with

a great deal of variability and which exist within a field that combines capitalist and non-capitalist forms of production. For instance, Babb (1989) argues that the market women she analyzes play a role in articulating capitalist and non-capitalist modes of production. Given the transience of labor and the significance of the local informal economy in Puerto Berrío, the questions raised by Babb are central. In using the concept of informal economy, I do not mean to imply a static or marginal economic sector. Following Babb's (ibid., 49-50) cautions against these pitfalls, I discuss gender differentiation, the growth of the informal economy, and "commercialized house work" as central to labor reproduction in the context of ongoing migratory movements, and thus to the economy in general.

While the factory experience in emerging industrial production is often associated with the employment predominantly of women and the emergence of paternalistic ideologies, in expanding frontiers, formal employment is generally open only to men while women are relegated to informal economic sectors. This is a pattern found in Puerto Berrío, where single male migrants sought employment in public works projects, cattle haciendas, or the dockyards and women worked in petty trade, services, bars, and brothels. I am concerned with the ways in which a new sexual division of labor transformed gender relations; with the kinds of networks, families, and households that emerged; and with the ways in which these developments shaped working-class formation and politics.

The emergence of a working class in Puerto Berrío was also closely related to the coming to power of the Liberal party in 1930 and the period of leadership by the dockworkers movement coincided with the decade and a half of Liberal governments.

A greater understanding of workers' culture and mobilization in the Magdalena valley must look beyond local processes to the interactions of workers' actions and political discourses with state discourses and institutions.

Colombian Liberalism

In its most general sense, the term "liberalism" is used today to describe a social philosophy that favors social change and individual rights and choices. Thus, it is often equated with tolerance for social and cultural diversity. As an economic policy and under the name of neo-liberalism, the term is also associated with the unregulated advance of foreign industries in Latin America. My discussion concerns workers' appropriation and transformation of an elite-liberal discourse into a working-class liberalism during the first half of the twentieth century. Colombian elite liberalism resembles the development of what is now referred to as classical liberalism.

The political ideas that guided the English Glorious Revolution (1688), the Revolutionary War in America (1775-1783), and the French Revolution (1789-1799) were a central influence on the consolidating creole elites in Latin America. These elites fought against Spanish monarchical rule, for government by consent, and for the expansion of individual rights. However, they excluded most other social sectors from access to these rights. This political liberalism was closely related to the economic liberalism articulated by Adam Smith. These trends coalesced into what is now referred to as classical nineteenth-century liberalism which promoted the expansion of free markets and argued against government economic regulation.

Liberalism underwent a major shift in the twentieth century, as liberals argued in favor of government regulation of the economy in the public interest. This shift was related to the growth of the welfare state for the promotion of economic security and individuals' realization of their rights. As noted above, during the second half of the twentieth century and during the age of globalization, neo-liberalism promotes the nineteenth century tenets of expansion of free markets in the absence of government regulation.

In the emerging nation of Colombia, liberalism coalesced in the Liberal Party and followed the broad patterns of nineteenth and early twentieth centuries liberal ideas. External and internal factors combined to produce the wars of independence. Napoleon Bonaparte's temporary take over of Spain in 1808 made evident to the Spanish colonies the weakness of the monarchy (Stein 1970). Creole elites, desiring greater political power, found the early nineteenth century a favorable time to launch successful wars of independence. In Bogotá, these elites declared formal independence in 1810. Seeking to limit the powers of the church and to expand the range of individual rights, the new government enacted a series of reforms in the spirit of nineteenth century liberalism. These included a manumission law by which children of slave mothers would go free when they reached a specified age; the elimination of Indian *resguardos*, Indian tribute, and the *alcabala* or colonial sale tax; the creation of direct taxation on income produced by land or capital; the declaration of Indians as equal citizens so that now they were subject to all the regular taxes; and the elimination and confiscation of assets of monasteries with fewer than eight members (Bushnell 1993: 52-54).

Although these elites were united in their struggle against monarchical rule, the pace of reform and the particular form of government divided them and led to continuous reforms, counter-reforms, and civil wars. The role of the Church, the character of the education system, and the choice between a centralist or federalist government were among the main issues of dispute. The contending factions aligned with one or the other of the two main figures of the independence movement. Simón Bolívar, who favored a centralized government and assumed dictatorial powers, enjoyed the support of the military, the clergy, and the traditional elites from Bogotá, Cartagena, and Popayán. Francisco de Paula Santander favored a federalist government and drew support from rising elites (*ibid.*, 66)

Conflicts between Bolívar and Santander represent in an early form the coming struggles between forces that coalesced in the Conservative and Liberal parties respectively. The War of the Supremes (1839-1842) solidified these political alignments. This war consisted of a series of regional rebellions in opposition to anticlerical laws. The victorious Conservative forces strengthened the national executive and slowed down the process of slave manumission. Moderate Santanderistas and Bolivarian factions coalesced in the Ministerial Party which later became the Conservative Party and Santanderistas, in opposition, coalesced in the Liberal Party giving birth to Colombia's two traditional political parties (*ibid.*, 92). Nevertheless, there was no easy distinction between Liberals and Conservatives, all of whom accepted republican institutions as a substitute for monarchical ones. Overall, the main distinction was one between free thinking, *laissez-faire*, and anti-statism on one hand, and hierarchy and authority on the other hand (Delpar 1981: 60-

66; Dix 1967: 245-248).

During the decade of the 1850s, Liberals gained control of the government and remained in power for most of the rest of the century. This period is what most closely resembles the notion of classical liberalism. The most significant laws of the early 1850s included the elimination of the state monopoly on tobacco, the distribution of Indian common lands or *resguardos*, which led to their elimination in most of the country except the southwest, and the abolition of slavery in 1852. The most significant political development was the writing of the Constitution of Rionegro in 1863 which created Los Estados Unidos de Colombia, formed by nine autonomous states. The political conflicts of the 1850s had a strong class content as artisans forcefully protested liberal reforms and sought state protection (Urrutia 1969: 25-29). In a regional study of Liberalism, Stoller (1991) shows how elite Liberals and artisans clashed over the definition of Liberalism and how this conflict cemented Liberal-Conservative differences.

Several export booms offset the lost of state revenue produced by the elimination of state monopolies. These booms rested on entrepreneurial investment at times of favorable internal conditions. In addition to gold, export booms of several tropical commodities were the basis of the export oriented economy before the consolidation of the coffee economy in the twentieth century. Tobacco was the main export product from mid-1850s to early 1880s. Quinine replaced tobacco as the main export product during the 1880s. In addition, two shorter booms in cotton and indigo took place but, as was the case with tobacco and quinine, once the favorable international market conditions had disappeared, Colombian entrepreneurs were

unable to maintain the same export levels. Tobacco production in places like the Dutch East Indies, quinine plantations in India and Southeast Asia, the return to normal conditions in the cotton trade after the end of the U.S. Civil War, and India's production of indigo all worked against the maintenance of sustained levels of export.

As the export economy entered in decline, a conservative reaction against the radical liberals took hold. This was lead by liberal, Rafael Núñez, from the Caribbean coast, who, with the support of conservative forces, reached the presidency and was interested in strengthening the central government. Núñez replaced the 1863 constitution with a new one in 1886 which remained in effect until 1991 when peace negotiations with guerrilla groups resulted in the drafting of a new one. The 1886 constitution put an end to federalism and created a centralized political organization with a strengthened executive. Until 1991, mayors were appointed by governors who were themselves appointed by the national president. The party in power had a total monopoly on executive power. Aimed at rolling back the enactments of the previous Liberal period, Núñez's reforms amounted in his view, to the "regeneration" of Colombia and were continued by the Conservative presidents that followed Núñez.

In a reaction against the Regeneration, Liberals rose in rebellion in several occasions but, it was not until 1899 when the most devastating of the nineteenth-century civil wars started. In late 1899, Liberal forces staged a rebellion that lead into a three-year civil war known as The War of the Thousand Days. Rafael Uribe Uribe and Benjamín Herrera were the main Liberal commanders of the war and became the central figures of the Liberal party during the following two decades. Liberal and Conservative elites grew concerned with the disruptive impact of the war on

production and trade. Although, the Liberals were not defeated militarily, the war came to an end with the signing of two treaties; one in the Atlantic Coast region, the other, The Treaty of the Wisconsin, off the coast of Panama, aboard a U.S. warship. The treaties offered protection to the Liberals but contained no promise of political or economic reform (Delpar 19: 187-188). In *No One Writes to the Colonel*, Garcia Marquez (1961) captures the fate of a Liberal leader. After the signing of the Treaty of Neerlandia, the Liberal colonel is condemned to poverty, exclusion from local sources of authority, and waiting for a government pension that never arrives.

The signing of this treaty aboard a U.S. warship was not coincidental. Negotiations for the construction of an interoceanic canal were under way during the war and U.S. troops had landed on Panama to protect the transit route across the isthmus. In August 1903, the Colombian congress rejected the Hay-Herrán treaty signed in September 1902 for the construction of the canal and which gave the United States direct and permanent control of the territory where the canal was to be built. Three months later, Panama's elite, favoring the construction of the canal, staged a revolution that successfully led to Panama's separation from Colombia. The extreme centralism of the Regeneration which had heightened Panama's desire to secede, U.S. military backing of the secessionists, and the impact of the War of the Thousand Days combined to facilitate the loss of Panama. With the misfortunes of war and the loss of Panama, Colombia entered the twentieth century and a period of Conservative Hegemony that was to last for the next three decades.

The political and military conflicts of the nineteenth century were not the expression of a confrontation between a rising liberal bourgeoisie and a feudal class.

These conflicts more often resulted from particular regional interests. Elite conflicts continued to reflect differences concerning the pace of reform, not radically divergent politics. In fact, as said earlier, there was no clear-cut difference in composition or economic and political policy between the two parties. Safford (1972) found that the leadership of both parties consisted of landowners, merchants, and professionals whose interests did not openly clash partly because the same individual was often landowner, merchant, and lawyer. Neither was the choice of a federalist government predominant in either party but preferred by factions out of power. With the Conservatives enjoying the support of the clergy, one of the most significant issue that differentiated the two parties was the status of the church.

However, an important regional difference existed between the parties. The Conservatives prevailed in the central regions of Bogotá, Popayán, and Cartagena, and in Antioquia and the Liberals in more peripheral areas such as the eastern provinces, the Atlantic coast, Valle del Cauca, and Choco. Broadly, the departments most isolated from industry, mining, and commerce, and most attached to ancient modes of agriculture, tend to be Conservative; the departments with important industrial and commercial centers, and peripheral areas, tend to be Liberal. Antioquia, a commercial and industrial center, constitutes an important exception. Nineteenth century isolationism and the powerful presence of the church contributed to Antioquia's conservatism. Yet, the department is also known for its pragmatic approach to politics and as the center of a moderate Conservatism (Safford 1972; Dix 1967: 241).

These two political parties shaped the process of nation building in central

ways. As Bushnell (1993) argues, in a highly fragmented nation, these multiclass and nationwide organizations were among the few unifying forces (*ibid.*, 94). In many ways, the history of the creation of Colombia seems to be the history of the creation of the Liberal and Conservative parties. Being Liberal or Conservative became an aspect of being Colombian. Thus, the exclusion of slaves and Indians from full citizenship, political participation, and cultural membership in the nation. In this context, the Liberal party takes a particular significance as it eventually becomes associated with disenfranchised sectors of the population. It is through the Liberal party that the latter become social subjects in the nation.

Liberalism in the Twentieth Century

During the first three decades of the twentieth century, Liberals constituted a minority, with its most important base among urban sectors in a country predominantly rural. The consolidation of the coffee export economy, economic expansion during the 1920s, and the availability of foreign loans disrupted the traditional order and gave rise to a coalition of social forces that provoked the crisis of the Conservative regime. Urrutia (1969) emphasizes the impact of the transformation of the structure of the labor market in producing this crises. Labor intensive public works projects and foreign investment in oil and bananas paid high wages to attract workers to sparsely populated and insalubrious areas. This created a deficiency in labor supply for haciendas which lead hacienda owners to attempt greater control of workers by prohibiting coffee cultivation on tenants' lots (Urrutia 1969: 115; Jimenez 1989). In addition, the increasing "degradation of the trades"

mobilized artisans into political action and labor organizing. Long (1995) details the centrality of artisans for workers political mobilization.

Liberals and socialists competed for the leadership of these social forces. During the first waves of labor organizing and strikes, socialism enjoyed high levels of popularity and threatened to capture the urban base of the Liberal Party. In the 1921 elections for House of Representatives, socialist lists in major cities obtained more votes than those of the Liberal Party. After the elections, the Liberal party adopted the reforms promoted by the socialists and, according to Urrutia (1969), abandoned the individualistic free enterprise and free trade ideology. With the candidacy of, War of the Thousand Days hero, Benjamin Herrera for presidential elections in 1922, the Liberal Party gained the support of the socialist and obtained majorities in the same cities where it had lost the previous year. In Urrutia's words, socialism played the historical role of bringing Colombian Liberalism into the ideological stream of the twentieth century and forced the modernization of the Liberal Party (Urrutia 1969: 76-80).

For workers, their labor struggles and the struggle against the Conservative regime were inseparable. According to Long (1995), workers and the Liberal left shared a labor theory of value that emphasized workers as the creators of all wealth and prosperity, and workers' political virtue that resulted from their producing with their own hands. This centrality of workers reinforced the republican principle of democracy and the idea that workers should govern. In this regard, the Conservative hegemony (1886-1930) was clearly anti-republican and its demise became a workers' goal (*ibid.*, 99). They saw themselves as the embodiment of the popular Liberal

tradition of the nineteenth century grounded in armed insurrection. This tradition also shaped the emerging revolutionary socialism (ibid., 132).

The adoption of a moderate reform platform and the electoral gains of the 1920s attracted young socialist intellectuals, such as Jorge Eliécer Gaitán and Gabriel Turbay, to the ranks of the Liberal Party. Gaitán, and many unionized workers, believed that reform and socialism could be attained from within the Liberal Party. Gaitán questioned the individualistic nature of Colombian society and favored cooperative institutions for production, distribution, and consumption (Urrutia 1969: 77). Two decades later, Gaitán and Turbay would come to represent a major split between workers' and elite Liberalism.

The revival of radical nineteenth-century Liberalism and, what Pécaut (1973) terms, *sindicalismo de revuelta* of the 1920s strengthened insurrectionary perspectives, and led to the formation of the Socialist Revolutionary Party (PSR) and a failed anti-Conservative insurrection in 1929. With the election of Olaya Herrera as president, this upsurge in popular mobilization culminated in a process of change controlled by elite sectors. Rather than a frontal challenge to the Conservative Party, Olaya Herreras' government of "national concentration" was a bipartisan coalition effort to contain social mobilization (Pécaut 1973: 99-100; Dix 1967: 82).

The government of Olaya Herrera was a period of transition in which urban centers became essential sources of power and the hegemony of agrarian sectors is weakened. For Pécaut (1973) the central issue of contention is the character of the state. The close relationship among dominant economic sectors implied the lack of autonomy and regulatory capacity of the state. Lopez Pumarejo's was not a coalition,

but a strictly Liberal regime that sought a model of dependent industrialization requiring greater autonomy and regulatory capacity for the state. According to Pécaut (1973), Lopez Pumarejo attempted to break the alliance between the export and industrial sectors and saw the state as the organizer of a new alliance. His project of national development was based on the displacement of the political hegemony of the agro-export sector in favor of the export and industrial sectors. The Liberal regime mobilizes the popular sectors as the social and political base of its development project. While unionization becomes essential for the Liberal project of national development, the dominant economic sectors pursued a limited industrialization and accepted a regulatory role for the state among the elite sectors, but not as an autonomous regulatory entity (ibid., 133-145).

Elite Liberalism was confronted with the rising strength of workers' Liberalism. One of the most important conflicts of this period was the intra-party class confrontation that ensued within the Liberal Party. As Long (1995) argues, workers and elites fought over the true meaning of Liberalism and the *Gaitanista* movement represented the culmination of the class struggle taking place within the Liberal Party (ibid., 180, 224). While Gaitan's movement developed within the framework of the traditional political parties, his stimulus of social mobilization threatened to erode the traditional boundaries of political conflict. His target was the oligarchy of both parties and the working masses were the basis of his support (Dix 1967: 103; Pécaut 1973: 190-192). His assassination produced a counterrevolution aimed at curbing Liberal reforms and the advances of urban labor. As such, in addition to a confrontation between the Liberal and Conservative parties, La

Violencia should be approached as a class conflict (Long 1995; Roldan 2002).

Working classes in Puerto Berrío, and dockworkers in particular, joined the Liberal project of national development. However, they did not accept elite Liberalism wholeheartedly. With their acceptance of communism, they also aligned themselves with the most radical labor sectors in the country. They challenged elite Liberals in local and national elections, and became decidedly *Gaitanistas* and a focal point of persecution during La Violencia.

Chapter 2

Frontiers and Nation

The Frontier in the Americas

Frontiers have had a powerful role in the imagining and making of nations in the Americas. In the United States, Brazil, and Argentina frontier expansion and the cultural images associated with the frontier have had an especially central and positive place. But most commonly, frontiers in Latin America have been associated with negative traits, representing a place of exclusion. In Colombia, where great geographic contrasts and regional differences add a level of complexity to national integration, we can find both aspects of the frontier experience. A brief sketch of regions in Colombia will help us view Puerto Berrío in a national context.

Regional Formations

Flowing in a south-north direction, the Cauca and Magdalena Rivers break the Andes in southern Colombia into three mountain systems. The Cauca valley separates the Western mountain range, which extends into the tropical depression of Darien separating Panama and Colombia, and the Central mountain range, which extends into the Atlantic lowlands in the north. The Magdalena River, the country's main communication artery, separates the Central and Eastern mountain ranges. The Magdalena, which traverses the whole country from southern Colombia to the port of Barranquilla on the Atlantic coast, becomes the depository of the Cauca River waters,

and is navigable for most of its length (see map B.2). The two valleys formed by the Magdalena and Cauca rivers and the three mountain ranges constitute the Andean region. Other regions include the Pacific lowlands in the west, the Atlantic lowlands in the north, the grassland plains in the east, and the Amazonian rain forest in the south and southeast. Although the mountainous terrain of the Andean region has posed great challenges for the development of transportation and communication infrastructure linking landlocked regions, the mid and high altitudes of the three mountain ranges contain the bulk of the country's population and the core of Colombia's economic and political power, a pattern in place before the Spanish conquest and maintained through colonial times.

Searching for large sedentary populations from whom to extract labor and wealth, Spanish conquerors were attracted to the Eastern mountain range and the southern highlands, which contained the largest concentration of sedentary indigenous populations in northern South America. Cartagena, the colony's gateway on the Atlantic coast and main entry point for the slave trade into South America, together with Bogotá and Popayán, in the eastern and southern highlands respectively, were the main centers of colonial administration and of regional economies characterized by Spanish-owned cattle and agricultural estates. Cartagena's position derived also from its role as one of a handful of cities in the Spanish empire allowed to participate, through the Spanish Fleet System, in trans-Atlantic trade. The agricultural society of the eastern highlands also included a growing number of mestizos and poor whites who obtained a living from farming small, private plots. This region, and Bogotá in particular, had the most developed

craft industries and the highest concentration of artisans.

The Pacific and Atlantic lowlands and the Cauca valley became the areas with the largest black population. Gold mining was one of the principal forces accounting for the introduction of African slaves. Gold extraction was the most dynamic economic sector linking the colony of New Granada with the mercantile world through the colonial period and most of the nineteenth century. In fact, the region was the principal gold producer in the Spanish colonies (Twinam 1982). Although the levels of gold produced were minimal compared with the amounts of silver produced in the main mining regions in Mexico and Peru, it was for New Granada the only non-bulky product that could offset the high cost of transportation.

In contrast to the eastern highlands where slavery was not significant, the landowning elite of Popayán introduced African slaves to work in gold mining in the Pacific lowlands. However, the principal gold producing region developed in Antioquia with the mining of vein and placer gold deposits. As was the case in the agricultural society of the eastern highlands around Bogotá, gold production in Antioquia helped stimulate the growth of a white and mestizo peasantry and would, in the case of Antioquia, allow for the emergence of a powerful merchant class.

Two main cycles of extraction define the gold economy in Antioquia. The first “conquest mining” period took place on the lower Cauca river and expanded from 1550 to 1640. It was initially characterized by lode mining in the Buritica mine of Santa Fe de Antioquia. Technical problems account for the abandonment of the mine in the 1590s. However, the peak in production during this first period was associated with placer mining on river beds and the emergence of San Jerónimo,

Cáceres, Zaragoza, and Remedios as the principal mining districts until the 1620s, when gold placers were exhausted. Together with the Popayán elite, the Spanish who owned the Buritica mine were among the first to introduce slavery to New Granada to supplement Indian labor. But gangs of African slaves were the primary labor force in placer mining in the latter districts (Twinam 1982). Some of the towns of these districts would periodically reappear as significant mining centers and many migrants arriving in Puerto Berrío during the first decades of the twentieth century originated in towns such as San Jerónimo, Cáceres, and Zaragoza.

A second cycle of gold extraction, defined by Twinam as “creole mining,” took place from 1680 to 1800. Migration from the lower Cauca regions and the discovery of gold deposits in Rionegro and Santa Rosa helped turn Antioquia’s central valley into a commercial center and in 1675, La Villa de Nuestra Señora de la Candelaria de Medellín, today’s Medellín, was founded. Soon it became a merchant center supporting the growing placer gold mining production in river beds and towns surrounding the central valley. According to Twinam, the characteristics of gold placer production prevented a monopoly on gold sources and put limits on levels of investment and accumulation. Thus, a dispersed labor force of independent prospectors and owners of small slave gangs fueled the growth of a merchant class that provided them with provisions, collected gold in payment, and imported commodities for a growing local market. Gold extraction and the growth of a powerful merchant class were to provide the basis for the later pattern of smallholder coffee production in Antioquia.

While the colony exhibited a great variety of economic activity, all its

products were primarily for local markets. Poor transportation infrastructure and high transportation costs inhibited regular economic exchanges between provinces and even more so between the colony and the Atlantic world. Gold was the only exception. It remained through the colonial period and into the twentieth century virtually the only export product. Through the colonial period and the first half of the nineteenth century, Antioquia's highlands and the mid-Magdalena valley remained peripheral regions that did not attract major population movements. This pattern began to change during the second half of the nineteenth century when export booms of tropical products in the Magdalena valley temporarily rivaled the value of gold exports and the coffee economy began to take hold. Before looking at the expansion of the coffee economy, we will examine the conditions in the mid-Magdalena valley where Puerto Berrio will eventually be founded.

The Mid-Magdalena River Valley

It is clear, from the description above, that even within each of the five major regional distinctions (Pacific, Atlantic, Andean, Eastern Plains, Amazonia) there is a great deal of differentiation. The inter-Andean valley of the Magdalena river constitutes such a formation within the Andean region. Throughout most of the history of the colony of New Granada and of independent Colombia, the Magdalena river has been a life line through which goods, ideas, and people transit within and between regions. This characteristic as a space of transit had a major impact in shaping the river valley. But the valley, and the mid-river valley in particular, has also been shaped greatly by demand for tropical commodities and native Americans and

Afro-Colombians, the main ethnic groups in the region until the advent of the coffee economy, established and maintained independent communities there.

The indigenous groups that inhabited the central valley of the Magdalena river at the time of Spanish conquest had an economic base consisting of a mixture of horticulture, fishing, and hunting. Paul Rivet described them as part of the larger Karib group. They were the Calimas, Muzos, Carares, Yereguies, and Motilones on the eastern shores of the river and the Panches, Pantagoras, Yemecies, and Guamacoes on the western shores (Arcila 1991: 170). These groups in the valley maintained contact with the larger and more centralized groups from the highlands. The river settlement of La Tora, today's Barrancabermeja, served as the main trade center where highland groups exchanged a wide range of Andean products, including blankets, salt, and emeralds, for tropical goods such as skins, feathers, and arrows (ibid., 176).

Some of the groups on the eastern shore of the river constantly attacked Spanish ships, successfully resisting Spanish domination. In the early seventeenth century, Yereguies and Carares united under the leadership of "El Cacique Pipatón" to pursue a strategy of disrupting Spanish communications between the eastern highlands, where Bogotá is located, and the river (ibid., 170-172; Simón 1981).

Pantagoras and Guamacoes occupied most of the western valley. Pantagoras in the southern half extended their presence into the eastern flank of the Cordillera Central. Guamacoes in the northern half were largely decimated by the impact of gold mining, as the exhaustion of gold deposits in the lower Cauca lured Spaniards to gold deposits in the Serranía de San Lucas, a mountain system that descends into the

Magdalena valley (Twinam 1982; Arcila 1991: 172-175).

Merchants from Cartagena and Mompox were among the new owners who acquired these mines from previous Spanish settlers. They founded San Francisco de Nuestra Señora la Antigua de Guamoco as a center of gold mining in 1611 and enjoyed a boom in production until 1630. The mine owners brought black slaves from Zaragoza, in the lower Cauca, to be the principal labor force in the new mining districts. They supplemented slave labor with the labor of the diminishing Guamocoes who were forced into mining by encomienda obligations. The gold produced in Guamoco and the Serranía de San Lucas was smelted in San Antonio del Toro, today's Simiti, from where it was shipped to Cartagena. San Antonio del Toro was, after Cartagena and Mompox, the oldest Spanish settlement on the Magdalena river and it was through it that Guamoco obtained its supplies and goods. Although Guamoco was practically abandoned by 1675, lower levels of gold extraction continued through the Serranía de San Lucas (Alvarez 1988; Arcila 1991: 179-180; Simón 1981).

Mining in Guamoco had the effect of introducing to the region large numbers of black slaves, who on many occasions escaped from their owners and created maroon communities or palenques. After the initial boom in gold extraction, some of the palenques took control of gold mines which they exploited, obtaining goods and arms through trade. However these palenques were faced, by the end of the seventeenth century, with military expeditions that regained control of the mines for Spanish merchants from Mompox (Friedemann and Patiño 1983: 25, 181; Fals Borda 1980: 69a). Mines owned by the Jesuits also relied on Indian labor and black slave

labor until the order's expulsion in 1767. A new wave of formation of palenques took place after the expulsion of the Jesuits. The movement of runaway slaves through the Serranía de San Lucas led to the creation of settlements, such as Arenal, which survived and became permanent communities in the mid-Magdalena region (Arcila 1991: 180, 182; Simón 1981: 449-451).

The forest of the Serranía de San Lucas and the swamps around Simiti provided protection not only for runaway slaves from local mines, but also for runaway slaves from Cartagena and Mompox. The latter were also more likely to be associated with the foundation of different types of palenques along the shores of the Magdalena river. These were primarily fishing communities whose origins were closely related to river transportation activities (Arcila 1991: 183; Fals Borda 1980: 56a-69a). By the end of the sixteenth century, as black slaves were replacing Indians as the workforce that ensured riverine transportation, communities of runaway slaves started to emerge along the Magdalena's banks. Canoes traveling upriver from Cartagena or Mompox were typically manned by twelve to fifteen slaves who once in desolate jungle-covered valleys often abandoned the canoes and remained in the river valley (Fals Borda 1980: 42ab-49ab).

Increased transportation activity through the nineteenth century brought a greater presence of blacks to the mid-Magdalena valley. Before the introduction of steam navigation, river transportation relied on the use of various types of boats, locally known as canoes, piraguas, bongos, and champanes. Canoes and piraguas were lighter and used for short distances, but since piraguas allowed for a fast trip, they were, during the early nineteenth century, the preferred means for the

transportation of mail between Mompox on the lower Magdalena and Honda on the upper Magdalena. Under good conditions the trip up river would take twenty days and the return trip seven days. Bongos and champanes were bigger and could carry at least sixty tons of goods. The champan, which was about twenty meters long by at least two meters wide and covered at the center, where merchandise and passengers traveled, was the preferred means of commercial transportation (Posada 1989: 3-4).

Owners of bongos and champanes entered into direct contract with travelers and commercial houses. In addition to arranging boat rentals, travelers and merchants in Mompox had to hire a captain who was in charge of hiring the crew. This generally consisted of between twenty and twenty-four workers or *bogas*, as they were also known. Travelers' accounts provide evidence of the obstacles and risks involved in river transportation. They were required to pay all expenses in advance and after paying in advance it was not uncommon for bogas to not show up on the designated day of departure or to not show up at all. Others found themselves abandoned after two or three days of travel when bogas would leave the champan and go into the forest (*ibid.*, 4-5). A common phenomenon on frontiers, where labor is scarce and land abundant, these escapes also indicate the favorable conditions workers seemed to enjoy.

The introduction of steam navigation did not translate into the disappearance of bongos and champanes and they continued to exist alongside steam ships. The development of navigation on the Magdalena river faced a series of obstacles which ranged from the technical difficulties associated with navigation on a river of variable

depth often clogged by brush and trees carried by the river⁴ to the lack of export products that would guarantee a regular cargo. These conditions did not stimulate competition and investment in river transportation, and as a result, the introduction of steam navigation in Colombia was closely associated with the granting of a monopoly to Juan Bernardo Elbers from 1823 to 1837 (Posada 1989; Gilmore and Harrison 1977; Nichols 1973). With five steam ships, the Empresa Elbers was the most important company during the first half of the nineteenth century. It was not uncommon for the handful of companies created after 1837 to have just one steam ship; the two largest ones had three (Posada 1989: 8).

Starting in the 1850s, the growth of tobacco exports stimulated an increase in river transportation and the merging of three leading companies into the Compañía Unida in 1857. With twelve steam ships, this company remained the most important during the period of the tobacco boom. After the decline in tobacco exports, the growth in coffee production gave a new stimulus to river transportation on the Magdalena leading to the merger of three of the largest companies into the Compañía Colombiana de Transporte in 1886. It started operations with thirteen steam ships and increased the number of ships to sixteen by 1892 (*ibid.*, 7-9).⁴ The development of steam navigation on the Magdalena River during the nineteenth century fluctuated according to the various export booms. Coffee exports and industrialization provided

⁴In addition to slowing down transportation, materials carried by the river could pose a danger to ships. On at least one occasion on 1896, a ship sunk after being hit by a tree (Posada 1989: 6).

⁴The Compañía Alemana, Compañía Internacional, and F. J. Cisneros merged into the Compañía Colombiana de Transporte. The new company eventually incorporated the assets of the Compañía Unida (*ibid.*: 9).

for a more sustained development during the first half of the twentieth century.

Although there was a tendency for the largest companies to merge and have a dominant position in steam navigation, river transportation was not dominated by any single national or foreign capital. German, British, North American, and Colombian merchants and entrepreneurs created navigation companies. Nationals and foreigners alike occupied the prestigious positions of captain and accountant. Captains, in particular, were regarded as an aristocracy of distinguished men (*ibid.*, 9).

Steam navigation had an important impact on the creation of salaried jobs through the river valley. Not only the major ports of Barranquilla and Mompox, but all the smaller ports on the river attracted large numbers of workers to handle cargo. Ships also stimulated local petty commerce in ports where travelers disembarked and purchased local products and also had an impact on smaller villages where people stacked piles of dry wood which passing ships purchased to meet their fuel needs. As the century neared its end, the actual navigation conditions had changed little. In 1878 the Junta de Canalización del Río was created to channel the river waters but it soon became clear that the nation did not have enough capital to invest in the task, and the Junta limited itself to works to clear the river (*ibid.*, 12).

As we can see, before the nineteenth century, the Magdalena valley remained home to indigenous peoples and black slaves who through a tradition of resistance to Spanish domination maintained autonomous communities. The increased navigation activity along the river associated with various export booms throughout the nineteenth century brought greater numbers of migrants to the region, especially during the final decades of the century when a large number of Afro-Colombians

from the lower Magdalena settled in the northern section of the mid-Magdalena region. As with some of the early palenques, they generally remained in the river valley making a living from agriculture, fishing, and now, activities related to river transportation (Arcila 1991: 186). This pattern changed significantly with the consolidation of the coffee export economy which brought large numbers of mestizo migrants from the highlands to the southern section of the mid-Magdalena region in particular.

Coffee and Non-Coffee Frontiers

In contrast to the short-lived export booms of the nineteenth century, elites found in growing coffee production at the turn of the century a more stable linkage to world markets. However, Colombia also entered the twentieth century in the midst of its up-to-then most devastating civil war, the War of the Thousand Days. In addition, strategic interests in the construction of an inter-oceanic canal prompted the United States to take advantage of the country's internal crisis and promote Panama's secession from Colombia.

Because of the Conservative Party's control of executive power, the first three decades of the twentieth century came to be known as the Conservative Hegemony. Governments of this period maintained a position of little intervention in the economy, while concentrating on the goals of infrastructural development and "progress." After the defeat suffered in the War of the Thousand Days, Rafael Uribe Uribe and Benjamín Herrera were the main Liberal voices of dissent. In a break with nineteenth-century radical Liberalism, Uribe Uribe used the term "state socialism" to

call for a greater role for the state. His assassination in 1914 left the Liberals with the prominent leadership only of Benjamín Herrera who became the party's presidential candidate in 1922.

The governments of the Conservative Hegemony generally focused on the development of the economic infrastructure through railroad and road construction, development of navigation on the Magdalena river, and incentives for the development of local industries, especially textile industries in Antioquia. A bonanza of available capital, in what became known as “the Dance of the Millions,” enabled increased investment in economic infrastructure during the 1920s. U.S. payment of \$ 25 million as indemnity for the loss of Panama; the availability of foreign credits, facilitated by the institution of fiscal reforms recommended by the U.S. Kemmerer Mission (Drake 1989); and the coffee export economy provided governments with substantial capital to invest in roads, railroads, and ports. Although not very impressive in comparison with other Latin American countries, the kilometers of railroad tracks in operation increased from 565 in 1904 to 2,434 in 1929 (Bushnell 1993: 159, 165).

The consolidation of the coffee economy was underwriting this approach. The evolution of the coffee economy involved a major shift in production from the Cordillera Oriental to the Cordillera Central and the eastern slopes of the Cordillera Occidental. This shift also involved differences in production and labor arrangements, the emergence of the Antioquia region as a major economic and political force, and the rise to prominence of Antioquian Conservative politicians as was the case of President Carlos E. Restrepo (1910-1914).

During the 1880s and 1890s, coffee had replaced tobacco and quinine as the primary export product. Santander, in the eastern highlands, was the main coffee producing region and expansion of production took place as Bogotá merchants invested the capital accumulated during the earlier booms in large coffee haciendas in Cundinamarca and northern Tolima. Peasant migration from highland communities provided the main source of labor for the coffee haciendas and fluctuations in labor needs were met with a combination of tenancy, sharecropping, and permanent and seasonal wage labor (Jiménez 1989).

The particular labor system that developed and the fluctuations in coffee prices challenged the ability of large coffee planters to impose their political will. Tenancy arrangements were based on the exchange of labor for land. Tenants received a plot of land within the hacienda to reside on and for the cultivation of foodstuffs in exchange for a set number of days of labor in the coffee fields. Tenants also entered into sharecropping arrangements with hacendados. The spread of the tenancy system gave rise to a large sector of peasant units within the haciendas producing foodstuffs for local markets. This led to a duality between a tenants' economy and the coffee economy of the hacienda. Hacendados tried to undermine tenants' access to local markets by imposing restrictions on free transit through hacienda roads and prohibiting coffee cultivation on tenants' plots. Depressed coffee prices and the War of the Thousand Days combined to produce a decline in coffee exports and to create an uncertain situation for coffee planters during the 1895-1910 period. Coffee prices increased rapidly after 1909 but declined again during World War One after which they again regained a high position and exports continued to

grow (Deas 1977; Jiménez 1989; Palacios 1983). While many planters in the eastern highlands did not survive these fluctuations and the challenge of tenants and day laborers, growth in coffee exports rested largely in the expansion of production in the region of Antioquia after World War One.

Colombia's coffee exports, calculated at one million 60-kilo bags in 1913, had doubled by 1921, and tripled by 1930 (Bushnell 1993: 169; McGreevey 1971: 202). By this time, Colombia was, after Brazil, the world's second coffee producer. Production figures for the three main producing regions show the geographic shift taking place as Antioquia, on the Cordillera Central, became the leading producing region (see table 2.1).

Table 2.1.
Coffee Production by Region: 1888-1930
(60-kilo sacks)

	1888	1913	1930
Santander	181,000	328,000	301,000
Cundinamarca	38,000	200,000	452,000
Antioquia	5,200	161,000	630,000

Source: Palacios 1983: 24.

Smallholder coffee producers fueled the process of Antioqueño colonization, a massive movement of people and resources southward from Antioquia into the mid-

altitude forest of the Central Mountain Range and the eastern slopes of the Western Mountain Range. While cattle raising latifundios were opened in the Cauca River valley, small and medium size family farms spread on the slopes of the highlands. Villages and towns in Antioquia and Old Caldas, today's Caldas, Risaralda, and Quindio, rapidly became major urban centers and stepping stones toward an expanding frontier. Between 1870 and 1905 Antioquia's and the colonization area's population increased 134 per cent, from 395,000 to 923,000.

The spread of family farming associated with the Antioqueño colonization gave rise to the image of a democratic society of smallholder coffee producers, but while the bulk of the region's coffee production took place on family farms, its commercialization and financing was controlled by powerful merchant elites. Moreover, large landed property was also an aspect of the land tenure system that developed in the region of Antioqueño colonization. Between 1827 and 1931, 64 per cent of the land concessions in Caldas consisted of plots smaller than 49.9 hectares, but this percentage represented less than 3.3 per cent of the total public land distributed (Palacios 1983: 315). By developing land concessions, building roads, and founding villages, wealthy merchants expanded the frontier and functioned as real state developers. They provided colonists with credit and supplies and at times became their political allies in their efforts to obtain land concessions from the nation or in their struggles with absentee landlords (Christie 1978).

As the coffee frontier moved on, elites and frontier entrepreneurs reproduced the social hierarchies of Antioquian society and the images of a smallholder democratic society, and of colonists as resourceful, entrepreneurial, and hard-working

people, became the defining characteristics assigned to an Antioqueño ethos. Mary Roldán (1992) highlights coffee production, “white-Hispanic values,” and the Catholic church as three elements that constituted the cultural basis of a regional society associated with “civilization.” Through these elements, Antioquian elites differentiated themselves from the non-coffee frontiers that developed in the lowlands of Uraba and the valleys of the lower Cauca and the Magdalena rivers which were defined in terms quite different from the Antioqueño ethos. Some of these frontiers, as was the case of Puerto Berrío, were not directly involved in coffee cultivation, but emerged as transportation hubs in the movement of coffee from the highlands to river and ocean outlets.

The Pacific and Antioquia railroads were the two main routes of the coffee export trade. At the southern end of the coffee growing region, the Pacific Railroad, completed in 1915, connected Cali in the central Cauca valley with the port of Buenaventura on the Pacific Coast. An outlet on the Pacific became viable after the opening of the Panama canal in 1914. The coffee produced in Antioquia, at the northern end, was transported via the Magdalena river. Most of the Antioquia Railroad, connecting Medellín with Puerto Berrío, had been built by 1914. But, it was not until the construction of the tunnel La Quiebra in 1930 that the railroad was finally completed.

Antioquia’s connection with the Magdalena river was essential not only for the coffee economy but for the growing industrial development of Medellín. Since the early decades of the twentieth century Medellín had become the leading industrial city of the country. The gold and coffee economies had produced an active

commercial life and the accumulated capital was invested in textile industries. Antioquia's economic prominence made its connection with the Magdalena river an essential linkage for the export economy. Yet, in contrast to the highland society of entrepreneurial and hardworking smallholders, this lowland frontier was imagined as a lawless society inhabited by people of mixed races and strange customs (Roldán 1992). However, these images emerged in a context in which regional elites were increasingly interested in the economic potential of the frontiers of the Magdalena River valley and in which migrant peasants and workers found limited opportunities for family farming. Cattle raising and a high concentration of land ownership were two central factors shaping the formation of this frontier.

The Medellín-Puerto Berrío railroad was a principal element in the geographical shift of cattle-growing areas in Antioquia from the Cauca River valley⁵ to the Magdalena valley, with the latter becoming a preferred region for cattle raising. The cattle industry was to become one of the main economic activities of the southern section of the mid Magdalena valley. Between 1890 and World War One, Antioquia's elite opened large cattle haciendas which were, by the mid-1930s, producing half the cattle consumed in the department. Until the mid-1950s, the region remained Antioquia's prime meat producer (Arango 1988: 242).

The growth of the cattle industry and agroindustrial production developed on the basis of a land tenure system that transformed public lands into large estates. People who had financed the government through civil wars during the nineteenth

⁵Antioquia had 15,000 head of cattle in 1807, the herd increased to 115,000 in 1857 and 360,000 in 1875. Rapid growth during the 1870s was largely due to innovations in pasture seeds and the introduction of barbed wire (Arango 1988: 238).

century and members of the military received in exchange or were rewarded with public debt certificates which were exchangeable for land grants. The export booms of the last third of the nineteenth century intensified the interest in the acquisition of land but, although legal reforms in the 1870s and 1880s encouraged the distribution of land grants on the basis of productive use, it was people with political leverage and capital who continued to benefit the most from the distribution of public lands. Entrepreneurs bought the improvements made on the land by others or sent wage workers to clear land for them. While during the first half of the nineteenth century distribution of public lands to private individuals averaged 7,855 hectares per year, an average of 41,644 hectares were distributed yearly between 1874 and 1900. The distribution of public lands was intended to stimulate large-scale export production. More than three-quarters of all land distributed from 1827 to 1931 was allocated in grants with a minimum of 1,001 hectares (LeGrand 1986: 40-50).

The greatest disbursal of public lands in the mid Magdalena valley took place between 1870 and 1900 when, in contrast to the pattern of small holdings in Antioquia's highlands, thousands of hectares were distributed to a few individuals. In towns on the eastern slopes of the Cordillera Central, such as San Carlos, San Luis, and Cocorna, large land grants were allocated to a handful of individuals. In San Carlos 6,707 hectares were distributed in two grants between 1827 and 1869; and eight grants totaling 13,094 hectares were distributed during 1870-1900. In San Luis four individuals received grants for a total of 13,082 hectares between 1870 and 1900, while in Cocorna 4,400 hectares were distributed in two grants during the same period. In Puerto Berrío, in the valley proper, four grants totaling 5,692 hectares were

distributed between 1870 and 1900; three grants totaling 2,493 hectares between 1901 and 1917; and twenty one grants totaling 19,006 hectares between 1918 and 1931 (ibid., appendix D).

The men and women arriving to Puerto Berrío during the early twentieth century had the same dreams and aspirations of making a decent livelihood for themselves and their families as did those migrating to coffee producing regions. However, the high concentration of land ownership, the extensive use of land associated with cattle raising, and agro industrial demand for wage employment all worked against the formation of a land owning peasantry and constituted the basis for a history of intense social conflict in the Magdalena valley. The various expressions of this conflict led to the official creation of the Magdalena Medio region and are the foundations for the negative frontier images that continue to permeate perceptions of the region today.

El Magdalena Medio

People in Medellín commonly use the term *caliente* (hot) to describe Puerto Berrío. The term has a double connotation. It refers to the river port's tropical weather and high temperatures and, more significantly, it describes the port, and the Magdalena Medio region, as a "dangerous" place. This notion charges Puerto Berrío with all the social, political, and cultural evils that Antioqueño society historically assigned to the state's frontiers.

The concept of Magdalena Medio, in usage only during the second half of the twentieth century, is not a political-administrative denomination. It denotes the

geographic space of the mid-Magdalena River valley. As such, it does not refer to a region defined by established political boundaries, and various institutions expand or contract its limits to accommodate their interests. Based on the social, economic, and cultural processes that have characterized the region, Murillo (1991) provides a delimitation that is marked-off by the localities of La Dorada, in the south, and Gamarra, in the north.

The region is composed by sections of the departments of Caldas, Antioquia, and Bolívar on the western side of the river, and Cundinamarca, Boyacá, Santander, and César on the eastern side. Twenty four municipalities (see table 2.2, map B.3) make up the region and produce a combined territorial extension of approximately 28,000 square kilometers with a population of more than half a million people (*ibid.*, 5-11). With 11,200 square kilometers and 288,660 inhabitants, Santander is the most significant department. The combined sections of Santander, Antioquia, and Bolívar account for about 25,000 square kilometers of the territory while the combined population of Santander, Antioquia, and Caldas account for 414,286 out of 521,656 of the region's inhabitants.

The region does not constitute a homogeneous formation but one characterized by a diversity of economic activities and historical traditions. Nevertheless, some economic activities have had a more dominant role than others in shaping the social formation and political history of the area. Based on these factors, Murillo (1991) establishes a differentiation between a sub-region south and a sub-region north. The first, where Puerto Berrío is located, is composed of the territory south of Barrancabermeja-Yondo and is characterized by large cattle haciendas. The

growth of the coffee export economy, the centrality of the Magdalena River as the main route for the movement of coffee, the construction of railroads connecting the highlands to the river valley, and regular steam navigation on the Magdalena River were the main forces behind a process of colonization that lured workers, peasants, and elites to this sub-region during the first half of the twentieth century. With an earlier process of colonization and better transportation infrastructure, the sub-region south has greater facilities for commercialization and a greater degree of integration into national markets than does sub-region north, where colonization is a more recent phenomenon.

Table 2.2

Departments and Municipalities in the Magdalena Medio

Department	Town
Antioquia	Caracolí, Maceo, Puerto Berrío, Puerto Nare, Puerto Triunfo, Yondó.
Bolívar	Morales, San Pablo, Simití.
Boyacá	Puerto Boyacá.
Caldas	La Dorada.
César	Gamarra, San Alberto.
Cundinamarca	Puerto Salgar.
Santander	Bajo Simacota, Barrancabermeja, Cimitarra, El Carmen de Chucurí, Landazuri, Puerto Parra, Puerto Wilches, San Vicente de Chucurí, Sabana de Torres, Santa Helena del Opon.

In addition to cattle and agroindustrial production, oil extraction has been one of the dominant economic activities in sub-region north. Since the 1920s, Barrancabermeja has been the most important national center of oil production, which also takes place in Yondo, Sabana de Torres, San Pablo, and Puerto Wilches (Murillo 1991: 11-20). The elite interests associated with the dominant economic activities of each region and the presence of a diverse agricultural and industrial proletariat and of independent agricultural producers involved in subsistence and market production have generated a long history of social struggles and diverse forms of popular politics. The violent conflicts that characterized El Magdalena Medio during the second half of the twentieth century constitute the basis for contemporary Colombians' views of the region as a dangerous frontier. Some scholars explain the strong presence of rural guerrillas in regions such as this as a frontier phenomenon (LeGrand 1989; Molano 1992).

With the increase of guerrilla activity during the 1980s, the state sought a greater integration of regions of conflict into national society. My fieldwork in Puerto Berrío took place in a context shaped by recent state initiatives directed to El Magdalena Medio. First, there was a series of state-sponsored research programs on the region's history and culture; second, development projects that promise to turn Puerto Berrío into a central link of national and international communication networks have stimulated local concerns for the city's past and future; and third, the National Army's control over the region has created a sense of stability, especially when contrasted with earlier periods when various armed sectors actively disputed

each other for control of the area.

In an attempt to address the “objective causes” of violence, and as part of an amnesty law negotiated with guerrilla groups, the administration of president Belisario Betancur (1982-1986) created the National Rehabilitation Plan (Plan Nacional de Rehabilitación – PNR). This program was aimed at addressing issues of poverty and development in regions characterized by ongoing social and political conflict. It also aimed at the creation of new channels for government and community relations. In association with the state’s Colombian Institute of Culture (Instituto Colombiano de Cultura – COLCULTURA), the PNR commissioned four studies on the culture and history of the Atlantic Coast, Caqueta, Uraba, and the Magdalena Medio. The PNR has had a marginal impact on the Magdalena Medio, one of its main regions of interest, and the state’s presence in the region continues to be dominated by its military dimension.

In addition to the PNR, legislation requiring municipalities to conduct development plans, requiring exploratory archaeology in construction sites, and setting up regional government programs on cultural memory, have increased academic interest in Puerto Berrío and a degree of local acceptance of research projects carried out in the port. Moreover, the prospects of “revival” in Puerto Berrío, produced by national and state construction projects that promise to place Puerto Berrío at the center of transportation routes of national significance, have stimulated local interest in aspects of culture and history; and as part of the larger trend toward the creation of local museums in Colombia, the local council recently voted the creation of a museum to display the archaeological record produced by the recent

exploratory excavations.

As we have suggested in this chapter, the frontier of strange customs of the early part of the twentieth century turned into a frontier of guerrillas and violence during the second half of the century. The ideological construction of the Magdalena Medio as a frontier rests on the role of coffee in the creation of modern Colombia and on its role as a "civilizational" agent giving contrasting meanings to coffee and non-coffee frontiers. The region's economic significance for Antioquia and the nation notwithstanding, the Magdalena Medio was constructed as a peripheral place of cultural and political exclusion. Thus, the Magdalena Medio is integrated into the national formation as "the other." This context makes workers' political struggles particularly salient as they become struggles over definitions of and membership in the nation. Before looking at workers' political expressions, in the next two chapters we will examine the social conditions of the men and women of this frontier.

Chapter 3

Laboring Peoples of the Frontier

As a point of connection between river and railroad transportation, Puerto Berrío emerged as a "capitalist precipitate" and developed as an axis of Colombia's export economy. The boom experienced during this period attracted workers not only to the urban center of Puerto Berrío but to a wide range of economic activities along the Magdalena River and the Antioquia railroad. Communities of workers and peasants were transformed or created in the lowlands of the river and in the mountainous territory through which the railroad connects the port with Medellín. A kaleidoscopic world of labors continually shifted as commercial opportunities changed and workers moved to accommodate or take advantage of changing conditions. Workers' constant movement from declining industries to growing ones shaped the working-class culture that emerged. Exploring these workers' histories and working conditions, this chapter provides an overview of this diverse world of labor and serves to place dockworkers in this larger context.

The Formation of Puerto Berrío

Before the construction of the railroad, Antioquian trade rested on a network of rudimentary mule paths that communicated towns in the highlands with Medellín and the Magdalena river. Gold exports and the introduction of European goods via the Magdalena river took place through Puerto Nare and San Bartolomé (Bonilla 1991: 191). These functioned as warehouses and ports and were the main Antioquian

towns in the Magdalena valley until the late nineteenth century. In between Nare and San Bartolomé, a few small settlements, such as Remolino Grande and Garrapatas, were dedicated primarily to subsistence production (Restrepo 1903; Bonilla 1991: 195). With the increase of navigation, Remolino Grande became a source of dry wood for steam ships and a rudimentary pier functioned there to facilitate local trade in forest resources (Casas 1959; Bonilla 1991: 196). Transformations were also taking place in the mountain slopes as Antioquian elites searched for more efficient and less expensive ways of moving coffee to the Magdalena valley. Members of the Antioquian elite involved in the coffee economy, such as José María Jaramillo and the Ospina and Vásquez families, were strong supporters of the construction of the railroad (Brew 1977: 272). Railroad construction generated interest in the lands in the river valley and especially those along the future tracks.

The state of Antioquia signed a contract with Cuban engineer Francisco Cisneros in 1874 for the construction of a railroad from the Magdalena river to Barbosa on the outskirts of Medellín. Remolino Grande, located on lands claimed by Pedro Luis Villamizar, was selected as the starting point for the railroad; and an army general, Ricardo María Giraldo, explored the territory and drew a blue-print for the future port. He designed spaces for twelve blocks, a central plaza, a church, warehouses, and offices. Most of what was to become urban space and the surrounding land was distributed among prominent individuals who played important roles in local business and politics during the first decades of the port's life. These included Ricardo Giraldo, the army general, and eight other individuals (Casas 1959; Marulanda 1921). After the death of Antioquia's governor Pedro Justo Berrío in

1875, Remolino Grande was officially named Puerto Berrío; and in 1881 it was elevated into a district with Antonio Duque, a recipient of one of the plots of land, as its first mayor (Bonilla 1991: 197). Although the railroad's first 47 kilometer-phase between Puerto Berrío and Pavas was concluded in 1885, it was not until the construction of the tunnel La Quiebra in 1929 that the railroad was finally completed.

In 1886, Manuel Uribe Angel described the port's urban center as segregated into a North American section located on a hill where the employees in charge of directing the railroad works had their offices and living quarters; and an Antioqueño section at river level where the majority of the new arrivals, mostly railroad construction workers, had their wood and straw houses. Travelers' accounts were pessimistic and projected a short life for the port and the failure of the railroad project (Bonilla 1991: 198-200; Von 1953; Restrepo 1903; Uribe 1972; Cisneros 1880). Nevertheless, there was a rapid growth in the port and an ongoing process of urbanization that followed a pattern of segregation characteristic of other U.S.-influenced regions.

Regardless of travelers' pessimistic accounts, the construction of the railroad continued to attract Antioquian merchants who saw in the rail line the valorization of the land in Puerto Berrío and along the Nus river valley where the rail line was to be built. The history of the Agricultural and Immigration Society, formed by Francisco Cisneros, Francisco de Villa and Jorge Bravo in 1878, provides an example of the ways in which merchants and entrepreneurs took control of public lands. In 1874, Cisneros had received a 100,000-hectare land grant between Puerto Berrío and Carocoli along the projected rail line, to which he added another 100,000 hectares

purchased from the government for the constitution of the society (Bonilla 1991: 202; Brew 1977). The land distribution policy at the time was based on the notion of “the productive use of the land” and societies, such as the one led by Cisneros, were created to promote agricultural development and attract immigration. But in what must have been the norm, the society failed to develop its lands and limited its interests to lands near Puerto Berrío and those immediately along the railroad line.⁵

However, by 1906 when the society was reorganized, it had to contend with various forces that challenged its hold on land. Medellín merchants eager to invest in cattle raising cleared lands for pasture and claimed them, arguing that they were permanent cultivators. In this process they entered into conflict with the Agricultural and Immigration Society which, by delaying the measurement of boundaries, had impeded merchants from advancing their claims. Small settlements had also formed along the railway. These were formed by railroad workers who settled on Cisneros’ land and claimed it after clearing it for agricultural production (Bonilla 1991: 202-206; Brew 1977: 180-190). This case illustrates the potential for intra-elite conflict as well as for conflict between elites and agricultural laborers in the process of land accumulation. As LeGrand (1986) shows, it was during this period that most of the land in the region was distributed in a few large concessions. This gave rise to an agricultural model based on large land holdings and cattle production, with Puerto Berrío becoming one of the main cattle producing municipalities.

In addition to agriculture, commercial activity was a significant stimulus for the port’s growth. During the Dance of the Millions of the 1920s, when there were

⁵ It was common for engineers working in railroad construction to be paid in large land grants. In Central America, Minor Keith received land grants similar to those Cisneros got in Colombia.

large amounts of investment in public works, and with the appearance of several transportation companies and commercial houses in the port, Puerto Berrío consolidated as a commercial center. The most significant development was the formation of the shipping company *Naviera Colombiana* in 1920. *La Naviera* was founded by Antioquian merchants for the movement of cargo, people, and mail between Barranquilla and the ports on the Magdalena River. In addition to *la Naviera Colombiana*, by 1928 the *Compañía Antioqueña de Transportes*, the *Empresa del Dique*, and the Colombian Railways and Navigation had their offices in Puerto Berrío (Bonilla 1991: 211-212).

Another important commercial enterprise was the extraction of wood. The railroad opened a sawmill in Puerto Berrío to produce the wood necessary for the tracks. With the completion of the railroad, the sawmill became a viable enterprise due to the reduction in transportation cost. By the late 1920s, the *Compañía Maderera Antioqueña* was producing wood for Medellín (Brew 1977: 361).

Increases in transportation and commercial activity combined to attract migrants and stimulate rapid urban growth. In 1884, Manuel Uribe Angel had calculated the port's population at 1,069 and the national census of 1912 put the figure at 4,511 (Bonilla 1991: 208; Uribe 1972: 142. See table 1.1). The expansion of the urban space involved a permanent struggle against the conditions imposed by the lagoon-like territory of the port which was subject to periodic flooding. New arrivals to the port seeking permanent housing had to start by conditioning flooded land. The early history of urban growth was marked by two calamities: a flood in 1916 and a fire in 1924 (Bonilla 1991: 209).

In addition to the port of Puerto Berrío, important communities emerged along the river and along the railroad within the district of Puerto Berrío. Puerto Murillo is today the second largest river community. It is located a few miles -- "three leagues", as local people say -- downstream from Puerto Berrío. It consists of two rows of about fifteen houses each laid out parallel to the river. There is a church, a health center, a school, and a police inspector. The rest of the population of Puerto Murillo (about 300) lives in the surrounding rural areas. As one of the oldest settlements in the region, people in Puerto Berrío trace local history to the history of Puerto Murillo and describe it as a community bounded by its religious traditions. Worship of San Bartolomé has been a central element in the Murillenses sense of themselves as a community.

Before the emergence of Puerto Berrío as the main commercial center of the region, the area where the waters of the San Bartolomé River reach the Magdalena, now referred to as Sitio Viejo, constituted one of the few settlements of the region. It is likely that Sitio Viejo is the same place that Restrepo Eusse referred to as San Bartolomé (see above). The San Bartolomé River connects the Magdalena River with the mining districts of northeastern Antioquia and its shores were settled by runaway slaves during periods of decline in gold mining in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Runaway slaves scattered along the river from Sitio Viejo to a point known as Bodegas on the upper San Bartolomé River. For generations these people had been clearing virgin forest for agricultural production and complemented their livelihood with fishing and small game hunting. In about 1910, the San Bartolomé River flooded and destroyed Sitio Viejo. The settlement was rebuilt in a new location with the name

of Puerto Murillo.

In contrast to river communities, such as Puerto Murillo, the communities that emerged along the railroad were predominantly the result of the most recent forces of capitalist expansion. The workers in these areas tended to be recent arrivals in search of wage employment in haciendas or land to exploit forest resources or cultivate. The history of these communities was directly tied to the construction of the railroad and the opening of train stations.

With these different trajectories, the various communities were bound to respond differently to the opportunities and constraints posed by the forces of commercialization. Before looking at the actual experiences of the people that formed these communities, we will consider the broader context that produced their migration.

Migrants and Work

While processes of migration and colonization had centered on the coffee growing areas and the newly industrializing centers around Medellín, new waves of migrants seeking land or wage employment moved into the mid Magdalena valley during the first decades of the twentieth century. The construction of the railroad, the emergence of Puerto Berrío as a link between railroad and river transportation, the opening of large cattle haciendas, and high levels of state investment on public works during the 1920s attracted men and women workers from various parts of the country. Between 1918 and 1928, population growth in Antioquia's frontier surpassed that of industrial and coffee growing regions. The first had a population growth rate that

oscillated from 62.2 per cent to 84.8 per cent and that of the second oscillated from 30 to 54.8 per cent. Population growth in the Magdalena Medio during the 1920s was due not only to the attractions of the opening frontier and the perceived access to land, but the period also coincided with a decline in mining in northeastern Antioquia (Roldán 1992: 466).

The largely single male migrants arriving in the booming town of Puerto Berrío did not all share a past as subsistence producers. For most, arrival in the port city was only the latest in a series of movements from towns experiencing economic decline. Migrants arriving during the 1920s tended to originate in the declining gold mining towns of northeastern Antioquia. Some had traveled directly from their towns of origin, but many others arrived after long periods of movement from job to job in various towns and large cities. Women were also part of the waves of migrants arriving in the region, although in a smaller proportion. Many migrated alone and others arrived with relatives. While many of the men and women counted on friends or relatives in Puerto Berrío, many others came without previous connections in the port.

A decline in coffee prices, and a subsequent decline in coffee production after 1929, further stimulated migration from coffee growing towns to the Magdalena valley through the 1930s. Furthermore, public works had provided through the 1920s a major source of employment, but the combined effects of the depression, the decline in coffee prices, and the subsequent reduction of national and regional income from exports meant a drastic reduction of investment in public works. Antioquia's investment in public works, which had been 41.9 per cent of its budget in 1928-29,

was reduced to 7.8 per cent in 1931-32 (Roldán 1992: 468). Many of the people who now found themselves unemployed sought alternatives on the Magdalena valley.

Most migrants were attracted to Puerto Berrío by employment opportunities, such as the case for the workers arriving from mining districts for whom mining was an important experience shaping their expectations. They had previously worked as salaried workers in mines and many arrived in the region looking for wage employment and not necessarily with the purpose of clearing land for cultivation. Many others hoped to clear land with the aim of establishing their own small farms. However, the concentration of land in large holdings left little land available for colonization. Instead, they sought employment as cowhands or brush clearers in the haciendas.

Although mining in the Puerto Berrío region was not a main industry, there were short-lived booms that required the labor of many workers. Starting in the late 1930s several gold mining operations were initiated, along the railroad, in Caramanta, Providencia, and San José.

The above description highlights the central socioeconomic factors that produced migration and attracted people to Puerto Berrío. Through the examination of some aspects of their life histories, we will now look into the actual experiences of some of the region's long-term residents and newcomers.

Francisca Vélez Narváez

Francisca Vélez Narváez was born and baptized in 1908 in Sitio Viejo by Father José María Salazar, Puerto Berrío's first priest and the same one who in the

late 1880s had married her parents. Initially there was no priest in the region and itinerant clergy had to arrive from Remedios or Medellín to celebrate the fiesta of San Bartolomé and the fiesta of the Virgen Inmaculada. According to Francisca, Sitio Viejo was much larger than today's Puerto Murillo. For her, it was a large city and the best indication of that was that "people did not realize the death of their next door neighbors until they heard the church bells toll."

Francisca's father had a farm near Sitio Viejo at a point where there were many other people who had also cleared their own plots of land. As she explains, those lands were "wild and uncultivated," and in order to farm people just had to clear them. Francisca remembers that there were people with small farms along the river all the way to Bodegas, in the upper San Bartolomé river. After the flooding of Sitio Viejo and in addition to the foundation of Puerto Murillo, many people continued to clear land along the Magdalena River and relocated in smaller settlements. Francisca's family went to Masango, one of these settlements, where they created another farm. Masango consisted of about nine houses. Francisca describes life in Masango as having been one of "abundance," thanks to access to agricultural land, and river and forest resources. Typically, families in Masango tended to their own farms and occasionally hired, from their neighbors, a couple of workers. Workers were provided three meals a day and paid on a daily basis.

Francisca's father and her brother worked at the family's farm and hired a couple of workers. Workers started the day after breakfast at six or seven, returned to Francisca's house for lunch at noon, and ended at four. Francisca, her mother, and the rest of the children stayed in the house preparing the meals, mashing the corn in a

pestle, or grinding salt which arrived in rocks. For Francisca, "life in Masango was pretty good. There was a big house made of straw and cañabrava. There was cacao planted, and coffee. There were many fruit trees, mango, papaya, guava, guama.⁶ There was a huge old mango tree that made a large shaded, covered area and the bosses from the canaliza used to go there with their women to have picnics."

Although Francisca's current view of their past as one of "abundance" indicates the access to resources that the region's inhabitants enjoyed, it is also the case that their access to these resources was increasingly undermined by the forces of commercialization. These included migrant workers' and large land holders demand for land and the increase in river navigation.

The introduction of steam navigation on the Magdalena river constituted a major force impacting the communities on the shores of the river. As noted earlier, debris and sand banks were constant challenges to smooth travel and the need for constant refueling constituted an additional impediment and a major expense for navigation companies. River communities became closely acquainted with ships' crews, cargo, and rhythms of navigation. The main source for this connection was dry wood - the ships' source of energy. The fact that dry wood was reported by navigation companies as a major expense suggests that selling wood was a quick source of cash and commodities. Typically in new colonization zones where there is a wood market, people allocated more time to cutting wood than to farming. Through the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, river communities became increasingly dependent on selling wood to steam ships. It is likely that in many cases, selling wood

⁶Name used in Colombia and Venezuela for a tall tree of the Leguminosae family usually planted to shade coffee plants.

was an activity that complemented farming. Francisca remembers that workers organized the wood in piles in open spaces that were visible from the ships and that the money from selling wood was used to purchase commodities carried by the ships. After selling the wood, people entered the same ships and purchased clothes, soap, sugar, cheese, and perfumes, among other products.

While in Masango, they visited Murillo mainly for special occasions such as the festivities of San Bartolomé and the Virgen Inmaculada. Since they had aunts who lived in Murillo they stayed there for four or five days during the festivities. With the regular presence of the Catholic priest, the fiestas of La Inmaculada and San Bartolomé became the main celebrations of the community. They included a mass, a parade, and fireworks. Francisca describes the virgin's festivities: "During the fiesta to the virgin during the entire month of May, groups of two or three women took turns leading the celebrations every day. They recited the rosary every day and sang many songs they had learned by heart. The last day all the men took charge of the fiesta. The last day it was fancier because it was all the men together and they had a lot of fireworks and dances. When the priest was there during the rosary it was everybody praying, but as soon as he left then everybody was dancing and drinking. Accordions, *tiples* (treble guitars), and guitars were the most common musical instruments during the fiestas. There were old musicians who played the accordion very beautifully." While in the celebration of the virgin, the women were central in the maintenance of the event for a month, the men with greater access to outside resources could join forces in having a more elaborate last day celebration.

Among the former inhabitants of Sitio Viejo were those who did not accept

wholeheartedly the transformations taking place. In narrating the foundation of Puerto Murillo, Francisca lists some of the first people who built houses there and refers to Murillo Toro as "the first inhabitant" of the place. According to her, Murillo Toro was a very rich man who had all "his things", such as kitchen utensils, made out of gold. But accumulating this gold turned into nothing. Because of a war, they all had to leave and Murillo buried all his gold. Later, the river washed the gold away. Francisca's account presents a negative evaluation of the accumulation of wealth, in this case in the form of gold. Her story can also be viewed as a negative evaluation of gold in particular. This becomes significant when considering that the inhabitants of the San Bartolomé River were descendants of former slaves who worked in gold mines. The accumulation of gold had a negative impact on these communities.

Similar attitudes can be found in relation to selling dry wood. Urbano Vélez, Francisca's relative, recalls that his grandparents worked selling dry wood and has a negative evaluation of the effects of this activity. In his view, there was no progress in the country because there were no incentives to work in agriculture and the forest continued to extend to the river shores. In the case of his grandparents, continues Urbano, dry wood produced money faster than agriculture. Urbano remarked that the reason why people were not working in agriculture was that they were being paid in gold which they could bury and accumulate; something they could not do with paper after the transition to paper currency. His remarks reinforce the notion of gold as a harmful element. They also reflect the possible reaction of a generation with a work ethic based on agricultural and subsistence activities, now faced with a context of greater commercial opportunity where some people abandoned agriculture and

preferred selling dry wood as a means to make money faster.

However, it was around San Bartolomé, or San Bartolo as he is more commonly referred to, that the people of Puerto Murillo articulated a sense of community in the face of challenges against it. As probably the oldest person with roots in the community of people that settled along the San Bartolomé river, Francisca Vélez Narváez has played a central role in maintaining oral traditions concerning this saint. San Bartolo's history is closely related to the history of Francisca's family. Francisca recounted the stories below.

Francisca described San Bartolo as "... dark-skin colored. He is not black, black, but dark with black eyes." He first appeared to Francisca's grandparents in the upper San Bartolomé River. This was the period of time when there was no permanent Catholic religious authority in Puerto Berrío and priests from Medellín or Remedios went to Sitio Viejo for special celebrations. At all other times people gathered and prayed among themselves. In between priests' visits, Francisca's family managed everything having to do with the church in Sitio Viejo.

At the time of the flooding of Sitio Viejo there was already a church in Puerto Berrío and the priest tried to take San Bartolo to Puerto Berrío while a church was being built in Puerto Murillo. "When they put the saint in the canoe, the canoe sank and that was strange because the saint was not too heavy. Somebody suggested taking him to [the house of Francisca's grandparents]... The canoe did not sink this time. The canoe did not sink because San Bartolo preferred to [stay near Sitio Viejo] rather than to go to Berrío. The priest had to go there to say mass. That same priest died later from a dog bite when he went to pray for a sick person by *la linea* (the

railroad)." In this conflict over the location of San Bartolo, the local people asserted control over the attempts of the Catholic priest to take the central symbol of community to Puerto Berrío. Moreover, in the added remark about the death of the priest, Puerto Berrío, and particularly its railroad, are depicted as dangerous. The remark also ends the story with the death of the priest who was complicit in the effort to move the saint and therefore suffered.

Another story tells of a dry season event when about eight ships got stuck on the river during the night of the festivities of San Bartolo. "With the eight ships right across from Puerto Murillo, it looked like a town. Everything illuminated. As the people of Puerto Murillo were getting ready to carry San Bartolo out of the church, the sailors asked if they could carry him to petition for rain, but immediately everybody responded that ...how could it be possible for *forasteros* (outsiders) to carry the saint? That it was the people from Murillo who had to carry him. The Barranquilleros (sailors from the port city of Barranquilla), sad, sat outside the church... As the people from Murillo took the saint on their way out, they realized that they could not get out of the church, somehow the saint did not fit through the door. The priest asked again to give the sailors a chance, that they were doing it with faith and this time the people of Murillo accepted. Four Barranquilleros went inside and took San Bartolo and this time they carried him out of the church right through the door without any problem. They took turns carrying San Bartolo during the parade. As a result, that night there was a lot of rain and the next morning the ships and the *forasteros* were gone." This outcome resolved the tensions created by the interruption of river transportation and the presence of *forasteros*.

Another story shows that the devil appeared to men who did not recognize the authority of women. "A man was asked by his mother and his sister to go looking for dry wood (for cooking). He first refused because it was getting dark, but reluctantly he took the axe and left. The two women started to worry when he was taking too long to come back and wondered if something had happened to him. They decided to go searching for him. When the other women saw that they were leaving, they joined them. Then the men saw that all the women were leaving and joined as well. Some searched on land and others by the river because there was the possibility that he had gone to the river to drink water, slipped, and drowned. After searching for a while, one of them came across a cleared spot where the man was laying down with four crosses, one on each side, made out of the plant *platanillo*. They first thought that a snake had bitten him but then realized that something else had happened that the devil had appeared to him. They put him in a canoe with the crosses and headed back. In Sitio Viejo they realized that he was not dead. When he was up and okay again, he explained that the devil had appeared to him. He had cleared the tree and when he started to cut with the axe he felt something behind him. He turned and saw a cock with large claws that attacked him. He defended himself with the machete making a cross with it. The cock pulled back and attacked two more times. He continued to make crosses with the machete while asking San Bartolo for help. He did not remember anything after the third attack. San Bartolo had made the crosses and protected him. The curious thing was that there was no *platanillo* plant nearby." Francisca explains that the devil appeared to this man because he tried to refuse when the women asked him to go for wood and because he left angry.

Oral narratives reflect the role of San Bartolo as a point of autonomy and accommodation in relation to the growing influence of commercial activity and the presence of the Catholic church, and as a means for women to assert their authority. As an image of community, San Bartolo is not a reference to a primordial past but rather a response to the forces of commercialization and their encroachment on land. While families continued to have some access to subsistence production, they increasingly became dependent on selling wood and men increasingly took jobs on larger farms. The centrality of religion and the centrality of women in the maintenance of religious festivity and oral tradition suggest that these forces may have reinforced the position of women in the creation of community.

Román Antonio Rodríguez Cruz

Román Antonio's family arrived in Puerto Berrío from Sopetran. His grandfather illegally cultivated tobacco which was a state monopoly. His father worked for the railroad for thirty-three years. His brothers worked also for the railroad until they were fired when they were forming a union and organized a strike in 1933. His father had several positions with the railroad until he became captain in charge of fifteen workers doing maintenance in a section of the railroad. They were stationed eight kilometers from Puerto Berrío at a camp that in 1928 had about one hundred-eighty workers because an additional group of workers was changing the rail tracks and a group of North American workers was updating the bridges.

In contrast to his brothers, Román always preferred to be independent and work in the fields. He was born in Puerto Berrío and attended school from 1933 to

1936. He received a scholarship to study in Bogotá, but he preferred to work in the fields and, at the age of seventeen, he left the port in search of land to colonize. He prepared himself by working on a farm his father had acquired. He left with three friends to a forested region in the neighboring province of Santander. After twenty days, they returned for provisions and a few workers. In this way, Román opened his own farm which he named California because he heard a lot of talk about California on the radio during World War II. He worked on the farm for about three years and left it to his father who later sold it.

Román returned closer to the river and in association with another person opened a larger farm. During La Violencia, Román had to abandon the farm; indeed his associate kept the whole farm without recognizing Román's right to his share. Román always hired a couple of workers to assist him with the farm work. He also kept fishing nets which he used during difficult times when he relied on fishing to survive. Sometimes fishing produced enough to pay the workers.

Román eventually opened another farm and he continues to work in agriculture near Puerto Murillo. He makes contracts with merchants and harvests specified crops. Román explains that now it is harder to make a living from agriculture because you make less money for the crops and it is more difficult to find buyers. He argues that the cause of this situation is the spread of cattle raising, because lands previously dedicated to crops are now turned into pasture and the young people do not want to work harvesting crops. He thinks that it is important to love the land because there can not exist a people without fields. He recalls that several times he has helped relatives in the town with farm products. As he explains,

“...paper currency is always changing, but a chicken is always a chicken.”

Joaquín Emilio Hoyos Osorio

Joaquín Emilio Hoyos Osorio's parents were from San Roque. His father left San Roque looking for work on the haciendas, but he did not like to work as a laborer. Instead, he worked as a cook on the haciendas and changed jobs frequently. They moved from job to job until he decided to join a priest who was leaving with a group of people to colonize lands and create a town. Joaquín was a teenager when they left with the priest. He remembers that although there were many people working the land and everybody helped each other, it was a very difficult situation because everything they produced they had to consume. It was difficult to produce enough to consume and to sell. The situation turned worse for Joaquín's family when their father became sick and died.

They left the lands they were colonizing and depended on the help of relatives to survive. For some time, they were moving from one relative to another in towns along the railroad. Joaquín Emilio worked on haciendas in Caracolí. He also worked making bricks and tiles in Gallinazos. He then moved to the Malena where there were three large haciendas looking for workers. Work in Malena was easier and paid at a higher rate.

Like his father, Joaquín Emilio also moved frequently from one hacienda to another. Arguments with hacienda foremen were a common cause for movement. Workers often complained that *mayordomos* (foremen) were abusive. After an argument with an administrator, Joaquín Emilio and seven other workers left Malena

and went searching for work in nearby towns. Joaquín Emilio worked for a short period of time in Puerto Nare and returned to Puerto Berrío with little money left. He took his suitcase with all his belongings to a pawn shop and never got them back. He worked on various haciendas for periods of one or two weeks until he ran into a friend who worked on a hacienda in Malena and Joaquín Emilio returned with him to work in Malena. During La Violencia, he went to the coffee region and worked in an hacienda for about six months and returned to Malena, where he settled permanently.

Joaquín Emilio explains that large haciendas were organized into a mayoría, where owners and administrators lived, and a series of campamentos, where workers lived, dispersed through the hacienda. Each campamento had an average of about fifteen workers. Most haciendas had four or five campamentos while some of the largest ones had up to fourteen. When thinking about the origin of the large haciendas, Joaquín Emilio recalls that there were many colonists along the railroad, but the wealthy were buying the cleared and “improved” lands from them. As Joaquín Emilio puts it, that is how the rich opened up large farms because none of them cleared the forest themselves.

Carlos Holguín Flores

Carlos Holguín Flores’ maternal grandparents lived in Sopetran, where they had a farm and produced maize, cacao, rice, and fruits. His paternal grandfather and his sons worked in mines. Many of his grandparents’ children ended up leaving Sopetran after they lost rights to family land or could not find employment. His paternal grandfather’s children left Sopetran searching for work as miners. His

maternal grandparents' children, the Flores, left for Puerto Berrío. In Sopetran working conditions were changing and there were no guarantees of job security. While they waited for harvests to be ready, people had to go around looking for other jobs, creating an uncertain situation. Carlos' parents had a small farm. The younger children worked on the farm and the older ones, specially the men, worked outside. During the more uncertain times Carlos' siblings did not want to give money to their parents and the older one started buying everybody else's rights to the land. According to Carlos, this situation and their desire to be more independent pushed the older sons to leave Sopetran for Puerto Berrío where their mother had relatives. They had heard that in Puerto Berrío salaries were much better.

In the early 1930s when Carlos arrived in Puerto Berrío, worked on the haciendas was from five a.m. to five p.m. Carlos reports moving frequently from hacienda to hacienda searching for higher wages. Haciendas had a least two dozen workers but some of the largest ones had 150 workers. The contract with the haciendas included a sleeping place and meals. He remembers that they slept in tents and there were so many mosquitoes that many times while trying to burn mosquitoes with candles, they ended up setting the tents on fire. Carlos credits the new labor legislation of the 1930s and 1940s with improving working conditions.

After he married, his wife convinced him to settle in one place and they were able to built their own house. Carlos notes how initially there was substantial food production, thanks to the work of colonists, in contrast to today's lower production and high cost of foodstuffs due to the fact that all haciendas are just pasture.

Ramón Arturo Tabares

Many of the men arriving in the region opened up by the railroad were searching for wage employment. A few were able to exploit natural resources, mainly wood extraction, or to find land for cultivation. Ramón Arturo Tabares arrived from Barbosa, near Medellín. At this time most of the land had been claimed and concentrated in large haciendas. He expressed his frustration not only at the fact of land concentration, but also at the decline in food production. He recalls that “All the land was taken. The rich have all the land. They do not let anyone work. One day even the rich will die of starvation because the land is used only for pasture. At the end, we will all have to eat grass.” For men such as Ramón, claiming virgin land for small-scale cultivation was not an available alternative. Ramón was hired at the San José mining site, owned by a North American company. He worked here for about five years during the 1940s until the site closed.

At the mine, he became a person of trust for the owners. He was put in charge of making sure that workers did not steal any pieces of gold. Yet although Ramón had a close association with the 'gringos', they actually lived in very segregated quarters. The owners seemed to have cultivated a paternalistic relationship with the workers. Every year they gave them presents and the small number of workers allowed for easy monitoring of their activities. At the San José mining site, also known as Gallinazo, there were about 25 workers. The other two mining sites, Caramanta and Providencia, were larger and had different owners. Altogether, there were 170 workers in the three mines and they came together, forming one union.

A couple dozen workers initiated conversations about the formation of the

union. According to Ramón, they knew about the railroad union but they did not have outside assistance in the formation of their own and the union was not affiliated to any wider organization. The main purpose of the union was to ask for and negotiate salary raises. In addition, it provided some services for workers in time of crisis. The union seems to have had considerable leverage in the protection of workers' jobs because no worker could be fired without consultation with the union. The union was formed in 1945 and lasted until about 1948-50 when the mining site was closed.

In remembering this period, Ramón Arturo emphasizes the workers' pride in their ability to provide services. He points out that there was no need to strike, that when they needed a raise they negotiated with the company. He also points out that there was no contradiction between his close connection to the owners and his position of leadership within the union. Moreover, he emphasizes that in that union "...there was no politics, nor communist, liberal, or conservative. There was a single mass [of workers]..." This mining experience shows the company's need for labor so that it preferred to accommodate workers' demands than to enter into open conflict with them. But, as was the case for many short-lived booms, these mine workers had a short tradition of unionizing. Major organizations such as the railroad workers' union provided them with examples.

After the mine closed, Ramón made an arrangement with Jaime, the foreman of a large hacienda, to exploit timber. Jaime and Ramón had met in San Jose and trusted each other. After the closing of the mine, Ramón told Jaime that he was in a difficult situation and needed to rent forest land. According to Ramón, Jaime made the deal with him because he knew that Ramón was honest and that he would not take

advantage of him. The owners of the hacienda were from Medellín and they were not involved in the transaction. Ramón rented a large tract of land.

Ramón did not need any capital output to start the enterprise. He needed to have the ability to mobilize labor and establish a set of trading relations for his venture to be successful. He needed two workers who were with him selecting and cutting the trees and an *arriero* or mule driver to take the wood to the town. The *arriero* was responsible for the mules.

The work day was from seven in the morning to about three or four in the afternoon. Ramón and the two workers cut the trees into *tacos* and *rolos*. The *rolos* could be cut into flat pieces; the *tacos* were used in construction. This was not fine wood. It was all for commerce. In a day the total income from the wood could be 20 or 25 pesos. The workers were paid five pesos a day. The *arriero* was paid by the *rastra* or trip. The *arriero* who worked for Ramón had three mules and made about four trips a day. Each mule carried six thick *tacos* or *rolos*, three on each side. If they were not too thick, it could carry ten or twelve. The *arriero* was the one who made the most money. He took the wood to San José, separated it into *tacos* and *rolos*, and on Saturdays buyers arrived from Medellín to buy wood. Ramón had observed the merchants arriving from Medellín to buy wood before he made the arrangement to rent the forest. He told them that he had rented land and was going to bring wood out and asked them if they would buy from him.

In addition to paying the workers and the *arriero*, Ramón paid the foreman ten percent of his profits. The foreman benefited from Ramón's enterprise by simply allowing him to exploit wood sources and the owners of the hacienda benefited by

having land cleared which increased its value. It was common practice for hacienda owners to use these kind of improvements on the land as proof of their status as colonists and thus claim large extensions of land. Ramón exploited wood from this hacienda for about one year. The hacienda still has large tracts of virgin forest.

Ramón remembers the arrangement as very favorable for him. He did very well. He recalls being in a very good position, making a lot of money. He sees as the best indication of his wellbeing the fact that he had "another woman outside of the house" and was able to provide for her and his home. He was able to sustain two households. He later had jobs with the national and provincial governments. He is now recognized as a local community leader of the town along the railroad where he resides.

Amelia Castro

Amelia's family came from the mining town of Amalfi. Declining gold production most likely had a negative impact on Amelia's father's commercial activities. He owned several mules that he used in transportation. Her father decided to leave the town and try his luck in the upper San Bartolomé River where his brother had a small farm. Initially, he worked with his brother in wood extraction and eventually cleared his own plot of land. Amelia's father seemed to have been better off than many of the regions' inhabitants. He hired two or three workers to work on the farm while he worked with the mules he brought from Amalfi, carrying agricultural goods for the people of the upper San Bartolomé. He transported wood, rice, maize and beans from the interior farms to Bodegas, where they were transferred

to canoes and moved down the San Bartolomé River and up the Magdalena River to Berrío. Amelia grew up in the farm which her father kept for about twenty years. But both long-time residents and newer arrivals such as Amelia's father would later face the challenges of Medellín elites. Amelia's father sold his land to the Valderrama family. Other relatives sold to the Duque family and many other people sold the Bedout family. These families continue to be among the largest landowners in the region.

Amelia married when she was twenty-four years old to an hacienda foreman for the Duques. She remembers the Duques as having been good to them. They helped them during La Violencia when Amelia and her husband went to Amalfi for about three years. Amelia is thankful that now they have their own house because her husband suffered a stroke and can not work anymore. Amelia has a small store in a community center where she sells soft drinks and snacks.

Community Formation

Long-time residents and more recent arrivals in the region of Puerto Berrío were affected and responded in different ways to the forces of commercialization. All of these communities and workers had different historical experiences and backgrounds. The story of Francisca Vélez Narvaez illustrates the cultural history of a people whose traditions were grounded in a past of slavery, subsistence production and the struggle for community autonomy. They had made the shores of the Magdalena River their home decades before the arrival of new migrants in the early twentieth century. Many others, such as Carlos Holguín, migrated as a result of

pressures on family land holdings which was exacerbated by the impact of the Great Depression. A decline in gold mining in northeastern Antioquia during the second half of the 1930s produced the arrival of new migrants as was the case of Amelia's family. Differences in background produced differences in expectations. While some arrived with the aim of colonizing virgin forest, others searched for wage employment.

The existence of various economic sectors and employment opportunities created a significant diversity of working conditions. Important differences existed at the level of workers concentration. While some colonists lived in relative isolation in the hinterlands, others worked in small gangs. The latter was the case of hacienda workers who were distributed in camps of about a dozen workers. But even in these cases, workers most likely spent most of the day in the fields with just a couple of co-workers. We can expect that a strong degree of identification developed with the immediate group of co-workers. Thus, it is not surprising that at one point Joaquín Emilio left an hacienda with a group of co-workers who together went searching for employment in other towns. While bust conditions led to migration from other towns into Puerto Berrío, demand for labor continued to stimulate migration within Puerto Berrío as workers moved from job to job in search for better working conditions and higher salaries. As shown above, abusive foremen were a common cause for change in hacienda employment. In contrast to rural areas, a great number of workers concentrated, socialized and competed for non-agricultural jobs in the port.

These descriptions highlight the relevance of migration for working-class formation and the great diversity of rural people that others have found in other

contexts (e.g., Mallon 1983; Nash 2001; Edelman 1992; Smith 1989; Gould 1990). As Roseberry has shown for Venezuelan proletarians, the consciousness of these emerging working-classes does not rest on a pre-capitalist village tradition, but it emerges from the turbulence created when capitalism uproots and then thrusts together diverse groups of laborers. In other words, cultures of class and resistance are “constructed from the cultural raw materials presented from history” (Roseberry 1989: 76). Thus, the deployment of cultural practices in new contexts as was the case of offerings to Huari or the significance of contracts with the devil in the context of particular working conditions among Bolivian miners (Nash 1979); the continuation of the idiom of reciprocity that masks new unequal relations among peasant households (Lagos 1994); or the struggles to redefine *día de trabajo* and *faena* as foreign and local landlords, and Nicaraguan and Costa Rican laborers confront historically specific “cultures of work” (Edelman 1992: 354).

In Puerto Berrío, different groups of laborers responded with different forms of community to the tensions created by increased commercial activity. Among migrant workers, the creation of community can be found in a history of union and political organizing that relied on Liberal reforms. In this regard, Puerto Berrío workers resemble Chinandegan campesinos in their use of a Liberal discourse to create a class culture (Gould 1990). We will discuss later their liberal ideas, but for now we can establish that practically every single male and female worker, including those described above, described their identification with the Liberal party as part of their family tradition. In addition, as we will see in the next chapters, workers in the port responded by organizing and taking control of dock work. In contrast, the

creation of community in Puerto Murillo can be found in the religious image of San Bartolomé. Although people in Puerto Murillo identified themselves as Liberals, in response to outside forces they elaborated a sense of community built less around politics and more around the religious figure of San Bartolo. Women played a central role in the maintenance of this tradition. The fact that they were able to maintain a hold on subsistence production and were less drastically impacted by a rigid sexual division of labor may help explain their central leadership role.

This diversity highlights the powerful role of Liberalism as a common point of identification of all these communities. These differences notwithstanding, Liberalism emerged as a unifying element bringing all the laboring communities together. Political identification was the common central aspect they all shared. Identification with the Liberal party was a point of commonality among workers along the river and the railroad, and between these and workers in Puerto Berrío.

Chapter 4

Work, Gender and Households

This chapter examines the impact of labor transience on household construction and gender formation. In the fluid frontier context of Puerto Berrío, households took particular forms as the transient nature of labor inhibited their stability. In addition, gender constructions took on contradictory meanings as males in formal employment assumed positions of privilege while at the same time the frontier context allowed some women to assume positions of autonomy and leadership.

By looking at the sexual division of labor, household forms, and family ideals we can understand the ways in which gender relations in Puerto Berrío structured a particular working-class culture. I consider two basic dimensions that shaped the emergence of this culture. First, the frontier characteristic of the region translated into boom and bust cycles of economic activity and into the migratory waves that accompany such cycles. This periodic movement of people was a central factor shaping the types of domestic arrangements that emerged. Second, cultural understandings and commitments mediated economic and structural factors and shaped domestic arrangements and gender relations. As part of the cultural and political traditions that migrants carried with them to Puerto Berrío, they also brought particular notions of proper family ideals and gender relations. These notions articulated in various ways with the conditions present in Puerto Berrío and provided a basic framework for the choices individuals made about their living arrangements.

Sexual Division of Labor

The study of gender relations in class societies, and male supremacy and women's subordination under capitalism in particular, has largely rested on "metanarratives" of capitalist development in core areas and on the roles of family and household as sites of labor reproduction. In contrast to core industrial areas, where women tend to be largely excluded from the public domain and workers are reproduced from within nuclear families (Sacks 1974, Farnsworth-Alvear 2000),⁷ women in frontier areas may have a greater role in the public domain and workers are replenished through migration.

While these migrations are traditionally seen as consisting of single male workers, women form an integral part of them and of the emerging working-class communities they produced. Most men arriving in the Puerto Berrío region engaged in formal wage employment on cattle haciendas, in public works, the railroad, and the dockyards. Most of these single male workers, and dockworkers in particular, met their needs in the informal economy that developed. While men occupied the formal labor market, women became the primary source of labor for the informal economy.

The negotiation of men's and women's places within these communities was shaped by the very transiency of labor and the forms of employment available for men and women alike. The particular forms of employment available in Puerto Berrío structured a sexual division of labor that gave men control over the labor market.

⁷Early textile manufacturing in Medellín employed predominantly women. The industrial elites forged an ideology of work and gender that rested on a tight supervision of women's morality and sexual habits (see Farnsworth-Alvear 2000). At the level of the household, women's labor was conceptualized as supplementary to family income and their participation in industrial production did not translate into greater autonomy.

With the exception of those who ventured into remote areas to cut timber or open small farms, most men arriving in the town engaged in formal waged employment. As we have seen, a high demand for labor gave men some level of negotiation over salaries and working conditions, and they often moved from hacienda to hacienda or to new construction projects in search of better working conditions or higher wages.

In addition to cattle haciendas and public works, the two other major sources of formal employment were the railroad and the dockyards. The railroad was a state-owned company that had several work-gangs stationed in Puerto Berrío. It offered attractive conditions but a small number of jobs. Dock work became the main occupation for men, and dockworkers developed a strong and organized labor movement that consolidated the working-class culture that shaped life in the port. Work in the dockyards was the highest paid local occupation, making dockworkers an elite among the working classes. Their salaries helped fuel the local informal economy that developed to meet the needs of single male workers.

In contrast to men, women did not have access to formal wage employment in the railroad or dockyards, and employment in public works or cattle haciendas was limited to a very few positions in the preparation of meals. Most women sought work in the growing informal economy of petty commerce and services. They worked in restaurants and bars or as domestic servants, washed workers' clothes, or opened small food stands in the local market. But prostitution was by far the main occupation available for women. In fact, social life in the port was dominated by a large prostitution zone.

Although I use the concepts of formal and informal economy, following Babb, I do not mean to suggest a lack of linkages between capitalism and the informal sector (Babb 1989: 49-50). Women's labor in households and informal economic activities were an integral part of the regional economy. As Nash states, "Whereas women's labor appeared to be a reserve when the ideology of patriarchy characterized their commitment to domestic labor as primary, their labor has always been an essential part of specific labor markets" (Nash 1985: 9).

Moreover, Babb challenges placing Andean marketing exclusively in the sphere of redistribution. As she shows, when viewed within the broader arena of the whole production process, market women have a role in production as they transform products in their passage from marketer to consumer (Babb 1989: 46). In addition, re-evaluations of the concepts of production and reproduction, and their use in the study of domestic workers, show that the activities usually assigned to women in households, such as child rearing, cleaning, and cooking are linked to production processes (Gill 1994; Chaney and Garcia 1989; Bunster and Chaney 1985). Puerto Berrio women's labor in the informal economy and in households is equally as linked to productive activities as is that of women elsewhere.

Women, Work, and Households

The prostitution zone consisted of dozens of bars and bordellos. Each of these bars employed women to serve and socialize with the men and offered rooms where women lived and engaged in sex-work with the clientele.

The women working in prostitution were not just individuals outside of a larger set of social relations; they developed a community among themselves that provided support in meeting their subsistence and other needs. They sent remittances to relatives in other towns, and many of them, in addition to their room in the bar, paid for a separate room outside of the zone for their children. A spectrum of relations developed in which occasional sex-work turned into more regularized relations with particular men based on the exchange of money and goods for sex and company. In addition to dockworkers, men working on steamships were preferred for these type of relationships. They were considered "good customers" because they also provided women with gifts such as clothes and perfumes. Many of these relationships turned into formal marriage or long-term informal unions.

Toward the late 1930s the state developed an interest in regulating prostitution and confining it to a more specified zone for which purpose it created a Health Center. Maintaining a registry of all the women, the Center had assigned to it a "sanitation police force," charged with keeping women from the zone out of the center of town. This caused many conflicts, particularly with women who had children housed in apartments outside of the zone.

Different forms of prostitution developed on the river shores. Women visited fishing camps along the river but the relations they established with fishermen were more of a contractual nature where sex, services, money, and company were exchanged. In addition to the sexual and Romantic relations that women had with particular individuals within the fishing camp, they remained in the camp and worked fixing meals and preparing fish. As the son of a fisherman explained, in the cases

where children were born and the fisherman assumed paternity, "the fisherman becomes a señor and the prostitute becomes a señora." However, this new status was not achieved until a living place for the woman and child was acquired in the town.

While it could be argued that women enjoyed some degree of autonomy, reflected in their ability to independently start small businesses or in the non-monogamous character of the relationships that they established⁸, it is also the case that their exclusion from the formal labor market put them in an economically subordinate position in relation to men and that the transient nature of labor and the non-legal character of their conjugal relationships left them in a weak position to enforce men's obligations. By continuing with occasional sex-work while maintaining one or several more formalized relationships, women exercised a level of autonomy and independence concerning their relationships with men. This highlights the contradictory nature of some social relations, which could be at the same time a source of oppression and a source of autonomy. A similar question can be raised about the relationship between formal and informal economy. The exclusion of women from the formal labor market may place them in a contradictory position of economic subordination while at the same time they could achieve a level of autonomy provided by the possibilities of the informal economy in which they participated.

Established men were conscious of their dominant position and saw themselves in a position of power, able to give women a new social legitimacy through setting up a household, whether by marriage or through a long term informal

⁸For a similar argument in the context of copper mining frontiers in Chile see Klubock 1997.

union. This was referred to as taking the women “out of the life”. In fact, dockworkers thought of themselves as very desirable candidates for marriage. As one of them explained to me “[for a woman] to marry a dockworker was like hitting the lottery. A wedding lasted three or four days. They named twenty-five or thirty godparents...each dockworker with his wife or permanent partner sponsored the wedding, twenty or ten pesos each, food, drinks ... some weddings even had up to three bands...two or three days dancing. Those were famous fiestas. ...In the town the people would comment ‘shit, she hit the lottery. She married a dockworker’”.

In studying domestic relations in the fluid social context of a frontier, it is necessary to challenge any rigid understanding of concepts such as “household,” which is often used to imply a bounded and stable unit that reproduces itself. A common problem in family studies is the tendency to “reify the unit, to treat it as an entity or ‘black box’ rather than a collection of people and relationships” (Creed 2000: 346). These understandings rest on the tendency to turn concepts into things or to take basic social categories, such as family and household, as explanatory devices (Roseberry 1989). Research on Andean women and households has shown that in fact, households are highly flexible articulations of income streams, productive and reproductive spheres, and modes of production (Smith 1991; Babb 1989; Gill 1994; Nash 1985; Deere 1990). In addition, Gill’s work on domestic service challenges rigid distinctions between public and private spheres. These become problematic notions when the public sphere of the employee is the private sphere of the employer. As Gill argues, these concepts are then related more to an ideology of power and control than to any actual existing division in social life (Gill 1994).

Labor transience was a central factor undermining the emergence of stable households in Puerto Berrío. Single men arriving in the port and moving from job to job were in too unstable a position to start a household. These men entered into conjugal agreements with women who worked in the maintenance of their household and produced household income by engaging in petty trade and services. These households often lasted until men left, searching for employment as declining industries forced them into migration. Women, often with children, stayed behind and eventually formed a new household with another man.

We could have expected this condition to be more the case for rural workers or workers not based in the port itself. But the majority group of workers in the port, the dockworkers, also found few incentives to establish permanent households. Men who had access to temporary work in the dock yards tended to move in and out of dock work, which was, in their case, one of several sources of income. Most men who secured a permanent position in the union remained on the job on a more permanent basis. In any case, dockworkers who enjoyed a position of power had access to a large informal economy to meet their subsistence needs. Age may have played a major role in shaping men's desire to enter into contractual agreements with women and start a new household.

The everyday experience of making a living - boom/bust economic cycles, migration, conditions in the hinterlands, dockworkers' position- became constitutive of family ideas. Households in a constant process of dissolution and reconstitution became the cultural norm. Compounding the possibilities for diverse domestic arrangements was the particular situation of dockworkers who generally met their

reproductive needs not through the formation of households, but in the informal economy.

In various contexts families and households can be described as the point of articulation of multiple income streams. This is the case in the context of flexible accumulation and transnational families where formal wage employment, informal activities, and subsistence production are articulated through the family. A similar situation is described by Carmen Diana Deere (1990) when she focuses on the multiple income generating activities of peasant households to explain the persistence of the peasantry in the midst of social differentiation. Similarly, the households Smith described are multi-occupational enterprises reflecting a mixture of commodified and non-commodified social relations (Smith 1991). In the same fashion that the instability of various sectors of the economy creates a situation of constant household dissolution and reconstitution among Huasincanchinos, Puerto Berrío households were constantly reconstituted according to changes in employment opportunities. In addition to households as the articulation of multiple income strategies, dockworkers' reliance on the informal economy turned the informal sector into a central sphere for the articulation of productive and reproductive activities.

Juana Cañola and Luz María

The life histories of Juana Bautista Cañola and her daughter Luz María serve as an indication of the changing conditions of labor for men and women in the history of Puerto Berrío and the ways in which these conditions impacted household formation. Because Juana's father had acknowledged her as his daughter, she had

rights to his land in a coffee-producing area in Santa Fe de Antioquia. But after the death of both her parents she and her siblings were too young to effectively maintain control over their small plot and they soon lost it. With the help of Juana's paternal uncle, who worked near Puerto Berrío, Juana and her grandparents left Santa Fe for a small plot of land along the railroad in Puerto Berrío in the final years of the nineteenth century.

Juana's first partner, Pablo Tulio, worked for the railroad while she worked at home preparing three meals a day for about five workers, her partner, and her children. In Juana's view, railroad workers had an easy job and many breaks during the day, while she was raising two children and preparing meals from very early in the morning until late at night. When Pablo died, Juana left the children with their godmother and went to work preparing meals for workers on the haciendas. There she met Juan Bautista who worked for a family from Medellín that was opening an hacienda. Juana and Juan decided to live together; while he worked on the haciendas, she raised pigs and washed clothes for hacienda workers.

During the mid-1930s there were rumors of available employment in road construction in the region of Catatumbo. Juan said that he was bored with working on the farms and wanted to try something new, so he left for Catatumbo. Juana went to live with a sister who now resided in El Presidio, a few miles along the shore of the Magdalena River. El Presidio was a small settlement of people who had cleared land along the river, and from agricultural production and fishing obtained their basic subsistence as well as products to sell in Puerto Berrío. They also sold land to new arrivals. Forty-five days after arriving in Catatumbo, Juan died from yellow fever,

but it was not until three months later that Juana received the news. She left for Catatumbo and was able to receive payment from the company for the days that he had worked and some money for his death. With that money she bought some cattle and a small plot of land in El Presidio. When Juana started a new household with Isaac Herez, a fisherman and agricultural producer, three or four years later, she had acquired about fifteen head of cattle and had land under cultivation.

In 1945, the Gulf Corporation began to explore for oil in the region of El Presidio. Most of the people sold their land to the company and left the area. As Juana explains: “they pushed us out, with money, but still they pushed us out.” Soon more and more people came to the region -- company employees and workers, as well as women to work as prostitutes. With the money she received for her plot, Juana bought another piece of land where she continued to keep cattle and cultivate. Soon she found herself selling smaller plots where people were building houses and bars. In a short period there was a large population of workers. Juana seized the opportunity and quickly became known as “La Poderosa” (The Powerful One) in El Presidio. In addition to washing workers' clothes, she had a yard with about one hundred chickens. Purchasing large quantities of sugar, rice, and oil in Puerto Berrío, she prepared food for the workers and the women of the zone. She also rented houses to the women.

The company seemed to have appreciated Juana's efforts in providing services to workers and allowed her to use a company boat when she needed to go to Puerto Berrío to buy provisions. The boom lasted no more than three years but during that time more than a hundred houses had been built. This period came to an end when

Gulf moved to a different place and most of the people who owned bars and restaurants left, following the company.

The case of Luz María, Juana's daughter, indicates that the choices outside of prostitution for women without capital may not have been many. In Luz's case, staying in an abusive relation was perceived as an alternative preferable to prostitution. Women who did not engage in prostitution were careful not to undermine their chances to start a new household and sought "not to fail" or not to have pre-marital sex. Luz María's first job in Puerto Berrío was as a domestic servant in the house of a military officer. She found the wife of the officer to be too bossy and to demand too much work, and after a couple of months she left the job and began washing dishes at a hotel. While working at the hotel she ran into Alejandro, whom she had met earlier. He asked her if she was not ashamed to be washing dishes and if she wanted to go with him and cook just for him. The next day she quit her job and left with Alejandro for the remote area where he worked as a logger. Luz describes Alejandro as unstable because when "he was bored on a job he just left and took another one." They stayed in the mountains cutting wood several months at a time, then moved to nearby ports to sell wood and buy provisions, and on many occasions stayed fishing for several months. At other points, Alejandro also kept corn crops and one time he left for about four months to work on the construction of a road.

When Luz's and Alejandro's first child was born, her mother was able to give Luz two *chinchorros* (fishing nets) so that they could leave the forest and Alejandro could establish a fishing camp on the Magdalena. Alejandro fished near El Presidio

for several years until the Gulf Corporation abandoned the region. He went searching for employment in another port and eventually returned to logging while Luz, now pregnant with her second child, stayed with her mother and two other brothers. Alejandro's relatives, who were fishermen in Puerto Berrío, provided Luz with fish and money. Months later Alejandro returned very sick, fished in Puerto Berrío for some time and eventually died.

In evaluating the seven years that she lived with Alejandro, Luz describes herself as very submissive and him as a very bad "husband." "That *señor* never respected me. He drank a lot. The man who drinks a lot does not respect the wife or woman. I never treated him badly but he beat me a lot." Luz explains that Alejandro never asked her to marry him and that he was so bad that he did not even register the children as his own. Although she looks back on Alejandro as abusive and violent, she also describes this relation as a learning experience that made her a better woman. "With that 'senor' I learned 'to respect'. When he died, I was left with that *enseñanza* (learning), 'to respect'." With Alejandro, Luz acquired the habit of being *ordenada*. She was not a *bailarina, callejera, andariega, grosera, o desordenada* (dancer, street woman, promiscuous, vulgar or disorderly), nothing like that." In trying to make sense of how the relation with Alejandro could somehow be viewed as a positive experience, Luz looked at the choices available for women. She believes that if she had not lived with Alejandro, maybe she would have taken up another life on the streets, drinking alcohol, because if a woman did not go with a *señor*, the only other alternative was the zone.

The stories of Juana Cañola and Luz María illustrate the range of economic activities that women engaged in, the impact of working conditions on household formation and the possibilities the informal economy could provide to some women. The sexual division of labor that emerged, the large informal economy that developed to meet the needs of single male workers, and the transient nature of labor provided little incentive for the emergence of stable households and favored a situation of constant household reconstitution that required women to develop flexible strategies of survival.

At the same time, the working-class culture that emerged in Puerto Berrío was shaped by dockworkers' notions of masculinity associated with work and social life. To be a dockworker, a man had to prove great physical strength and the capacity to endure many hours of continuous movement of cargo. The masculine bonds created during work were reinforced through male sports clubs, union organizations, and socializing in the zone. Dockworkers took pride in being able to dress fancier than most other workers, in having uniforms for special celebrations, and they enjoyed entering a bar and having two or three women sitting at their table. Non-dockworkers resented their cockiness and arrogance.

Family Ideas

Cultural commitments and expectations informed the choices people made in the context of particular economic conditions. Thus, the decision to migrate to Puerto Berrío, to enter into particular domestic arrangements, and the degree of exchanges

maintained with their families of origin were also a result of individuals' ideas and expectations.

Migration to Puerto Berrío during the 1920s and 1930s was clearly connected to economic decline in mining districts and in coffee producing towns. When faced with economic depression families have two basic choices: to disperse through migration or to limit the size of their families. The choice to create limits on fertility and to have smaller families was not a culturally acceptable norm. For Antioqueño culture, built on the experience of frontier expansion and strong Catholic values, the ideal typical family is a large one and migration is a culturally acceptable norm over limiting fertility.⁹

This raises the question of the extent to which migration, in this case, could be viewed as a family strategy. If we were to take a notion of strategy in which those who migrate continue to be strongly linked to their families of origin through, for instance, the sending of remittances, this would not be the case of Puerto Berrío. Although some informants reported sending remittances to their towns of origin, this was not a regular practice and communications and exchanges with their families of origin were sporadic at best. Exchanges were hindered by the lack of technological developments that would make continual interaction possible. Rather, migrants in Puerto Berrío became a resource that relatives or friends in towns such as Santa Fe or Sopetran considering migration could tap. Migration became more than the unfortunate situation of those who could not be supported by family resources.

Although the decision to migrate may have taken place in a context of economic

⁹For a case where limits on fertility becomes the response to economic depression see Schneider and Schneider 1996.

crisis, most males experienced their move as an act of independence and autonomy as they were growing "mature" and were rebelling against their fathers' expectations and desired a greater share of economic independence, as was the case of Carlos Holguín, described in chapter 3.

However, an earlier generation of migrants, those arriving earlier in the century and generally from the Atlantic Coast, most commonly cited as the cause for migration family disintegration due to complete land dispossession at a time when large latifundios were consolidating. These more directly experienced migration as a result of dispossession rather than a search for autonomy.

In the first case a cultural dynamic, men's desire for independence from their families, was a factor in driving them to the frontier and in frontier expansion. In this process of frontier life, people generated cultural practices in which they tried to reconcile their previous notions about family, household, and gender with the arrangements created in Puerto Berrío. For this they tended to rely on a language of family.

The model of the factory as a family has served as a paternalistic approach for the control of women entering industrial production (see Farnsworth-Alvear 2000). Women's participation in industrial production may violate gender codes that value them for their domestic roles. The factory model serves also to reconcile the contradiction between their cultural expectations and their current roles. In these cases workers remake the factory into a private space like home and the language of family is used to refer to the workplace.

A similar argument can be made about the community of dockworkers and prostitutes forged in Puerto Berrío. Both men and women tended to refer to the port as a large prostitution zone. The zone dominated the social life of the port and for the majority of workers it was a central aspect of their community. Rather than focusing on the sexual and economic transaction involved, when describing the "zone", a social and community character was emphasized. The term family was commonly used to describe dockworkers and prostitutes: "we were all just one big family." This is an image enhanced by the role women played during major social upheavals when they participated in support of striking dockworkers.

This representation of community as family does not imply a Románticized idea of equality. In fact, people used notions about family and domestic arrangements for personal objectives and as a source of social differentiation. Arguments over family are an attempt "to tap the cultural capital concentrated in the idea of 'family' for personal, social, political, and economic objectives" (Creed 2000: 330). To avoid entering into prostitution some women entered into abusive monogamous relationships with men working in the hinterlands. As illustrated by the case of Luz María, the prevalence of prostitution swayed some women to enter into particular domestic arrangements and to accept harsh working and living conditions in the forest. Men used prostitution as leverage and tapped into the prevalence of unstable households to meet their personal needs as they moved from job to job. Conversely, the fluid state of domestic arrangements allowed some women to acquire positions of independence, mostly in petty trades.

At a broader level, there are two models of family and domestic arrangements in contestation. Migrants from Antioquia's interior originated in a cultural milieu characterized by the dominant presence of the Catholic Church and patriarchal families. Long-time residents of the region and migrants from along the river shores tended to conform to domestic arrangements based on the notion of *unión libre* - not sanctioned by the church. The structural conditions of the expanding frontier and people's negotiations of their working and living conditions generated the dominant model characterized by households in a constant process of reconstitution, including female-centered multigenerational households. This conforms to Gutiérrez de Pineda's (1996) description of family cycles along the Magdalena shores. Her typological discussion of family in Colombia raises questions about the ways in which these models interact and become sources of social differentiation.¹⁰

In Puerto Berrío, church officials, state functionaries, and the wealthiest sectors of the local and regional economy seem to make up the group most clearly advocating the "Antioqueño" model. For them, all other forms of domestic arrangements were signs of moral decay and a cause of the "backwardness" of the region. These views were shared by many who in a self-deprecating manner would point to the existence of few "established families" as evidence of cultural and social backwardness. The history of working classes in Puerto Berrío suggests that alternative domestic arrangements were a result of the forces of commercialization that periodically uprooted people. They were also a result of processes of

¹⁰For a critique of how these typologies perpetuate the racialization of regions see Appelbaum 2003.

differentiation between working men and women as they negotiated changing working conditions.

As Meertens (1993) found in another colonization area, in expanding frontiers women have an increased flexibility in the various roles that they can perform. The lives of Juana and her daughter exemplify these possibilities while at the same time showing men's attempts to impose rigid definitions of their roles.

Chapter 5

From Insurrection to Institutionalization

From the early 1930s to the early 1950s, Puerto Berrío dockworkers developed a strong movement that successfully advanced workers' interests. Their strength was not guaranteed by the strategic importance of dockwork for the national economy but resulted primarily from the political choices they made. As Roseberry (1989) has argued, the expansion of the state may provide elements for the formation of political communities among emerging working classes; such was the case of Liberalism in Colombia. However, communist discourses constituted another raw material that workers could draw on in the process of community formation. As Caballero states, "It is impossible to study twentieth-century history without referring sooner or later to the Russian Revolution" and, continues Caballero, to the role of the Bolshevik Party as the embryo of the world Communist Party – the Communist International (Comintern) (Caballero 1986: 7).

Through an overview of early Colombian labor history and a discussion of popular protests in Puerto Berrío in the early 1930s, this chapter examines the obstacles for autonomous working-class political representation and the fluid context of Liberal and Communist contestation for the political leadership of the laboring classes. It is from this context that Liberalism emerged as the dockworkers' central ally in their ascendancy.

The period 1870-1930 signifies for Latin America the origins of a modern urban age. This was the result of the creation of export economies and the subsequent

emergence of working classes associated with early forms of manufacturing and primarily with mining, agro-export activities, and transportation. By the 1920s, Latin American nations faced the challenge of political inclusion of new working classes that had emerged in the previous decades and constituted new powerful social actors. Before entering into the discussion of dockers in Puerto Berrío, it is necessary to take a look at the development of the Colombian labor movement and the character of workers' relations with the state prior to the early 1930s.

The Early Colombian Labor Movement

Public works and transportation played a major role in attracting workers from agricultural work into new forms of salaried employment. The state encouraged this movement directly by providing subsidies for transportation costs and indirectly through forced military conscription. After two years of military service, many chose not to return to their towns of origin but to seek new employment; in fact, proof of military service went a long way in ensuring employment. These developments were part of the process of national consolidation and infrastructural development stimulated by the growth of the export economy. Although manufacturing industries developed in cities such as Medellín and Bogotá in the 1900s and 1910s, the greatest concentration of workers could be found in the railroad and river transportation sectors and it was these workers who led the labor struggles of the first decades of the century. Labor historians have characterized the 1900s to early 1930s as an early formative period for the working class, which consolidated as such in the 1930s and 1940s (Archila 1991, Urrutia 1969).

The early labor movement was characterized by an eclectic combination of popular religiosity, radical liberalism, and socialism. Archila (1991) identifies these as the main cultural and political traditions that artisans passed down to the new generations of workers. Partly due to the low numbers of European migrants to Colombia, anarchism had a less enduring influence on the labor movement. Although the direct impact of artisans on the emerging working classes may have been stronger in the few large urban centers where they were concentrated, the working classes outside of these few cities emphasized various aspects of the artisans' traditions. The popular religiosity of the first workers' organizations was not an acceptance of religious authority but an emphasis on the social aspects of Christianity. This religious perspective coexisted with anarchist, socialist, and communist ideas and led to an anti-clericalism which provided a common ground with the radicalism that had characterized Liberal sectors since the nineteenth century.

In considering these Liberal sectors, it is important to remember that liberal radicalism was not simply associated with the Liberal Party but refers to a set of values associated with the French Revolution and a strong belief in reason as a force for change. These values were passed down through family tradition in the sense that affiliation to the Liberal or Conservative parties was an ingrained element of family history. Typically, while Conservative families met daily to pray the Román Catholic rosary, Liberal families recounted the military glories and deeds of Benjamín Herrera and Rafael Uribe.¹¹ Finally, rather than a radical transformation of social structures, the socialism espoused by the early labor movement was a call for the need to attend

¹¹ A similar pattern is found in Honduras, where it is common to hear that a person is of "cuna Liberal" or "cuna Nacionalista".

to *the social question* or the social conditions of workers, as well as a call for a redistribution of income through a reformist process (Archila 1991: 91-97).

Although artisans' organizations and leadership did serve to articulate and project the demands of the first generations of workers, these early years were characterized by workers' attempts to create their own unions and political organizations. Dissatisfaction with the Liberal economic reforms of the mid-nineteenth century and the search for protectionist measures drew artisans to support the Conservative insurrection of José Melo in 1854. The failure of the insurrection caused a crisis in the artisans' Democratic Societies. Following this period artisans were organized mainly in mutual aid societies and cooperatives which, in addition to including artisans, were open to entrepreneurs and elite members, and received the support of the church (Sowell 1992; Archila 1991: 212, 216). Artisans' preoccupation with Liberal-Conservative inter-party politics and a perspective of class collaboration continued to be present in the first workers' organizations, and the search for an independent workers' politics defined the labor movement in the first decades of the twentieth century.

With the consolidation of the export-oriented economy under Conservative governments, artisans reactivated their demands for protectionist policies and saw in the new salaried populations an ally. The Unión de Industriales y Obreros – UNIO (Union of Industrialists and Workers), founded in 1904, was the main vehicle for artisans' demands during the early years of the twentieth century. The organization made no distinction between industrialists and master artisans and reflected a spirit of collaboration between workers and elite members. Short-lived experiments to create

an independent workers' party and to overcome UNIO's alliance with industrialists took place through the 1910s. The most significant cases occurred in 1910 when UNIO sponsored the creation of a workers' party with a protectionist program, in 1913 with the appearance of the Unión Obrera Colombiana, which appealed exclusively to workers, and in 1916 when workers and artisans revived the idea of a workers' party. These organizations often disappeared after they allied with one of the two traditional parties in electoral participation. Nevertheless, many local and regional organizations emerged through the 1910s which supported the creation of a workers' party. All these organizations formally adhered to socialism, rejecting the traditional Liberal and Conservative parties. All appealed exclusively to workers, were composed mainly of artisans, and lacked a national presence (Archila 1991: 216-219).

Nowhere other than Antioquia was the church as organized and effective in shaping workers' organizations. The Antioquian clergy transformed *cofradías* (sodalities dedicated to particular saints) into mutual aid societies which provided the basis for the later emergence of Catholic unions. Through its Catholic Social Action (Acción Social Católica), the church and elites promoted the creation of philanthropic organizations to provide aid and promote the technical education of workers. Antioquia's industries became characterized by their *patronatos* through which elites sought to control the predominantly female labor force of the textile industries. *Patronatos* were administered by religious communities and provided workers with housing, meals, and religious and moral education (Archila 1991: 213-216, Farnsworth-Alvear 2000).

However, the clergy could not contain workers' strikes, their search for more autonomous organizations, and their attempts to create a workers' party. A crisis in coffee exports from 1919 to 1922 was a central factor causing a wave of strikes that took place, primarily among railroad and river transportation workers, in 1919 and 1920. By now, the Russian Revolution was an important stimulus for workers' struggles and it was among these transportation workers that revolutionary ideologies spread first (Torres 1973). Socialist, anarchist, and Bolshevik tendencies disputed the leadership of the labor movement.

A national workers' assembly in Bogotá in 1919 founded the Socialist Party and local and regional organizations throughout the country adhered to it. Rapidly, the Socialist Party obtained electoral victories in areas of worker concentration as well as in those characterized by land conflicts. In major cities such as Medellín, Manizales, and Honda, the Socialist Party displaced the Liberal Party from second to third place (Archila 1991: 219-221). The rapid success of the Socialist Party brought into high relief socialist and liberal competition to become the political voice of the emerging working-classes, and liberal fears over socialist advances. After declaring that "socialist aspirations have been and are part of its goals as a political collectivity and would be a reality if the party were to govern the country," the Liberal Party submitted the candidacy of Benjamín Herrera for the 1922 presidential elections (*El Espectador*, 3, April, 1922. Quoted in Archila 1991: 259, note 27). Benjamín Herrera's candidacy gained the support of socialists and caused the disintegration of the Socialist Party. While the struggle against the Conservative regime continued to unite socialists and liberals through the 1920s, Liberal and Conservative political

traditions continued to undermine the emergence of alternative politics.

Attempts at resurrecting workers' organization at the national level reemerged in 1924 when, dominated by reformist sectors, the First National Workers' Congress and the parallel Socialist Conference were held and a conciliatory platform was approved. The following year, anarchist organizations from Bogotá organized the Second Workers' Congress which rejected political parties, called for workers' direct action, and founded the National Workers' Confederation (CON). Socialist sectors gained leadership of the Third Workers' Congress in 1926 and, in addition to CON, the congress founded the Socialist Revolutionary Party (PSR) (*ibid.*, 240-243). After the disintegration of the Socialist Party in 1922, the PSR represented the most significant expression of a workers' political organization with national projection.

Although Colombian communism did not yet constitute one of the "real sections" of the Communist International in Latin America,¹² Comintern policies had an important impact on the Colombian labor movement. The leadership of the PSR was active in the Comintern, organizing strikes, and involved in insurrectionary activity.

With the Second Workers Congress in 1925, Raúl Mahecha, María Cano, Tomás Uribe Márquez, and Ignacio Torres Giraldo emerged as the main socialist leaders and played central roles in the PSR and the leadership of workers' strikes during the 1920s. Strikes were generally organized to demand reduction in work hours, salary increases, and the improvement of working conditions. Unions tended to emerge in the context of specific strikes and to disappear once the conflict was over.

¹² Only in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Uruguay, Mexico and Cuba did Communist organizations achieve the status of real parties, while Paraguay, Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador, Colombia, Venezuela, Panama, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Costa Rica, they were considered "minor" parties.

Strikes often drew the solidarity of other workers and the popular classes, which raised the possibility of general strikes. Socialist leaders often appeared as the negotiators for striking workers.

For instance, a strike at the Pacific Railroad in 1926, led by Ignacio Torres Giraldo, rapidly extended to include five thousand railroad workers and paralyzed the western section of the country. During the same year the threat of a general strike on the Magdalena River in solidarity with striking dockworkers from Girardot ensured them a victory. Major strikes also took place in enclave industries. In 1924 and 1927 oil workers from Barrancabermeja went on strike against the Tropical Oil Company. Raúl Mahecha and María Cano figured as prominent leaders of these strikes. The most significant struggle of this period was the 1928 strike by workers of the United Fruit Company where Raúl Mahecha played an important role (Caballero 1986: 51). The strike ended after the army's intervention resulted in the death of between one thousand and 1500 workers.

The leaders of the PSR was most likely encouraged by their success in labor mobilization and their self-conceived role in world revolution. Indeed, they saw an imminent social revolution occurring in Colombia. Although the PSR was not recognized as a "real party," it was accepted into the Comintern in 1928 (Caballero 1986: 43-44). As Edelman argues, Soviet policy toward Latin America was shaped by a tension between the Soviet interests as a nation-state and the promotion of world revolution (Edelman 1987: 9). In Caballero's words, this translated into, on one hand, a European or defensive emphasis or, on the other hand, a colonial or offensive emphasis (Caballero 1986: 19). The PSR joined the Comintern during its Third

Period, when Stalin was gaining power, campaigns of Bolshevization were in place, and sectarian policies questioned peasant organizing as a “Trotskyist” deviation.

Yet, at the First Congress of Latin American Communist Parties in Buenos Aires, in 1929, when the Comintern transmitted the Stalinist policies set in motion at its Sixth Congress a year earlier, Latin Americans were more concerned with the imminent agrarian or democratic revolutions they saw coming in Venezuela, Brazil, Colombia, Peru, and Bolivia. In several of these countries, communists had a significant following among the peasants (Caballero 1986: 82-83; Edelman 1987: 11-12).

At the Buenos Aires conference, it was now communists who expressed concern over the advances of Liberals in several countries. Raul Mahecha declared that “...unless the communists took the initiative, the Colombian Liberals would achieve revolution with imperialist support...” Similar concerns were expressed by delegates from Guatemala. The meeting conclusions stated that “The situation in many countries of Latin America was far more revolutionary than we supposed before” and that at least in Colombia there was “an imminent revolutionary situation which could lead the syndicates, the peasants and the party to take power and set up a workers and peasant government” (Caballero 1986: 84-85).

The PSR was in fact in the midst of organizing an insurrection scheduled for a few weeks after the Congress. Another insurrection was to take place in Venezuela at the same time. Exclusion from the political system created a common ground between socialists and Liberals and once again the PSR and sectors of the Liberal Party joined forces, this time in an armed anti-Conservative insurrection. While the

civilista sector of the Liberal Party argued for the need to modernize and regulate labor relations, the *guerrerrista* sector joined the PSR.

After the Venezuelan insurrection was called off and many Colombian Liberals withdrew their support for what they now perceived as a communist takeover, the Colombian insurrection was also rescinded, but news did not reach all participating groups. Most notably, a group of artisans and peasants led by a shoemaker who worked with the PSR went on to stage an uprising in the town of Líbano, Tolima. In a religious style, they talked about “father Lenin” and “Virgin María Cano,” drew up concrete plans for the redistribution of hacienda lands, and accumulated a large armament for the insurrection. As they found themselves isolated, their insurrection failed and more than one hundred-fifty peasants and artisans were captured. This group became legendarily known as “the Bolsheviks” (Henderson 1985; Sánchez 1976).

Compared to other Communist Parties in Latin America, several of which consisted of a handful of activists, the PSR was a real mass party. However, from the point of view of orthodox Bolshevization, the PSR did not constitute a real Communist Party. With active pressure from the Executive Committee of the Comintern, it turned into a cellular organization and re-emerged in 1930 as a “Bolshevized” Communist Party. With this transformation, the PSR, now the Communist Party, lost its importance as a political force. The ultra-leftist and sectarian Comintern policies of this period led to the isolation and defeat of several communist movements (Caballero 1986: 51, 102; Edelman 1987: 12). It is clear also that relations between many Latin American communists and the Comintern were

uneasy, as Latin Americans, too, tried to grapple with the goal of a world proletarian revolution and the realities of their predominantly agrarian societies.

In fact, one of the most significant areas influenced by the CP was the peasant region of Viotá where peasants were encouraged to keep the land they had seized from large haciendas. Viotá developed as an “independent republic” with its own militia and judicial system. Agriculture prospered and the “independent republic” survived as such until the 1960s (Gott 1970: 176; Jiménez 1985).

The dominant policies of the conservative regime were characterized by economic liberalism and political authoritarianism. There was no regulation of labor or capital and a lack of inclusion of workers as such in the political order (Archila 1991: 248). As a result, labor mobilization in the 1920s created a crisis of legitimacy for the Conservative hegemony even if, at the same time, the failure of the insurrection caused a crisis for the PSR. Through its *civilista* sector and with the victory of Enrique Olaya Herrera in the 1930 presidential election, the Liberal Party emerged as a popular alternative, a modernizing agent, and in the process ensured the maintenance of elite dominance.

This overview highlights the failed working-class attempts to create an independent political representation and the national level competition between Liberals, Communists and the Catholic Church to lead the labor movement. Below, we will look at Liberal and Communist efforts to lead popular protest in Puerto Berrío during the early 1930s.

Popular Classes and Political Traditions in Puerto Berrío to 1934

Although the election as president of a moderate Liberal candidate in 1930 raised hopes for social reform, the coming to power of the Liberal party did not automatically mean social peace. While there were fewer strikes during the early 1930s, Olaya Herrera had to face the social unrest produced by the impact of the Great Depression on public works, agriculture, transportation, and mining. Unemployment and agrarian agitation in regions such as the Magdalena valley were the main sources of social unrest during this period. Major protests took place in early 1932 and on May 1st of the same year the Communist Party organized *Marchas del Hambre* (Hunger Rallies) which originated in rural areas and converged on major cities.

The government of Olaya Herrera responded with repressive measures and the persecution of Communist and peasant leaders (Archila 1991: 276-282). Nevertheless, the Liberal political discourses of the 1930s resonated with a population whose historical memory was shaped by Liberal figures such as Rafael Uribe Uribe and Benjamín Herrera. This was especially so for the people of Puerto Berrío. Olaya Herrera had chosen Puerto Berrío to officially launch his presidential campaign. The central decoration at the chambers of the local council continues to be the document produced at that moment. This, the naming of the central square after him, and his life-size statue in this square indicate the symbolic importance of Olaya Herrera and of Liberalism for the local population. The launching of his campaign in Puerto Berrío had a strong meaning, not only for the working people of the Magdalena valley, but also provoked fear among Antioquia's traditionally Conservative elites. Puerto Berrío, after all, was at the center of a space they considered dangerous.

Despite the reformist hopes raised by the end of the Conservative Hegemony and the fresh memories of the 1928 massacre of the banana workers and of the 1929 failed insurrection, the early 1930s continued to be a period of acute social conflict in Puerto Berrío. Compared to both the late 1920s and to later years, the early 1930s had fewer movements of protest, but these were concentrated in regions such as the Magdalena River valley.

In its condition as a port of strategic importance and as the center of an expanding agricultural frontier, Puerto Berrío became a place where the region's workers concentrated. The impact of the Great Depression on extractive industries, transportation, and agricultural production turned large sectors of workers into the unemployed who gathered in the port. In addition, to avoid the concentration of large numbers of unemployed people in Medellín, departmental authorities provided free tickets for train transportation to Puerto Berrío. Local authorities in the port complained of the daily arrival of more unemployed people. To the local and regional elites, these popular classes became the source of all kinds of disruption.

In the late 1920s, local authorities were optimistic about "... the alarming character of the workers' situation...". They expected that a great number of people would soon be hired by foreign oil companies in the region and assured the governor that they were attempting to stop workers from moving to Medellín (Archivo Histórico de Antioquia, Fondo Gobierno-Municipios, hereafter cited AHAGM, 1930, vol. 8085, no. 136, see appendix A). However, the optimism was unfounded and, through 1931, local authorities continued to report worsening conditions for workers and to find in the unemployed the source of such major evils as the growth of petty

crime and the expansion of communism. The crisis had not only led to unemployment but also to a reduction in wages. A high number of workers previously employed in dredging the river now found themselves unemployed or with their salaries reduced. Implying that workers had less money to spend on alcohol, a mayor saw these trends reflected in the reduction of the number of people imprisoned for drunkenness: 739 in 1928; 266 in 1929; 94 in 1930; and 21 in the first two months of 1931 (AHAGM, 1931, vol. 8099, no. 312). Yet, petty crime was reported to reach an "alarming" level (AHAGM, 1931, vol. 8099, nos. 326-327), exacerbated by the arrival of "foreign elements" after the firing of *mucho bandolaje* (many bad elements) by the Tropical Oil Company. Viewing them as "...socialists and not just Liberals," many believed that these people were after the priests, the warehouses, and the tax collectors (AHAGM, 1931, vol. 8099, no. 372).

The social atmosphere of Puerto Berrío made the port an important stop not only for Liberal presidential candidates but also for political leaders with a more radical agenda. Liberalism and communism were the main political orientations to which workers and peasants adhered.

Radicals and Liberals: Luis Sterling and Julio Ocampo Vásquez in Puerto Berrío.

In June, 1931, the mayor informed the governor of the recent arrival in the port of individuals fomenting socialist propaganda. In particular, he reported on Luis Sterling's arrival from Bucaramanga, and his meeting with local socialists such as Marcial Delgado, Enrique Arango, and Julio Barrera. According to the mayor, these

meetings were part of a general plan to create a Federal Workers Organization and he explained to the governor that he had noticed a "socialist ferment in the port that only waits for a suggestion to fully explode." The mayor thought that the atmosphere was favorable for the "agitators" because of the unmet needs of the people of the port and the extreme "malaise among the working classes." He referred in particular to conflicts created by workers' competition for jobs unloading ships, because ship captains preferred to use their own crews rather than local workers. This competition for jobs was intensified by the depression and became a central context for the creation of the dockworkers' union (see Chapter 6).

After summoning Sterling to his office, the mayor concluded that although his actions were not subversive, he did promote "... the system adopted by the Russian workers and against capitalism" (AHAGM, 1931, vol. 8099, nos. 326-327). Sterling's presence in Puerto Berrío suggests that despite the failed insurrection two years earlier, sectors of the local population continued to be receptive to socialist and communist ideology and politics and clearly indicates the existence of known local socialist leaders. The communication also highlights the importance of conflicts concerning dockwork, which intensified as greater numbers of unemployed tried to obtain jobs loading and unloading ships.

During the early 1930s, workers expressed the class struggle taking place within the Liberal Party through their confrontation of elites in local elections. They confronted Conservative elites and Liberal elites in control of the electoral board. They presented independent workers lists for municipal elections and workers' based policies were drawn in many parts of the country. It is then significant that Luis

Sterling arrived from Bucaramanga where workers gained control of the city council in 1931 (Long 1995: 182-197).

Local authorities and the governor were also concerned with the actions of Julio Ocampo Vásquez. Ocampo Vásquez's arrival in Puerto Berrío was partly the result of elites' use of frontiers as the destination for "politically undesirable" people. In December 1930, Ocampo Vásquez was organizing in Medellín to present his candidacy as a socialist in the State Assembly elections the following February. Fearing the impact this could have, the governor pressured Puerto Berrío's mayor to name Ocampo Vásquez as Police Inspector of Puerto Nare, located in the district of Puerto Berrío, as a way of getting him out of Medellín (AHAGM, 1931, vol. 8099, nos. 320-321).

Ocampo Vásquez was a typographer, member of the PSR in the 1920s, and director of the paper *Nuestra Palabra*. During a strike by oil workers in Barrancabermeja, workers leaders were persecuted in several parts of the country and Ocampo Vásquez was captured in Honda and taken prisoner. Following the same trajectory of many PSR leaders, Ocampo Vásquez became a member of the Communist Party during 1930-1933, the period of time when he was in Puerto Berrío (Long 1995: 163; Medina 1980: 107).

Deploring the state of abandonment in which the municipal authorities maintained some of the towns in the district and Puerto Nare in particular, Ocampo Vásquez set out to work for the betterment of the public administration and created the Junta de Fomento de Nare for that purpose (AHAGM, 1931, vol. 8099, nos. 357-358). He also exhorted the local population to exercise the right to vote in the coming

elections and reminded them that it was not necessary to know how to read and write in order to vote and that they could and should inspect the ballot box to ensure that there was no fraud. He called on the population to participate in the elections in a spirit of peace "... as children of the same nation, [as] *compañeros* in the sacred temple of work..." and to take on the emblems of "work, progress, and justice" (AGAHM, 1931, vol. 8099, no. 385). On February 1, satisfied, he reported a not surprising result: 12 votes for the Conservatives, 194 for the Liberals (AHAGM, 1931, vol. 8099, no. 359). Rather than a communist threat, the actions of Ocampo Vásquez seemed to help legitimate the Liberal regime through the incorporation of agrarian sectors into politics.

Reflecting the growing Liberal and communist presence, elections in Puerto Berrio, the district's seat, were more conflictual. In these elections it became clear to local elites that "...the port was in the hands of four or six agitators" and that "... four or six Conservatives who were working on the elections were put in jail." The member of the Electoral Board reporting this incident lamented the treatment that Conservatives were receiving and described how before the elections many people were fleeing the banditry and looting that was expected (AHAGM, 1931, vol. 8099, no. 372). Another member of the Electoral Board described the moment as one when "... the lives of many honorable citizens were in danger, victims of the concentrated and legendary anger of the plebe in mass that assaulted them and pretended to throw them in the Magdalena river ...". Remembering these events and considering that the number of voters had increased considerably, local authorities requested greater numbers of Departmental Police in anticipation of future elections (AHAGM, 1931,

vol. 8099, no. 376).

As Ocampo Vásquez moved to promote the colonization of national lands to ensure small producers' access to land, local and departmental authorities tried to curtail his actions. Vásquez, meanwhile sought to legitimate these actions by relying on the Liberal discourses concerning small agricultural producers' access to land, especially given the impact of the depression. When forced to explain himself to the governor, he emphasized the legal basis for his actions. In order to help "...their brothers who suffer misery in the city...", agricultural producers organized the Liga de Colonos which Ocampo Vásquez supported. After presenting the project to the Departmental Assembly and contacting the Ministry of Industries to establish which lands were available for colonization, the producers concluded that even after considering the lands occupied by people with their respective titles, and especially those of the hacienda La Unión, there were still unclaimed public lands (*tierras baldías*) in Puerto Berrío and also in San Luis, San Carlos, and along the Magdalena river and its tributaries (AHAGM, 1931, vol. 8099, nos. 360, 361-362).

Ocampo Vásquez's promotion of laws concerning colonization and *tierras baldías* resulted in at least thirty people initiating actions to legalize their possessions under law 47 of 1926. They claimed to be occupying these lands for at least 40 years. At least twelve of them were occupying lands that a large landowner claimed as his property (AHAGM, 1931, vol. 8099, nos. 361-362).

National political changes and the presence of Ocampo Vásquez in Puerto Berrío provided a framework for local, small agricultural producers in which they attempted to legitimize their struggle for land by calling for the application of

national laws. The effects of the Depression and the need to solve the "social problem" were also invoked to promote land colonization. However, this did not mean that social conflicts took a legalistic and pacific form. Colonists had to face the hostility of large landowners and Conservative authorities. As conflicts continued to grow with Ocampo Vásquez, Puerto Berrío's mayors grew hostile to him. Without much detail, a mayor reported to the Governor that a homicide had occurred on the lands of a large landowner that colonists, encouraged by Ocampo Vásquez, were attempting to claim (AHAGM, 1931, vol. 8099, nos. 326-327). To describe the threat posed by Ocampo Vásquez, this mayor characterized him in the same way that he was later to describe Luis Sterling. He informed the Governor that Ocampo Vásquez was a communist, who every Sunday assembled a number of people and talked to them about the "systems adopted by the government of Russia in relation to work" and about the need to "organize against the capitalists." Regardless of the mayor's calls to Ocampo Vásquez to advise the people "to respect the right to property" and the Puerto Berrío Council's call for his resignation, the mayor agreed with the Governor's decision to leave Ocampo Vásquez in Puerto Nare where he "causes less damage than in Puerto Berrío or Medellín" (AHAGM, 1931, vol. 8099, nos. 320-321, 326-327).

Ocampo Vásquez's lectures were causing growing dissatisfaction among some sectors of the local elite, who complained to the Governor because the mayor was allowing them. Ocampo Vásquez must have become a powerful figure, since the Governor delivered a public speech that attempted to respond to the issues he raised. According to the mayor, in the lectures Ocampo Vásquez rebutted the governor's

speech and emphasized that money and support were necessary to cultivate the land, and that after clearing forest and establishing themselves, these poor workers were expelled from the land or imprisoned because "the people were completely alone and without protection from the public powers...". Taking into account that the "...people almost in its totality believes everything that their jefe tells them ...[and] are in fact following him," the mayor considered that if Ocampo Vásquez's conferences were prohibited, it would be necessary for the Governor to send between 80 and 100 soldiers until the upcoming elections (AHAGM, 1931, vol. 8099, nos. 336-337). The Governor did take some action by sending a detective to investigate Ocampo Vásquez and 30 soldiers to be used at the mayor's discretion (AHAGM, 1931, vol. 8099, nos. 338, 339).

Ocampo Vásquez, meanwhile, was expanding his activities, which were not limited to Puerto Nare. He was also giving lectures in Maceo, another settlement under the jurisdiction of Puerto Berrío. In addition he had announced to the Governor that the newspaper *Nuestra Palabra* of Cali would continue to be published from Puerto Berrío under his direction. He described the paper as an "...organ of the workers" (AHAGM, 1931, vol. 8099, no. 338).

Ocampo Vásquez moved from his lectures to the organization of public rallies and the creation of a Cooperativa Obrera de Producción y Consumo (Workers Cooperative of Production and Consumption) in 1931. The new mayor was more blunt than his predecessor in attempting to restrict the freedom of the people involved in this project and prohibited their meetings. This mayor feared that the "socialist or communist" group led by Ocampo Vásquez was attracting a greater number of

followers. He denied permissions for their meetings because they tended to turn into political rallies (AHAGM, 1931, vol. 8099, nos. 343, 344). Immediately, in a document with about 50 signatures, Ocampo Vásquez complained to the Governor about the arbitrariness of the mayor's decision. Reminding the Governor that just two or three days earlier he had received and given his assurances concerning their rights to meet and organize to a committee of workers, Ocampo Vásquez explained that the pro-worker and union campaigns were within the law and discussed the lack of legal basis for the mayor's decision (AHAGM, 1931, vol. 8099, nos. 388-389).

As Long argues, artisans and colonists shared a similar structural position and were independent producers becoming proletarianized. In the role of artisans in the social mobilization of colonists and the many instances of joined political action, Long found that the worker-peasant alliance was more than just a slogan (Long 1995: 157-165). In addition, the Liberal Party's promise to work for the establishment of "cooperatives of production and consumption" and Gaitán's interest in "cooperative institutions for production, distribution, and consumption" brought together a concern for urban and rural workers. With his work leading peasants in the colonization of public lands, pro-workers campaigns, and the creation of the Workers Cooperative of Production and Consumption, Ocampo Vásquez represented this tradition in Puerto Berrio.

Although we do not know the final outcome of this specific incident or the fate of Ocampo Vásquez and his followers, these communications indicate Ocampo Vásquez's ability to manipulate regional political forces and face local elites. Forced to explain himself, the mayor argued to the Governor that he had "irrefutable proof"

that in previous rallies "...honorable individuals were cited by their names and referred to as bourgeois and other expressions which do not sit well with [them]..." The mayor did not see a purpose "...in a crowd of individuals taking to the streets carrying flags ...with the premeditated objective of applauding shocking expressions and to take advantage of every conjuncture to hurt peaceful citizens with phrases and attitudes which do not allow tranquility." Moreover, based on security information, he explained that they were just waiting for the right moment to seize the goods that honest merchants have in their stores in order to form with them the so called "Workers' Store." The ultimate evidence the mayor found to prove his points was that these people were "...precisely those of the lower class of all societies, the day laborers and the unemployed who pretend to better their situation with what is produced in others' haciendas or enterprises." The mayor emphasized the seriousness of the situation by concluding that "a starving people, well trained in the doctrines of Ocampo Vásquez, will produce at any moment an imminent catastrophe, which I want to avoid" (AHAGM, 1931, vol. 8099, no. 345).

Although some of these descriptions of the working classes and of the social conflicts in Puerto Berrío may have been exaggerated, they do indicate an increasing level of popular political mobilization and elite fear, and an intricate web of political alliances. For example, the president of the local Conservative Committee warned against the forthcoming tragedies that "...the horrors of Communism..." would bring (AHAGM, 1931, vol. 8099, no. 379), but the mayor, although he described the political situation during election times as delicate, noted that the socialists did not seem to have subversive intentions and suggested that some people had an interest in

making it seem that they were going to take over stores (AHAGM, 1931, vol. 8099, no. 341). Not only did Liberals and communists share political interests but the negotiation of particular conflicts was shaped by the political affiliation of particular governors and mayors. Liberal governors and mayors were more receptive to working-class demands and suspicious of Conservative motivations.

But Liberals and communists also entered into conflict. In the mid 1930s, Ocampo Vásquez was a Unirista working with the Casa Liberal in the organization of peasants and colonos. From a communist perspective, the influence of the Casa Liberal on worker's unions was characterized as the work of "sindicalist buroucrats of known anti-communist trajectory", such as Ocampo Vásquez who apparently had left the Communist Party (Long 1995: 163; Medina 1980: 256).

In 1934, Ocampo Vásquez was leading an umbrella organization of peasant leagues in Central Cundinamarca responsible for a strike of tenant farmers that involved three thousand peasants and ninety-two coffee haciendas (Long 1995: 163).

While political conflicts intensified in the port, land conflicts continued to occur through the district. In 1933, the owner of the hacienda La Arenosa in Puerto Alicia initiated legal action against three men for an "attack and disturbance" (*ataque y perturbación*). The men explained that they were colonists in possession of a plot of public lands. The mayor explained to the Governor that it was false that he had asked any tenants to leave the land and that on the contrary and according to the "...idea of the current government to help and protect small cultivators, who constitute the main source of public wealth, the mayor's office would not try in any case to evict from their possessions individuals who since remote times enjoyed national lands that

now belong to them as cultivators or colonists, on the contrary this office has a special interest in this class of workers who we consider worthy of official support" (AHAGM, 1933, vol. 8131, nos. 362-363).

In other cases the authorities sought the mediation of the clergy. That was the case in an hacienda in Maceo where a priest had agreed to talk to the "insurrectos" but warned the Governor of the difficulties that "...these poor people, due to their own ignorance, will give [him] since not always do the parishioners agree with those of us who are in charge of guiding them morally and spiritually." After talking to the men who numbered more than thirty, the priest reported that they claimed to be in possession of the land for more than forty-five years and that it was in the last fifteen that they were being harassed. While some were ready to settle for a division of their lands, despite the injustice that this would mean, others said they preferred to die than to give up their land (AHAGM, 1933, vol. 8131, nos. 413-414).

As the conflicts over land throughout the region demonstrate, the hopes for reforms and the interest of the new Liberal regime in avoiding radical transformations provided legal and institutional spaces that agricultural producers could manipulate in their struggles. High levels of unemployment played a role in intensifying conflicts over land between colonists and local and regional landowners. Continued struggles over land throughout the whole district of Puerto Berrío during the early 1930s suggest that these agricultural producers found conditions favorable to collectively challenge the claims of large landowners.

Communist Politics.

Conflicts over land were only one aspect of the social unrest of this period. Puerto Berrío faced acute problems caused by the concentration in the port of unemployed workers and the resurgence of popular politics. Although the Liberal forces now had an interest in the maintenance of social order, they continued to share a common ground with communists in identifying Conservative elements as their enemy. Local, state, and national elections were periods of heightened political conflict when fears of popular political mobilization intensified. The early 1930s can be seen as a period of transition when Liberal and Communist forces successfully challenged local Conservatives' powers. At the same time, however, Liberals sought to distance themselves from the more radical atmosphere of the late 1920s. While initially Liberals and communists shared political interests, starting in 1932 they grew more hostile to each other.

In 1932, as communist agitation reignited at the national level, the party in Puerto Berrío was also consolidated. It focused on attacking the Liberal Party as it consolidated its electoral victories by including new social sectors in the political system. On a general level this may seem a clear-cut distinction, but at the local and regional levels political and economic interests intersected in a complex web of alliances and sympathies. Both Conservative and Liberal local elites and large landowners feared the challenges posed by the expansion of communism. Local communists received support from political networks that extended to other cities and used the legalistic discourse of the Liberal regime to win the sympathies of the working classes and further their political and social mobilization, as the case of Ocampo Vásquez illustrates.

In early February, 1932, with some urgency, the mayor asked the Governor for authorization to take actions against communist events. These included the continued organization of lectures and rallies which the mayor prohibited, the creation of a "Committee Pro Union Organization", and the announcement of a large rally for February 29th. In addition to having detectives investigate communist leaders, the mayor ordered that their houses and offices be searched. According to him, "... they talked about arms, and had agreed that in the rally they would carry flags in order to hide their daggers" (AHAGM, 1932, vol. 8119, nos. 113-114, 115).

The rally of February 29 seemed to fall within the Hunger Rallies that the Communist Party was promoting. According to an official investigation of that rally, a communist committee from Puerto Berrío coordinated with communists from Guamal and Cachimbero, in the neighboring Department of Santander del Sur, to stage attacks against merchants, the mayor, and the police. As a result of the investigation some forty people were imprisoned and taken to Medellín. This provoked protests against the mayor in Medellín and in the national press. The mayor complained to the Governor that the communist uproar against him had penetrated into high levels of the Departmental Administration and that he rejected the findings of a second investigation that the Governor had ordered. He rejected the second commission because, according to him, its members were some of the same people who had caused the events of February 29 (AHAGM, 1932, vol. 8119, nos. 120-121).

This rally must have been a turning point for both communists and local elites. It indicated the growing influence of communism among the working classes of the region and the challenges that popular mobilization created to the reformism of Olaya

Herrera. Throughout the remainder of 1932, local elites grew alarmed at the growing presence of communism. The mayor, merchants, landowners, and the clergy regularly petitioned the Governor for additional police forces for the port (AHAGM, 1932, vol. 8119, nos. 122, 125, 127, 159, 163, 164, 165). These people feared communist attacks on their lives and properties (AHAGM, 1932, vol. 8119, no. 163), even more so when considering that "... the people affiliated with these movements represent more than half of the residents" (AHAGM, 1932, vol. 8119, no. 164). These petitions also requested changes in the jurisdiction of municipal and Departmental police as well as the office of mayor because there was little they could do to carry on an investigation or capture someone once they had crossed the Magdalena to Santander (AHAGM, 1932, vol. 8119, nos. 119, 131, 132, 156).

More than accurate descriptions of actual events, the constant references to communists, to their connections with the changes taking place in Russia, and to the "legendary anger of the masses" hiding their daggers to attack peaceful citizens are a reflection of the intolerance of authorities and elites for any form of popular politics and of their efforts to delegitimize, indeed to demonize, popular protest. This was all the more so at a time when the Liberal regime aimed at becoming the voice of the popular classes and the regulator of social conflict. In a letter of support to the Governor for his recent response to a communist rally against him in Medellín, the mayor noted that "...if everyone from the head of state to the last mayor of a village had seriously dealt with the problem which we have today, without doubt ... we would have dealt with that nucleus of citizens without spilling blood, and without anything disloyal from those who govern to the governed; because it is not necessary

to deploy as in past epochs the armaments of the *bananeras* causing death [a reference to the massacre of United Fruit Company workers in 1928], but with prudence and determination, if the case merits it, and relying on the constitutional principles of public order..." (AHAGM, 1932, vol. 8119, no. 128).

Communism seemed to be getting in the way of the Liberal model of social regulation and not all sectors of society were as convinced of the Liberal aim of incorporating the new social sectors. Puerto Berrío's Patriotic Junta of National Defense petitioned the Governor for authorizations for the mayor and the local commandant to lend the rifles under their control in order to give military training to a group of public employees and merchants who had volunteered. The training was to take place two hours daily near the mayor's office (AHAGM, 1932, vol. 8119, no. 145).

Communists presented a list of candidates for the local elections for the municipal council in 1933. Although they seemed to be an important force in the urban center of Puerto Berrío, their main strongholds were in the rural areas. Before the elections, people from Puerto Sierra complained to the Governor of the abuses and persecution that the mayor was committing against communist leaders. Two of them had been arbitrarily arrested for four days because they were suspected of being responsible for a flier that questioned the local public administration and called for the investigation of some crimes. A few weeks later, for no apparent reason, one of these men was again arrested in Maceo and imprisoned in Puerto Berrío for at least five days. About a month before the elections another man was arrested when he was distributing fliers signed by the Communist-controlled Electoral Committee of the

Frente Unico. According to the complaint, the mayor's interest was clearly to obstruct Communist participation in the elections (AHAGM, 1933, vol. 8131, nos. 398-401).

The flier accused the purveyors of electoral fraud from "both bourgeois parties" of trying to deceive the working masses with the only goal of reaching the local council to control the municipal budget and distribute for themselves the money from taxes paid by workers and peasants. They identified three forces competing for votes. Liberals created the newspaper *El Obrero Liberal* to try to gain influence among the port workers. Conservatives attempted to gain votes among workers in rural areas. Finally, "...others, in the Sindicato de Braceros, whose belligerence has been recognized by some of us and who because of their needs allowed their own enemies to lead them in their union organizing efforts, are also beginning to capitalize the votes of their own compañeros..." This last remark suggests that in August, 1933 the Sindicato de Braceros Portuarios had already been created and that despite communist efforts to lead in the organization of unions, Liberals might have played a central role in the organization of the dockworkers union. Several dockworkers mentioned the influence of at least one merchant in providing support for the organization of the union. But, the communists were optimistic because, according to them, now workers started to realize that these people interested in their votes were all their class enemies, whose common interests were contradictory with their own because the 'surplus' was at the same time the origin of wealth and of their own misery.

The flier emphasized a description of the Liberal and Conservative parties as

representing the interests of the same class of wealthy Liberals and Conservatives and called on workers and peasants to vote for candidates of their own class. Communists promised to address the problems of peasants, to protect small merchants against municipal taxes, to address the situation of tenants, to ensure that every working family had a place to live without becoming a victim of the landlords, to attend to the unemployed, and finally, they promised to enlist the support of the administration in ensuring that the dockworkers receive a fair wage and not have to suffer the contingency of work (AHAGM, 1933, vol. 8131, nos. 398-401). This list provides a blueprint of what must have been the main social issues affecting the working classes. The array of issues raised is also an indication of the diversity of working classes gravitating to Puerto Berrío. The flier identifies issues affecting landless peasants, hacienda wage workers, people in petty trades, small and mid-size merchants, and a large number of workers facing problems of urban growth. The latter included principally dockworkers, but the port was also a place of convergence for men employed in river transportation, the railroad, public works, the Santa Cruz shipyard, and the dredging of the river.

This concentration of workers in Puerto Berrío and the continued waves of migration into the region intensified the problem of housing. The development of the urban sector required a long process of leveling the terrain and filling the lagoon-like area. Although institutions such as the hospital provided some housing for workers, most of the expanding population was at the mercy of a few large landlords who owned large numbers of houses.

As we have seen, unemployment was especially acute in the first years of the

decade, as an expanding frontier Puerto Berrío continued to attract people from other regions. Not all of the arrivals found employment and they became, in the eyes of the local authorities, a source of petty crime. In 1934, the mayor asked the Governor to substantially limit the number of free tickets given for travel for Puerto Berrío. He explained that the three daily free fares that the railroad in Puerto Berrío had made available for sick people to leave the port were not enough for the number of people requesting them (AHAGM, 1934, vol. 8142, no. 112).

Local and regional authorities became increasingly anxious about the behavior of the working classes, which were identified as sources of petty crime and communist agitation and subjected to moralizing campaigns (AHAGM, 1934, vol. 8142, nos. 18, 19, 20). Social unrest originated not only in the challenges that popular politics and mobilization created for local elites but also in conflicts among workers competing for available jobs and particularly for dockwork employment.

Communist and Liberal competition for leadership of urban and rural protests meant that at the local level workers and peasants engaged in particular conflicts could draw on these discourses to articulate their demands and mobilize resources on their behalf. Through this engagement with politics, workers and peasants placed themselves and articulated their struggles within the national sphere.

It is in this context that the dockworkers' union emerged as the central institution around which a local working-class culture coalesced. In the next section we examine some of the processes involved in the emergence of the union. These include a generational conflict, the transformation of the labor process, and the national political context.

Chapter 6

The Sindicato de Braceros Portuarios

The rise of dock workers to a position of high social status was a result of their transformation of a casual system of labor into a formalized labor system controlled by their union. The prominence of dock workers resulted also from the ways in which they were integrated in the rest of the port's communities, and the particular way in which they forged a community of *braceros* or laborers. In addition to creating and maintaining a strong organizational framework for their economic struggle, dock workers constituted an elite and solidified this status through social and cultural expressions which differentiated them from non-dock workers. This chapter reconstructs aspects of dock workers' lives that can help us understand their political consciousness and the process through which they achieved a position of high social status. Thus, dock workers' experiences must be considered in relation to those of working communities in urban and rural areas discussed in Chapter Four. It is in relation to these communities that they achieved a high social status.

The Origins of the Sindicato de Braceros Portuarios

Until 1934, loading and unloading of ships took place on a casual basis. Navigation companies did not rely on a permanent labor force for the handling of cargo; instead, every captain hired the labor necessary to handle his ship's cargo as he arrived in each port. Captains negotiated loading and unloading prices and the full amount was paid upon completion of the task with no further obligation. However,

the system was not as unorganized as one may first think and the organization of dock work in Puerto Berrío is an example of what might have been the norm all along the river. Captains developed regular connections with “middle-men” who served as intermediaries between them and workers. They contracted with these labor brokers and did not have to deal directly with dockers or concern themselves with matters of supervision. This, however, was not entirely their choice.

Migrations from the highlands and the coastal lands to the valley of the Magdalena river ensured a steady stream of unemployed people eager to make some quick cash loading or unloading ships and this availability made it easier for captains to employ laborers without entering into long term obligations with them. The captains did attempt to maintain a permanent body of workers that they could supervise and control. Although labor was abundant, not having a core force of workers would leave captains subject to the uncertainty of finding and dealing with a labor force, over which they had no control, as they arrived in each port. Thus, ships carried a number of workers to load and unload cargo. Yet, as conflicts in Puerto Berrío indicate, local workers struggled against this practice. The port’s mayor reported in 1931 the existence of a local organization known as the “ambulance” in charge of handling ships’ cargo. The mayor had to intervene on several occasions because conflicts erupted when members of this organization protested against the captains’ use of their own crew to handle cargo (AHAGM, 1931, vol. 8099, nos. 326-327). In addition, dock workers refer to the powerful presence of Heliodoro Arroyave in controlling dock work in the early 1930s. It is not clear what the relationship between Arroyave and the “ambulance” organization was, if any, but

they both suggest dock workers' efforts to control the workplace and the work process.

Heliodoro Arroyave, most commonly known as "El Barbao", occupied a privileged position as a "middle-man" in Puerto Berrío. As ships arrived in the port, captains contracted with him, and he in turn hand-picked the necessary number of workers. He negotiated with each captain unloading prices by the sack and workers were paid by him in accordance to the number of sacks each handled. Arroyave, and two other men who assisted him, organized and supervised a labor force of seventy or eighty men distributed in daily work gangs. Luis Gómez remembers the first time that he worked for Arroyave: "...that was everybody 'take me, take me' and one time he took me and since I was still weak, I drop a sack ... into the water and what a problem! Right there I lost [my day's earnings]..." Gómez's recollection indicates not only Arroyave's central role in the organization of work, but the existence of a large number of workers competing with each other for access to dock work (Luis Gómez Restrepo and Germán Baena Sánchez. Interviews).

Germán Baena, who in the late 1920s was already working as a dock worker, gives an indication of the informal daily arrangements with Arroyave:

"...they would say 'such a ship is arriving and it is pretty loaded, fifteen men there to go unload it until finished'. The *capataz* [foreman] collected the money when the job was finished...In those days there was no office ...The office was the street. The *capataz* would go to the captain 'so many sacks at so much per sack'. He was paid inside the ship. Those navigation companies had an administrator, but they did not pay in the office. It was the captain who paid in the ship. The *capataz* would

come out with the money and sat on the street, such and such, and he would pay him say fifteen pesos, ‘that’s what you made’ ...” (Germán Baena Sánchez. Interview). Surely workers questioned if the amount distributed on the outside was the same as what was received in the inside.

German’s matter of fact usage of the term *capataz* to describe people in charge of job organization and supervision is a recognition of an established authority. This term is commonly used by agricultural workers to describe people in positions of supervision on the haciendas and thus, its usage in the context of dock work in an urban area may suggest dock workers’ evaluation of work discipline in relation to earlier experiences as agricultural workers. His recollection also reflects the prestige of the ships’ captains. Although navigation companies had administrative offices in the port, workers dealt directly with captains who paid them in cash. More significantly, German’s recollection indicates the lack of any accountability to workers by Arroyave and his associates, who privately negotiated each contract inside the ship. Moreover, it is unlikely that the system of supervision was so efficient as to effectively determine each workers’ salary based on the number of units of cargo each moved.

Arroyave’s ability to command this labor force, his relations with captains, and the fact that, prior to 1934, many workers were already working primarily as dockers suggest the existence of an informal organization of work and a regular labor force. Although it is not clear how Arroyave achieved his position or the basis of his hiring and long-term relation with workers, it is evident that he had sufficient authority to decide who had the right to work.

This labor system can be described as casual because beyond payment in cash for a task performed there was no further formal obligation between employer and employee. However, one can speculate on the existence of informal obligations and expectations between Arroyave and captains and between Arroyave and a core of workers who labored on the docks for long periods of time. Willing or not, by relying on Arroyave as a source of labor, ships' captains ensured a regular labor force as they arrived in port. Most likely, Arroyave's relations with captains helped him legitimize his position vis-a-vis workers and undermined attempts by others to challenge his place. From his relationship with workers, Arroyave ensured access to a basic body of workers who in turn could count on having a job the next time a ship arrived.

For many workers, dock work provided an attractive source of cash without the constraints of a commitment to a permanent job. Many port workers took docking as a temporary occupation and worked for several days, a couple of weeks, or a couple of months. Although many workers moved in and out of dock work, many of them took dock work on a more regular basis, which indicates the existence of a regular labor force and relationship with Arroyave. This second group of dockers started to resent the exclusive powers of Arroyave. Workers did not have any insight into his negotiations with captains, but most of all, they resented his authority and exclusive right to decide who could work. The latter concern was expressed in descriptions of him as "the king of jobs."

Opposition to "El Barbao" was led by a younger generation of workers who felt "...mature, [and] strong to work and to talk" (Luis Gómez. Interview). German Baena recalls that these men "... set up a meeting for all eighty men...[there were

people] more knowledgeable, who had more education, then a junta was formed with the younger workers.” Out of this conflict the Sindicato de Braceros Portuarios (SINDEBRA), the dock workers union, was formed in 1934. At one level the emergence of the union can be viewed as a generational struggle against El Barbao. In addition to feeling more mature, these younger workers felt "strong to talk," were "more knowledgeable," and "had more education." What these descriptions may be indicating is that these workers had appropriated either Liberal or communist discourses in their efforts to create a union. The flier of the communist Frente Unico suggests that Liberals had a strong leadership among workers and local sources credit one local merchant with supporting the formation of the union with money and his knowledge of the new labor laws (German Baena. Interview). With the formation of the union, Arroyave and his friends were displaced and the system of casual labor was replaced with a formal work organization and work discipline controlled by the dock workers' union.

Casual Labor

In the expansion of capitalism, capitalist interests are faced with the crucial issue of, not only how to obtain labor but, how to obtain a reliable and disciplined labor force. In addition to cutting workers off from non-capitalist forms of subsistence, capitalists enter into a cultural conflict in which notions of thrift, rationality, and work discipline clash with workers' particular histories, notions, and social obligations. Capital's interest in the making of a respectable working-class has often been couched in terms of the evils of casual labor. Frederick Cooper's

discussion of casual labor among London and Kenyan dock workers serves as a counterpoint to the particularity of the issue in Puerto Berrío.

In comparing London's dock workers with those in Mombasa, Kenya, Cooper argues that the most important difference was that while dockers in London did not have access to alternative means of subsistence, dockers in Mombasa had continued access to precapitalist forms of production, allowing them many alternatives and therefore some leverage against the imposition of a capitalist work discipline (Cooper 1987: 20-21). For different reasons, dock workers in both Mombasa and London seemed to prefer the casual system of work. London dockers feared that stabilization would translate into most of them losing access to dock work, while most of Mombasa dockers used dock work to complement their agricultural activities.

Conflicts over the casual character of labor on the East London dockyards revealed in the first place that the transformation of casual into a stable and permanent labor force is not a unilinear and progressive process. Capital manifested an interest in a reliable and permanent labor force in the 1810s, 1880s, and in the mid-1940s. At other times, employers actually promoted the casualization of port labor. Efforts to promote a respectable working class were guided by political discourses that argued for the need to protect labor from the "residuum" characterized by instability and radical politics which threatened "contamination" of the more respectable sectors. These discourses and the need for steadier work became greater under the pressures of World War I and World War II (*ibid.*, 16-21; Stedman Jones 1971). These fluctuations suggest that it would be simplistic to see casual labor as resistance. At least in London, during periods of slow economic activities, employers

promoted casual labor. Yet, casual labor can also be sought by workers with access to non-capitalist forms of production. Thus, its meaning is something that needs to be evaluated in the context of particular historical and political forces.

The tendency toward decasualization during the late nineteenth century and emphasized during World War I was not only well received but promoted by labor leaders who argued that while capital profited from a vast labor supply, workers bore the burden of fluctuations in work. But, although labor leaders and the state argued against casual labor, by the late 1910s the companies were arguing in its favor. Moreover, rank-and-file dockers feared the consequences of more centralized hiring and supervision and that decasualization would exclude many of them from access to work. It was during World War II that the state managed to impose measures toward decasualization of labor; but, as Cooper points out, conflicts over issues of control of the labor process intensified and revealed a tension between dockers and the union leadership (Cooper 1987: 19).

From these two cases, I take three elements that are helpful in analyzing dock workers in Puerto Berrío. First, the state played a crucial role in imposing a new order in Mombasa and London during the mid-1950s and mid-1960s respectively. In fact, calls for labor decasualization in London at the turn of the century echoed a growing critique of the slow pace of the state in regulating capitalism (*ibid.*, 20-21). Second, labor stabilization implies capital's control over the labor process. Third, either because capitalists develop a need to promote the creation of a "respectable working-class" or because labor leaders, as in London, articulate a critique of casual labor, decasualization implies a process of differentiation in which the members of

one sector of a large pool of laborers become full-time wage earners.

The case of Puerto Berrío has elements of both examples discussed above.

Prior to 1934, a large body of workers relied on seasonal or temporary dock work as a complement to subsistence and market agricultural production or other diverse forms of employment. After 1934, the workers' leadership and the state became interested in formalizing dock work and in the creation of a "respectable class of dock workers."

The transformation of dock work in Puerto Berrío took place under the initiative of workers themselves and in the process they did not lose control over the workplace but asserted it. In fact, dockers did not become company or state employees.

Appropriating state discourses and attempts to regulate capital and labor, dockers created a union through which they made a claim to exclusive rights in dock work.

The union organized and supervised all aspects of dock work. In order to maintain the exclusive place of the union, dockers needed to be constantly vigilant against the threat of the "unemployed" willing to work at lower wages. The intense cultural elaborations that came with dockers' high social status (discussed below) gave social legitimacy to their exclusive rights.

The notion of casual labor describes a form of labor acquisition in which there is no other obligation between employer and employee than payment for a specified task. Thus, workers are not guaranteed a second day of work but neither are they obliged to return. Employers may not have a choice and they have to take the labor as it comes. They may have abundant cheap labor or insufficient labor when they need it the most. Although the concept of casual labor implies the existence of a mass of undifferentiated and unorganized laborers, as Cooper shows for Kenya, the

resilience of casual labor was partly the result of a complex and structured organization of hiring and supervision (*ibid.*, 37-41). The struggle against El Barbao and the creation of the dock workers' union laid down the foundations for the decasualization of dock work in Puerto Berrío. Workers did so by appropriating the discourses of the Liberal governments which sought the smooth operation of a key link in the national export economy. The formation of the union also consolidated a process of differentiation among workers, with dock workers eventually becoming a social and cultural elite among the working classes.

Union Structure

The docker's union created in 1934 was not a modern union in the sense of a group of salaried workers who join forces to advance their interests vis-a-vis their employers. This organization can best be described as a corporation that provided for shipping companies a stable and disciplined labor force and for workers one of the most attractive occupations in the port and a range of services rarely available to other workers at the time. Shipping companies continued to lack control over work habits. The actual organization of work, work rhythms, and work discipline were determined by the union. This structure was to last for the next two decades.

A significant aspect of the transformation from a casual to a stable labor force is that in most cases this results from employers' attempts at creating a disciplined and reliable labor force. In the case of Puerto Berrío, it was workers themselves who led this process. The Dock workers Union claimed exclusive rights to dock work and it came to control the workplace.

With its leadership elected by open nominations and show of hands at a general assembly convened every six months, the union created a more democratic organization than that existing under Arroyave. The elected junta was in charge of directing all aspects of the union's life for the next six months. Members of the junta were often reelected or quickly dismissed as their capacities for leadership or their incompetence became evident. The junta was generally made up of a president, vice-president, office supervisor (*fiscal de oficina*), port supervisor (*fiscal de puerto*), two *vocales*, a treasurer, a delegate and their respective alternates. The variety of positions in the union's junta indicate the wide range of areas with which the union was concerned. Most positions concerned the actual maintenance and running of the organization. In addition, the port supervisor ensured the smooth operation of the docks and handled the paperwork describing the type and amount of cargo to be moved. The delegate was charged with maintaining relations with larger political organizations and state institutions. *Vocales* had the special mission of ensuring that sick workers received attention.

The Organization of Work

The most important aspect of the union was its complex organization of work. To emphasize efficiency and discipline, most former dockers explain work organization as based on one hundred sixty men distributed in eight work gangs of twenty workers each. It is unlikely that this number remained stable, but every docker would confidently explain that the union was made up of one hundred sixty men. This emphasis may have resulted in an image of limited availability of dock

work and it may have served to limit entrance of new members to the union.

However, membership in the union did not remain static and hiring practices were not as formalized as the 160-man scheme suggests. In fact, dock work continued to be flexible enough to provide temporary workers with extra cash while union membership was, more often than not, a result of kin and friendship relations.

From 1936 to 1943, the yearly amount of cargo that moved through Puerto Berrío fluctuated between 170,496 and 198,865 tons. The amount of cargo increased by about half in the post-war period and reached its highest point in 1952 when 539,169 tons of cargo moved through the port (see table 6.1). Puerto Berrío's dock was about three hundred meters long. The railroad warehouses were used to store delicate cargo such as coffee, molasses/brown sugar (*panela*), and cotton, while that which would not be affected by rain was unloaded into the open yards located between the warehouses and the river. Ships carried an average of between five hundred and a thousand tons of cargo and on the best days about six ships could be on the docks being unloaded while others waited for their turn. (Jesús González. Interview).

Dock work consisted of loading and unloading ships and moving the cargo between ships and yards or railroad warehouses. Each ship was assigned to only one gang. There could not be two gangs working on one ship, but it was possible to have six or seven gangs working at once, each on a separate ship. In addition to the twenty men in each work gang, there were at least two *alzadores* who lifted cargo onto dockers' shoulders, and at least two *recibidores* or *arrumadores*, who received and stocked the cargo. Usually, *alzadores* and *recibidores* were part of the ship's crew,

but many times when the ship could not provide them, the union added these men to the work-gang, which translated into additional charges. (Jesús González. Interview).

Table 6.1.

Yearly Movement of Cargo Through Puerto Berrío: 1933-1956

Year	Cargo	Year	Cargo
1933	107,339	1945	294,566
1934	136,616	1946	296,861
1935	160,067	1947	290,455
1936	175,256	1948	301,075
1937	170,496	1949	374,236
1938	195,136	1950	517,345
1939	190,760	1951	496,270
1940	181,810	1952	539,252
1941	192,996	1953	394,169
1942	187,620	1954	486,615
1943	198,865	1955	315,698
1944	225,061	1956	325,807

Source: DANE, p. 582.

Unloading involved heavy cargo such as cotton, paper, and railroad track.

Heavier machinery, a common import, was unloaded by cranes. Loading consisted of lighter cargo, primarily agricultural products such as coffee, molasses/brown sugar, vegetables, and oranges. As ships arrived in port, the possibilities for the work gang were that the ship brought only part of its cargo to Puerto Berrío and continued to other ports up river, that the ship's final destination was Puerto Berrío and it required unloading of all its cargo but it did not need to be reloaded, or that Puerto Berrío was

the final destination and, in addition to unloading, it required full loading for its return trip. The latter case was obviously the preferred situation: “when it was loading and unloading, the party was a big one”. The last scenario was one that required about two weeks of continuous work. It took five or six days for one gang to unload one thousand tons of cargo, after which they would start loading. During a busy time like this the work day started at seven and ended at ten or eleven at night with a half-hour break for breakfast, and a one-hour break each for lunch and dinner (Jesús González. Interview).

When Arcesio Delgado joined the union, in 1940, important changes in the organization of work had taken place. The unloading system was no longer based on assigning ships to a single work gang. Instead, each gang was assigned two hundred tons of cargo, so that several gangs would be involved in loading and unloading a single ship. Arcesio Delgado explains that while the work system was still based on eight work gangs, in addition to the corresponding work shift there were now two additional shifts: rotation and extra. The twenty members of a gang were in charge of moving the cargo across the yard and each gang received eight additional braceros who worked as *alzadores* and *arrumadores*. Each gang took turns providing the additional braceros. According to Delgado, there were times when the three shifts coincided and they just had to miss them, while sometimes they were lucky enough to have the shifts taking place one after another (Arcesio Antonio Delgado. Interview).

Since payment to workers was based on the amount of work performed, differential access to work was most likely a point of contention among workers. The two hundred tons assignment may have resulted from an effort to ensure a more

equitable distribution of work but it was also the result of a high demand for labor reflected in additional changes in the organization of work. Under the previous system some workers may have had plenty of work at a given time while others did not. While this may still have been the case in the 1940s, these changes ensured a more equitable share of work. Not only did a work gang have a short wait for its next shift but sometimes workers had to miss the extra shifts. The fact that the union now provided *alzadores* and *arrumadores* suggests a progressive expansion of union control over jobs formerly performed by the ship's crew.

As the institution that controlled dock work, the dock workers' union had control over the hiring process and worked to limit the number of people employed as dockers. In addition to the notion of one hundred sixty dockers which helped create a sense of a limited number of positions, workers often explained that in order to become a union member they had to prove that they were *trained* and able to perform the job. Since no special ability, other than physical strength, was necessary for dock work, attempts to describe this occupation as requiring some unnamed skill are significant in a context in which dock workers needed to legitimize their position. In reality, place of origin, kinship, and friendship networks proved the most effective in securing a place within the union. New workers were introduced to the union by relatives or friends after a *capataz* or the union president agreed on trying them in a work-gang.

Jesús González started working with the union eight days after arriving to Puerto Berrío:

"...when I arrived [in Berrío] a neighbor asked where I was coming from, I told him

from where. We became friends. [Eight days later], he asked me if I was strong to carry goods [guapo para cargar] and he took me to the union's junta because someone had left because he did not endure. 'If you think that you are able, I will take you,' he said.. On Monday, he took me to the office where he worked, he was a member of the junta. He said that I was his relative and asked that they try me for a week." (Jesús González. Interview).

Armando Vélez describes getting a job as a bracero as an easy thing, where the only requirements were a couple of medical certificates and a verbal recommendation, but this reflects his particular experience. Thanks to having two uncles who were already members of the union, he was able to secure a permanent position as a dock worker.

The high demand for labor made possible the formalization of the union's relationship with temporary workers and the creation of a flexible scheme that continued to allow temporary access to work. Vélez describes the existence of a pool of temporary workers known as *interinos*. These were people who worked several weeks or a couple of months. They were also called by permanent workers to replace them on a daily basis. *Interinos* did the same work and were paid as much as the rest of the work-gang. The practice of temporary work was also offered to people who went to the union for help because they were in need of extra cash and, most commonly, to men who were trying to collect enough money to pay their way back to their towns of origin (Armando Vélez. Interview).

As it was the case with El Barbao, the *capataz* dealt with the ship's captain who turned in paperwork showing the tonnage to be handled. But in contrast to El

Barbao, dockers now had access to these forms and could see the amount of cargo to be handled and the price charged. The final amount was equally divided among twenty-one for the twenty gang members, including the capataz, and one share for the union. Dockers continued to be paid in cash and right after completion of the job.

In addition to organizing all aspects of dock work, the union established a series of disciplinary measures to enforce the smooth operation of the port. Showing up drunk for work, not showing up at all, and fighting with co-workers carried fines or suspension from work. The union was not trying to enforce a moral stance against drinking, but trying to guarantee the efficient performance of dock work. In fact, a worker could decide to go on drinking and not to show up for work without incurring in any sanction as long as he sent somebody else to replace him. There were also suspensions from work for dock workers who were abusive to ships' passengers. According to Armando Vélez, it was very rare to see two braceros fighting because it meant a suspension for four or five shifts and the loss of income (Luis Eduardo Gómez, Armando Vélez, and Jesús González. Interviews).

The functions of the *vocal* exemplify the extent to which the union as a corporation provided medical services for its members. The organization hired a physician for the exclusive use of its members who examined incoming and sick workers. The *vocal* was to assist workers during sickness. Jesús González was a member of the junta for at least six terms, most of these as a *vocal*. According to him the basic function of the *vocal* was "... to visit the sick. If one got sick, one would go home and the *vocal* would go every day to see how you were doing, to see if you needed medicine, to bring you money..."

González's definition of the *vocal's* function is one that emphasizes a sense of care. For the sick person, the *vocal's* visits were important not only for the material benefits that came with him but for the companionship that he provided. Given the lack of family and household arrangements that most dock workers had in common, the union, through the work of the *vocales*, met important material and emotional needs that households would otherwise provide. González continues:

“There were many sick people. Tuberculosis, venereal diseases, many things. The union paid the medicine for sick workers. We had doctors. The union paid for the doctor. If the person was very sick, we would carry him in a stretcher, bring him medicine at home, and we would also bring him half his salary because the union paid half a salary to sick workers. The doctors would write prescriptions and we bought the medicine. Doctors also examined new workers entering the union. We would also bring the doctor to the homes of workers who were very sick. Doctors could last for several years. There were times when they did not work out and we would change them. We would have a meeting and tell him that we did not require his services anymore, and we would find another one.”

González's description illustrates some of the benefits that dock workers enjoyed. While other workers hardly had access to medical services, Puerto Berrío's dockers could choose and dismiss medical doctors and received half pay when ill.

Dockworkers and La Virgen del Carmen

Several major religious and non-religious festivities were celebrated in Puerto Berrío on a yearly basis. In addition to the traditional celebration of Holy Week,

involving a week of praying, masses, and processions, Christmas, New Years, and the Virgin of Carmen were the most significant public festivities in the port. Since each celebration was promoted by a particular institution or group of people, they represented the state of social relations and each of them has particular, but not unrelated, histories and significance.

From the first day of December the enthusiasm and festive atmosphere of Christmas would start to build up. Every year the local government petitioned the regional one for special permits for the December celebrations. Bars would be allowed to stay open longer, the sound of fireworks was heard continuously, and a festive mood set in and intensified as Christmas and the new year approached. Although this was an occasion in which the general population participated, a characteristic element of the celebration was the appeal that spending Christmas and new year in Puerto Berrío had for people from out of town and especially for members of Antioquian elite. Wealthy families from the region and from Medellín spend Christmas on their haciendas and New Year's eve at Puerto Berrío's Hotel Magdalena. There they enjoyed the fireworks and lights and sounds of steamships coming from the port, where most of the local population congregated to welcome the new year.

In contrast to these holidays, the celebrations of the Virgin of Carmen were specifically associated with dock workers, though they had great appeal for the entire local population, and were often described as the most important festivities in the port. After its formation, the Sindicato de Braceros Portuarios initiated the celebrations of the Virgin of Carmen which reached their zenith during the late 1930s,

the 1940s, and the early 1950s -- the period of the dock workers' greatest strength. This celebration was the main means through which dock workers represented their cultural leadership. As such, changes in the organization of these festivities are a reflection on changes in the situation of dock workers and in their relations to other groups. These celebrations were an eclectic combination of religious fervor and socializing in the zone.

Every July 16, the people of the port were awakened at four in the morning to the sounds of dockers parading around the city with fireworks and a musical band. That was the initiation of the main day of the Virgin of Carmen celebrations. Every afternoon of the previous seven days there had been occasions to pray to the Virgin, with the last one accompanied by a mass at the river bank and followed with fireworks announcing the next day's main celebrations. The early event on July 16 was followed by a series of religious ceremonies. That morning there was a special mass to which "everybody wore new clothes. Women wore their best jewelry and, of course, their best dresses, new dresses. That day there were many first communions. People were faithful. There were people who did not go to church or confess the entire year, but that day was special and the church would be full of people" (Héctor Garces. Interview).

The morning activities were separated from the main afternoon parade by the noon hours when dockers went "to have lunch and to visit their girlfriends" (Héctor Garces. Interview). The parade was headed by the union leaders carrying the virgin's and union's flags followed by the virgin's image, a musical band, and the dock workers. Behind them came representatives of various sectors of the local

population, including merchants who sent representatives with emblems of their respective businesses. The festivities culminated with a dance in the union hall that night.

A substantial amount of union resources was spent in the celebrations. Not only were large quantities of fireworks purchased in Medellín, but a renowned musical band was hired each year and a special guest, often a priest, who delivered a speech was also invited. In addition, constant drinking accompanied the celebrations and people wore fancy clothes on that day. According to a bracero, at some times, at least in the early 1950s, the union distributed a special allowance to the dock workers to spend during the celebrations (Luis Eduardo Berrío. Interview). However, this particular bracero occupied a position of leadership and it is questionable how much of the allowance actually reached all union members. Nevertheless, the efforts and money invested in the celebrations point to the great significance that the Virgin of Carmen festivities had for dock workers and the general population.

One of the initial changes in the celebrations reflects the shift in the relations between braceros and lancheros. Germán Baena, who lived through this, remembers the fiesta:

“... the 160 men met at the union hall to make all the arrangements and to select someone to go to Girardota to contract a band and to buy the fireworks. The fiesta had a lot of expenses but everything was cheaper then. At the beginning, the parade was on Colombia and Moravia streets. Those were the only streets ... The parade started at the union hall, continued through some of the streets, and ended at the church, where there was a mass. All the 160 dock workers were at the parade

plus the people of the town ...The fiesta was organized by the union. That night some braceros went to drink, others to their houses to have dinner. Braceros had a lot of money and everything was very cheap. The end of the union was also the end of the fiesta. When the union was formed, the fiestas started. Initially, the braceros celebrated the fiesta and the following day the lancheros took the virgin and performed their celebration in the river. Afterwards, when both unions were on friendly terms was when the fiesta was celebrated together by the two unions.” (Germán Baena. Interview).

At some point after the mid-1940s, the fiesta took the river as center stage. Braceros, musicians, and people from the town in boats and canoes took the virgin to settlements along the river and visiting Puerto Murillo became a main stop of the parade. After returning from Puerto Murillo in the early evening, people started dancing in the streets. The taking of public spaces for popular diversions such as dancing meant a lot to people, who now emphasized that the dances were not “...inside the houses or in bars. They were in the streets” (Eloisa Duque and Juana Bautista. Interviews).

With the creation of the Sindicato de Braceros Portuarios and the formalization of dockwork, workers maintained control over their working space and aspects of the labor processes. In contrast to other workers, this control and their concentration in the port allowed dockworkers to forge a local working-class culture in which they enjoyed a high social status. The union itself and the celebration of the Virgin of Carmen are expressions of this status.

Chapter 7

Dockworkers and Liberalism: From Alliance to Betrayal

Olaya Herrera, a Liberal, became president in 1930. His presidency marked the end of thirty years of Conservative rule. In their quest for power, the Liberals cultivated the support of the working classes. They were not seeking a radical transformation of society but the introduction of legislation to regulate labor relations. This was an innovative step, but capitalist entrepreneurs and Conservatives did not see favorably the notion that laborers could have rights and that they could be protected by the state. The first had economic interests to protect, the second saw in this the growth of new social and political actors under Liberal patronage.

In this context, workers saw an ally in a Liberal government that defined its role as a mediator of the relations between capital and labor. The presidency of Olaya Herrera had the fresh memory of the failed insurrection of 1929 and this failure did not deter workers' collective actions, which continued to be common in the Puerto Berrío region. Workers seemed to have shared a sense of favorable conditions for positive outcomes of labor conflicts. Not only could they expect a relatively friendly government, but workers' solidarity was high. A series of conflicts will illustrate the sense of community and solidarity developing among workers.

Elites perceived the emergent working classes as threatening to the established political and economic order. This had been the case during the 1920s when working-class movements in the country's frontiers pursued an insurrectionary strategy. Communism and Liberalism were the two main expressions of social and political

community. Liberalism was part of the country's political tradition and it had been associated with emergent social sectors and popular movements. Communism was more of a "foreign" tradition. In Puerto Berrío, local elites described communist leaders and the working sectors associated with them as negative forces disrupting the moral and social order. They were forces outside of the traditional bipartisan political system and thus, outside of the nation. This chapter analyzes significant moments in the history of dockworkers' collective action as workers, and the influence of Liberalism and Communism among them. The end of the Liberal alliance with labor became evident to dockworkers when in response to a major strike in 1945, the president said "There can not be two governments in Colombia, one in Bogotá and one in the Magdalena River" and declared the strike illegal. Indicating its significance for working-class history, this phrase is the most remembered fact about the strike.

The Growth of the Dangerous Classes: Labor and Politics During the 1930s

Although the Liberal government provided spaces for Communist participation in elections, local and regional elites were most likely alarmed at the scene of communists from Puerto Berrío presenting a list of candidates for local elections in 1933. Just a few months earlier, the communists were investigated, harassed, and their living and meeting places searched. Generally they were described as outsiders who were trying to create disorder. Now they were side by side with the Liberal and Conservative parties participating in elections. As communists were making use of political openings, harassment by local elites was evident in their continued calls for police protection. It is also likely that the popular classes had some

misgivings about communists; at any event, their allegiance to the Liberal Party seemed a lot safer (AHAGM, 1933, vol. 8131, nos. 359-360, 361, 364-365, 368). A total of 1,830 valid votes were counted of which 1,331 were for the Liberals; 451 for the Conservatives; and 48 for the Communists. The Liberals obtained five councilmen, the Conservatives two, and the Communists none (AHAGM, 1933, vol. 8131, no. 433). The persecution that communist leaders from Puerto Sierra were subjected to by the mayor Jorge Lievano (see chapter 4) is another example of the repression they faced (AHAGM, 1933, vol. 8131, nos. 398-401).

Puerto Berrío was the center of a region experiencing high levels of economic activity and the center for the growing concentration of workers in the region. The so-called *Canaliza* was a public agency responsible for the dredging of the river and an important source of employment. These workers were based at Santa Cruz, eight kilometers from Puerto Berrío, which also functioned as a shipyard. Between 150 and 180 men worked there daily. Local authorities were so concerned with the need to police these workers that the shipyard administration gave two workers the role of policemen. In addition, in an effort to regulate workers' behavior, the government prohibited all sales of liquor in Santa Cruz. This was acclaimed as a "moralizing deed, which will definitively guarantee workers' tranquility in this company" (AHAGM, 1933, vol. 8131, nos. 449-450, 451). The workers at Santa Cruz formed a union, The Sindicato de Obreros de Santa Cruz, in 1936. Roberto Hernández Restrepo was the secretary and seemed to have played a major role (AHAGM, 1936, vol. 8166, no. 70).

Another large employer was the sawmill El Cometa. On January 16, 1937 the

mayor received notification that the workers at this sawmill had just formed a union and presented a list of demands to the company. Four days later, on January 20, with the company arguing lack of work, six workers were fired, two of whom were union leaders. Rounds of conversations began to take place between the company and the workers, with the rehiring of the workers as the main point of discussion, but without reaching a solution. The mayor's office received letters in support of the workers from five peasant leagues, including one from Puerto Berrío, as well as from the Magdalena River Workers' Union, dockworkers unions from Puerto Lievano and Puerto Berrío, the union of construction workers from La Dorada, the Union Federation from Medellín, and the Colombian Union Confederation. Without being able to reach an agreement, the workers at the sawmill went on strike and the same day the labor inspector arrived. Initially the inspector got the company to accede to most of the workers' demands but not to the rehiring of the fired workers. The morning of the following day there were moments of tension as workers threatened to disrupt the loading of wood into the train. The same afternoon the company finally agreed to rehire three of the workers including the two union leaders. From seven at night until ten in the morning all the parties involved met in the mayor's office and finalized the agreement (AHAGM, 1937, vol. 8181, nos. 157-159).

Oil explorations and extraction were another source of employment in the region. In 1938, the municipal government of Puerto Berrío was becoming concerned with the large number of workers who were concentrating in oil fields and the problems that this was causing. The mayor reported that there were a great number of workers on the other side of the river, in the department of Santander del Sur, after

several oil companies had been established there. These companies included La Compañía Nacional de Petroleos, Shell, Tropical Oil Company (Troco), and Nacional del Carare. According to the mayor, there were about six thousand workers in camps ranging from 700 to 1,500 workers each. The mayor was concerned because that region of the neighboring department was very little developed. There was no urban infrastructure or police or judicial forces. Often criminals evaded the law by simply moving to the other side of the river into the other department. These places where large numbers of workers were concentrated were described as a source of disorder and crimes against private property which needed to be controlled through the allocation of police forces to the workplace (AHAGM, 1938, paquete #2, nos. 2, 12).

Compared to the Conservative period, the Liberal government seemed very favorable to workers' interests. Unions were being formed and officially recognized and the government through the labor inspector intervened in labor conflicts in many instances, urging entrepreneurs to accept workers' demands. But there was also a great distance between national legislation and what took place at the local level. The intricate world of local politics was fundamental for the outcome of labor conflicts. Unlikely alliances between communists and Conservatives were present at some point (AHAGM, 1933, vol. 8131, nos. 410-411). But more important is the fact that in Puerto Berrío dockworkers were becoming a significant force in local politics.

Campo Elías Botero was a central figure in the formation of the dockworkers union and at the same time he was involved in local politics. He appears on the Liberal ballot for local elections in 1933 (AHAGM, 1933, vol. 8131, nos. 359-360). This was the same year the he had promoted and supported the formation of the

union. In what could have been a direct reference to Campo Elías Botero, the Communists warned that the “...belligerent elements among the braceros [were] being organized by their own class enemies who now are capitalizing on the workers' votes” (see chapter 4). In 1934, Elías Botero was named alternate mayor (AHAGM, 1934, vol. 8142, no. 97).

With their numerical and organizational growth, workers became a strong influence in local politics. In order to legitimize their demands, political forces seeking the appointment or removal of particular mayors often claimed to have the workers' support. In 1936, workers and Liberal leaders asked for the removal of the mayor Agustín Angel. He was accused of abusing his power in collusion with the inspector, of having committed some crimes in Medellín, and of abusing the laws of moralization by charging excessive fines. Agustín Angel was supported by the Municipal Council. Luis E. Sosa appears as behind this support (AHAGM, 1936, vol. 8166, nos. 44, 47, 48, 49-50, 51-56, 57, 58, 59-60, 61, 63).

On July 20, 1937, in his letter of acceptance as mayor, a position to which he was nominated by the municipal council, Juvenal Tobon H. assured the governor that he enjoyed the sympathy of the workers and the unions. He explained that the president of the largest union, the dockworkers' union, personally expressed to him its satisfaction over his appointment. Juvenal assured the governor that the moment there would be a union that did not look well on him as a mayor, he would resign so as not to cause any problems (AHAGM, 1937, vol. 8181, nos. 226-227).

For these workers and for the Liberal forces, the name of Enrique Olaya Herrera had a central significance in their sense of being an organized working class.

This sense is associated with the end of the Conservative period. Olaya Herrera launched his presidential campaign in Puerto Berrío in 1930 and Liberals would later emphasize the role of Puerto Berrío in the beginning of this new era. A few months after the end of his term in 1934, Campo Elías Botero was active in the newly formed committee for the construction of a bronze statue of Olaya Herrera (AHAGM, 1934, vol. 8142, no. 167).

The death of Olaya Herrera in February 1937 was mourned equally by workers in general and by Liberals. The mayor in Puerto Berrío organized official events in his memory which all employees were required to attend, and all other public events as well as the use of radios and victrolas were prohibited for two days. February 18 was declared a day of mourning. This was done considering that "...Puerto Berrío was the cradle of the political transformation of the country due to the events that took place [in the port] during early 1930" (AHAGM, 1938, paquete #2, no. 12). In addition, the Sindicato Industrial de Obreros Nacionales en el Río Magdalena, Santa Cruz, organized two minutes of silence in memory of Olaya Herrera (AHAGM, 1937, vol. 8181, no. 239).

Olaya Herrera was followed in the presidency by Alfonso López Pumarejo (1934-1938). Most of the unionization that took place during the 1930s was a result of López Pumarejo's reforms under his "Revolution on the March" program. While the government of Olaya Herrera was a coalition government of transition from a Conservative to a Liberal regime, López Pumarejo's government was more exclusively a Liberal regime.

Raúl Mahecha's warning at the communist congress of Buenos Aires that

communists might find themselves on the sidelines as Liberals take the initiative to lead the revolution seemed to be materializing. During the sectarian and insurrectionary policies of the Third Period, Mahecha could not have predicted that support for the Liberals would actually become Comintern policy. Initially, the communists in Colombia rejected cooperation with López Pumarejo's "Revolution on the March," but the Comintern shift to a defensive position in its Seventh Congress translated into a policy in favor of alliances with anti-fascist bourgeoisies and the creation of Popular Fronts. In fact, López Pumarejo's government was virtually the only one in Latin America that recognized the Soviet Union during the mid-1930s. Guided by Stalin's favorable views of Roosevelt, Latin American anti-imperialism passed to a secondary plane. Thus, a national congress of the Venezuelan Communist Party stated that "There is a strengthening of the anti-fascist front, thanks to the success of the national revolutionary government of Mexico, to the new democratic orientation of the Batista government, of the Chilean Popular Front, of the Colombian democratic-Liberal government, and of the democratic-progressive government of Roosevelt" (Caballero 1986: 131; Edelman 1987: 14).

López Pumarejo's mobilization of labor raised the fears of Conservatives as workers appropriated the Liberal discourse on capital and labor regulation to organize and demand the improvement of their conditions. The creation of the dockworkers' union and the labor disputes involving the Pact of 1937 are evidence of the growing importance of Liberalism for the working classes.

The Pact of 1937

In the early 1930s there were several national workers congresses and in 1936 the Colombian Workers Confederation (CTC) was created. CTC promoted the creation of workers federations in every industrial sector, such as FERROVIAS which grouped all the railroad workers. In January 1937, transportation workers of the Magdalena river held their own conference and formed the federation that grouped all the river workers, FEDENAL. These were among the most radical sectors of the Colombian working class. FEDENAL in particular became known for its communist orientation.

In May of the same year FEDENAL presented a list of demands in the name of all unions of the Magdalena river. Shipping companies rejected the demands. FEDENAL went on a strike that quickly paralyzed transportation on the river. Representatives of the navigation companies, FEDENAL, and the government met to discuss the situation. The conflict ended with the signing of an agreement over major issues such as salaries and working days among others. This agreement was called *The Pact of June 17, 1937*. This was the first collective labor agreement signed in Colombia and it remained the main point of reference of all future conflicts. In this process things were being tested. There was no comprehensive labor legislation guiding labor conflicts. The collective action of organized labor was forcing the creation of these mechanisms.

The Pact and Local Politics

An examination of a specific conflict that took place between 1937 and 1938 will allow us to evidence the connections between the Liberal state and workers'

organizations. Dockworkers used state liberal discourses and emphasized their alliance and spirit of collaboration with the state. It is precisely this spirit that made Luis Eduardo Gómez Restrepo, a union leader, emphasize the maintenance of communications with state authorities and it is his complaints and reports which allow us to look now at this conflict. As discussed below, Gómez Restrepo was also closely associated with the history of another union, the Sindicato de Braceros Lancheros, in Puerto Berrio.

The Sindicato de Braceros Portuarios loaded and unloaded ships with large tonnage involved in import and export trade. There was a separate section of the port where smaller boats involved in local and regional trade arrived. Dockers working on these smaller units created their own union, the Sindicato de Braceros Lancheros.

This union had a similar structure to that of the Sindicato de Braceros Portuarios. It was an association of about thirty men organized in three work gangs, each with its *capataz*. Some of its members such as Angel Salcedo, Tobon Quintero, Roberto Zapata, Jesús Smith, and Tomás Uribe were considered good leaders and were often re-elected to positions in the junta. As was the case with the braceros portuarios, *vocales* played an important role visiting the sick and bringing them medicine. In order to enforce work discipline, fines were also established for not showing up for work because of drunkenness and for fighting with co-workers, and a week's suspension from work was imposed on those who harassed the *vocal*. If *vocales* were a target of harassment by co-workers, this was likely due to the fact that in addition to their role in caring for the sick, they were in a situation in which upon visiting absent workers they had to report drunkenness or sickness as the cause of

absenteeism. During periods of time when there was less river traffic, it was common for workers to leave dockwork to go to work on an hacienda or for a company. Conversely, the union would take extra workers during periods when there was a lot of work (Luis Eduardo Gómez Restrepo. Interview).

Capataces and junta members were all working on the docks while *vocales* were the only ones who could leave their job to visit sick workers. Gómez Restrepo was the only union member who did not actually work on the docks but dedicated himself to running the union's businesses (Luis Eduardo Gómez Restrepo. Interview). He exercised virtual control of the union throughout its history. His career as a union leader exemplifies the importance assigned to various positions in the junta. He had initially been a member of the Sindicato de Braceros Portuarios where he had occupied the positions of *vocal* and president. With the *braceros lancheros* he occupied first the position of president and then that of secretary from 1938 to 1970. Gómez Restrepo derived his position of leadership from his ability to deal with regional and national government institutions. He seems to have spent a lot of time at his typewriter sending letters to the president, the Ministry of Labor, and Antioquia's governor.

When Gómez Restrepo started working as a dockworker, efforts to create the Sindicato de Braceros Portuarios were under way and he joined the group of men seeking to displace El Barbao. In 1938, however, he was expelled from the union, even though he occupied the position of union president. As he explains, he was expelled because he is sometimes authoritarian. According to him, his expulsion took place during a conflict over the construction of the union's building. Amidst

suspicion of Gómez's management of the union's funds, the workers wanted the union's share to be distributed with the rest of the salary instead of using it for the construction of a union building. After managing to halt a general assembly meeting for which workers were calling, he continued the construction of the building. As he explains, he left "...proud of leaving them a building that they couldn't have had if they had redistributed all the money" (Luis Eduardo Gómez Restrepo. Interview).

At this point, Gómez Restrepo joined the *braceros lancheros*. As he puts it, with the creation of the Sindicato de Braceros Portuarios "Barbao's" thesis moved there." He meant by this that the lancheros' union, still charging by the sack, worked at very low rates and was not strong enough to demand stable prices or establish itself as the exclusive source of labor. Prices ranged from one or two cents to five cents a sack, giving boat owners a bargaining space. They arrived and searched for the lowest unloading prices.

Gómez Restrepo led the lancheros in their organizing efforts. They tried to stabilize the price, charging first four cents a sack, raising it later to six, and finally to ten cents a sack, after which they started charging by the ton. When the braceros lancheros presented their first list of demands, boat owners responded with their own strike. They stopped service on the Barrancabermeja-Puerto Berrío and Puerto Berrío-Nare routes and told dockworkers "we won't hire you any more. Go eat shit!" (Luis Eduardo Gómez Restrepo. Interview). But Gómez Restrepo was confident because the union had *personería jurídica* (legal status) and government support. Effectively, the Labor Inspector arrived from Medellín and took the braceros' side, arguing that their demand was legal and fair.

Yet, *personería jurídica* was also a tool that the Liberal state used to control organized labor. Ignacio Torres Giraldo expressed concern over the limitations created for labor organizations with the illegality imposed on strikes by workers in the public service sector, and with the broad inclusion of state-owned and semi-private enterprises in this definition. The states' granting or denial of legal status to unions was used to impose limitations on the right to strike non-existent in other Latin American nations (Torres 1947: 55-63; Dix 1987: 128).

The documentation sent to the governor by the unions and the mayors indicates the complex web of local and national politics that mediated dockworkers' conflicts with transportation entrepreneurs and the unemployed. Gómez Restrepo's expulsion from the Sindicato de Braceros Portuarios took place during a period when conflicts among *lancheros*, boat owners and unemployed men intensified. The Sindicato de Braceros Lancheros was formed in 1935 and on April 26, 1937 the union and several boat owners signed an agreement by which boat owners were to use the union to unload their cargo (AHAGM, 1938, paquete #2, no. 8). While nine boat owners signed the pact, according to the mayor, twenty-three remained free to contract with the union or anybody else (AHAGM, 1938, paquete #2, no. 5). During the first half of 1938 a conflict erupted as non-unionized workers organized to unload small boats and the *braceros lancheros* saw their interests threatened. A close look at the arguments put forward gives us an indication of the place of *braceros* in local and national politics.

The unions asked for the intervention of the Ministry of Labor and the Governor because in their view there was a "demoralizing movement against the

unions.” They asked the Governor to intervene in order to safeguard the “unions’ reputation” and specifically requested two detectives to investigate the people who were acting against the organizations. They added that if no action was taken “...soon the organized workers will be in total disgrace because today the scabs steal any object, then it is not said that it was a non-unionized element but that Puerto Berrió’s braceros are thieves” (AHAGM, 1938, paquete #2, no. 17). This concern with protecting and differentiating the good reputation of *braceros lancheros* from that of non-organized workers was part of a strategy to maintain and expand control over this sector of dockwork and non-organized workers and boat owners were identified as the promoters of the campaign against the union (AHAGM, 1938, paquete #2, no. 3).

The Labor Inspector’s response to the conflict was his Resolution No. 1. According to this resolution, the main problem was that boat owners complained of the lack of responsibility and organization of workers offering to work as dockers. The resolution supported the Sindicato de Braceros Lancheros and established that anyone interested in working as a docker needed to obtain a certificate from the mayor’s office. This certificate was intended to provide boat owners with the assurance of dockworkers’ respectability and good behavior. Resolution No. 1 favored members of the Sindicato de Braceros Lancheros because all they needed to obtain the mayor’s certificate was a union document declaring their membership in the union. All others needed more paperwork including certificates from their previous employers. However, the unions quickly complained that the mayor was creating obstacles and slowing the process, giving time to non-unionized workers to plot against the lancheros. Moreover, they accused the mayor of being part of the

“demoralizing movement against the unions.”

Although this conflict did not directly involve the Sindicato de Braceros Portuarios, Gómez Restrepo, who had been elected as its president for the period February 4 to August 4, 1938, was active in favor of the braceros lancheros. In his communications to the Governor, he lamented the prospects of the Sindicato de Braceros Lancheros' death under the Liberal and democratic government of president Alfonso López Pumarejo. Given the reactions against the government of López Pumarejo, the unions argued, any conflict with the unions was dangerous because according to them there were entrepreneurs with the “... appetite to see unions in dissolution and creating conflicts because they would enjoy seeing the president in confrontation with the workers.” They also argued that the situation went against the interests of “...all workers who, with so many hard struggles, had convened in organizations so as to be under the control of the Ministry of Industry and Labor, and respectful of all laws and authorities in general” (AHAGM, 1938, paquete #2, nos. 3, 17).

However, the mayor presented a different version. He informed the Governor that the Sindicato de Braceros Lancheros had twenty-six members and that initially they labored without anybody competing with them and this was the reason why they exaggerated their demands. Several union members, continued the mayor, left the organization and formed a free gang which was preferred by boat owners. The mayor enforced the 1937 pact so that at least the nine boat owners who had signed it would use the union while the rest were free to use unionized or non-unionized labor. The Ministry of Industry and Labor advised the mayor that although the boats outside the

pact were free to contract labor, it was preferable that contracts were encouraged with the union to avoid difficulties for the industry and the presence of unorganized workers, which would reduce the living standards of braceros lancheros (AHAGM, 1938, paquete #2, no. 5). In this respect, the government and the union agreed about the need to promote a stable and disciplined working class in order to ensure the orderly operation of the port.

Conflicts with the mayor started when he issued certificates of good behavior to fourteen men who, according to him, had been union members and left or had been expelled from the organization, and the braceros lancheros “in mass” protested in the mayor’s office. In the mayor’s view the union members were set in not allowing the fourteen men to work, while his actions were based on his view that “labor is free” and the twenty-six men could not be supported in their monopolistic fashion (AHAGM, 1938, paquete #2, no. 5).

A group of non-unionized workers complained to the Governor about their situation and were more explicit in their characterization of the unions. They claimed that about fifty men, representing fifty families, depended for their subsistence on their work with boats that were not in the pact with the union. They described both unions as “two octopi ...extending their tentacles..” to block access to work and explained that efforts were underway urging all boats to formalize contracts with the union. This amounted in their view to a “semi-official” action against non-unionized workers (AHAGM, 1938, paquete #2, no. 8).

It was in the midst of this conflict that Gómez Restrepo was expelled from the Sindicato de Braceros Portuarios. He joined the braceros lancheros, becoming their

long-lasting leader. The mayor's communication to the Governor on June 16, 1938, reports that Gómez Restrepo, as a member of the Sindicato de Braceros Lancheros was asking him to reactivate conversations with captains to enter in the pact (AHAGM, 1938, paquete #2, no. 29). On July 26 and 27, when the lancheros' assembly took place, Gómez Restrepo was elected president and in this assembly the conflict seems to have been resolved. The fourteen men became union members with access to two or three positions in the board of directors (AHAGM, 1938, paquete #2, no. 10). In theory, the Sindicato de Braceros Lancheros now had control over small tonnage dockwork without the challenge of non-unionized workers.

However, by November of the same year the conflict reemerged, as nine men initiated the paper work to dedicate themselves to loading and unloading small boats. The new mayor, aware of the tension this could provoke and remembering the delicate situation earlier in the year, consulted transportation authorities and the Ministry of Labor. Their response was clear. They considered that allowing for new braceros lancheros would create social conflicts that had to be avoided at all cost, that the thirty men in the Sindicato de Braceros Lancheros were enough and there was no need for more workers, and that this would create a labor surplus resulting in economic losses for all workers. They concluded that the new certificates should be denied (AHAGM, 1938, paquete #2, no. 8).

The confident mayor refused to issue new certificates with an explanation that points to the existence of complex, local political struggles. He explained that the conflict during the first months of the year had been created not by the workers but by a group of people he described as unscrupulous politicians, professional agitators,

enemies of the workers, and “reactionaries.” He suspected the same in the present case in which “the bad intentions of individuals who wanted to open battle against the government and the proletarian class were at play” (AHAGM, 1938, paquete #2, no. 8). According to the mayor, these individuals were the same persons who in the past “[manipulated] the unions to obtain the victory of certain campaigns but who now want to ...provoke acts of violence against them, such as this” (AHAGM, 1938, paquete #2, no. 11).

During the early months of 1938, Joaquín Tamayo, the mayor facing the conflict with the braceros lancheros, was critical of the Sindicato de Braceros Lancheros for its “monopolistic practices” and seems to have been somewhat supportive of the men competing with the union. Joaquín Tamayo was not unknown to the unions and he occupied the mayor’s office thanks in part to the support he received, in late 1937, from six unions that included the Sindicato de Braceros Portuarios and the Sindicato de Braceros Lancheros (AHAGM, 1937, vol. 8175, no. 81). At that time, Gómez Restrepo was not president of the union. Moreover, in the midst of the conflict, Tamayo was accused of trying to employ people associated with the Sindicato de Braceros Portuarios in the local administration (AHAGM, 1938, paquete #2, no. 8).

In appealing to regional and national authorities, the unions placed the conflict in a context of national politics. By using a political discourse that resonated with that of the Liberal government in power Luis Gómez Restrepo was successful in obtaining state support for making the Sindicato de Braceros Lancheros an exclusive source of labor. If the braceros lancheros asserted their claim to exclusive rights to

handle the small boats' cargo vis-à-vis the shipping entrepreneurs and other workers, they also needed to do so vis-à-vis the Sindicato de Braceros Portuarios.

As the Sindicato de Braceros Lancheros solidified its organization, conflicts arose with the braceros portuarios over the ships to be assigned to each union. In about 1940, both unions signed an agreement that the braceros lancheros were to handle ships carrying up to three hundred tons of cargo. At the time of the signing, smaller boats carried an average of 25 to 50 tons of cargo. Conflicts continued to surface as boat owners modified their ships to increase their capacity. When a ship's cargo capacity surpassed three hundred tons, the braceros portuarios would then claim their right to handle the cargo while the braceros lancheros argued that it did not matter because that specific boat was assigned to them. Although the Sindicato de Braceros Portuarios filed a complaint with the Ministry of Labor, the government was unable to resolve the conflict. Conflicts between the two unions continued for many years and intensified during periods when work was slow and the braceros portuarios claimed rights on the smaller boats (Luis Eduardo Gómez Restrepo. Interview).

Gómez Restrepo, who resented his expulsion from the Sindicato de Braceros Portuarios, instigated conflict between the two unions. Although it is difficult from the existing evidence to clearly define the political discourses of both unions, it is obvious that their capacity to utilize local and national political institutions was an important aspect of their perspectives.

The politics of the braceros lancheros were dominated and expressed by the views of Luis Gómez Restrepo. The basic elements were that the state, through the Labor Inspector, was a friend of the union, that transportation entrepreneurs were not

their enemies, and that if the union had any enemies those were the scabs. A paternalistic view of the state dominated the *lancheros*' view of their place in society. Emphasis was often placed on the fact that the government gave the union its legal status, *personería jurídica*, and thus dockworkers counted on and expected the state to take their side in conflicts with entrepreneurs and scabs. In this perspective, acquiring *personería jurídica* was not simply a legal formality but it gave dockworkers a social identity and function. This is especially significant in a context in which unions are being created for the first time. Gómez Restrepo viewed the state as a neutral force seeking the orderly functioning of society. He described the government as a "*balanza*" or scale that regulated social conflict. However, as he put it, if the union was "responsible" the government would help it in its conflicts with entrepreneurs, but if it was "irresponsible", the government would cancel its *personería jurídica* (Luis Eduardo Gómez Restrepo. Interview). One can assume that "irresponsibility" here refers to unions taking a more radical political stand and thus state support ended when union politics did not follow government expectations.

Although *lancheros* entered into conflict with boat owners, these transportation entrepreneurs were not viewed as a social group with interests necessarily opposed to those of dockworkers. Gómez Restrepo replicated the government's attempts to regulate social conflict. The Labor Inspector argued to transportation entrepreneurs that they should cooperate with the unions because these were "well organized and responsible for the social function they played." In this perspective the dockworkers' function was to do their part in the smooth operation of the port. Thus, Gómez Restrepo's leadership of the *braceros lancheros* was based on

a perspective that emphasized the need to maintain good relations between workers and boat owners. *Lancheros*' demands were based on Gómez's calculation of the cost of living and then asking for loading and unloading prices high enough to cover it. He argued to captains that this could be done in ways beneficial for both of them, that all they had to do was to increase their transportation rates. He told them "you are not Gods sitting in an office waiting...you have to work late, be hungry, endure the heat all day from Barranca to here in a boat, with the continuous noise of that motor. That is torturous. That is work. You must see that if your working conditions are improved, so will those of the workers... None of the captains were my enemies because I always talked to them..." (Luis Eduardo Gómez Restrepo. Interview).

Gómez politics did not go unchallenged and he had to deal within his union with individuals that were *disasociadores* (troublemakers) and "were always asking for more and just wanted to act against the boat owners". His continued control of the union indicates that he managed to control or convince them that the best way to improve their situation was by talking to the entrepreneurs. We can assume that these *disasociadores* represented more radical political perspectives.

Dockworkers and the Unemployed

The union's main concern continued to be the unemployed. Conflicts became acute during strikes. González Tamayo explains that the workers declared few strikes because they had many enemies and "the enemies were the rest of the people who wanted to work." During a strike, dockers had to stay in the docks making sure that the strikebreakers would not work because whenever the union had a problem, the

ships' owners were trying to create a problem for the union in order to hire other less expensive workers, workers without rights under the new Labor Code. (Jesús González. Interview).

Gómez Restrepo seems to have been especially concerned with the union's "main enemies," the *esquiroles* (strike breakers). Every unemployed person was by definition an *esquirol*. He recalls that "every train that arrived from Medellín brought three, four, five unemployed men and when they could not find any employment they thought they could just go unload at the port to make money. That is when they would find out that they had to be members of a work-gang." The practice of allowing some of these men to work for a few days was a convenient way of dealing with the problem. They were allowed to work so that they could make enough money for the train fare to leave Puerto Berrío (Luis Eduardo Gómez Restrepo. Interview).

At the local level, conflicts with non-unionized workers remained a constant challenge to both unions. Although the general meaning of the term *esquirol* refers to strike breakers, its usage by dockworkers from both unions to define the unemployed stresses their tensions with a mass of laborers from whom they needed to protect their own jobs. The *esquiroles* would complain that they were hungry and needed jobs and that the unions were abusive. Gómez Restrepo recalls that "*esquiroles* were very upset and cursing at us, asking why were we the only ones who could work." Gómez Restrepo's view was that the union was organized to provide that service and that its members knew how to handle the cargo. He explains that they knew not to be rough with the cargo to avoid breaking sacks and to load cargo in the appropriate order. According to him, the empresarios saw how well organized they were and did not

want any *esquirol* handling their cargo (Luis Eduardo Gómez Restrepo. Interview).

The Sindicato de Braceros Portuarios and the Sindicato de Braceros Lancheros managed to establish control over all aspects of dockwork including not only the organization and supervision of work but also the hiring process. The most important difference between the two unions was that braceros portuarios controlled import and export cargo while the braceros lancheros controlled local and regional trade cargo. As outlined above, this division of labor did not mean the absence of conflict between the two unions. Yet similar social and political processes resulted in the formation of both unions. Both groups of workers created a stable working class and retained control over the workplace; and in their conflicts with the unemployed and the transportation companies, they received the support of the state. While they had common interests, the Sindicato de Braceros Portuarios' strategic significance and its greater numerical importance gave it local dominance over other working sectors.

The dockworkers' union was able to resist the constant challenges of the unemployed and to maintain control of the labor supply for the shipping industry as a result of their allegiance to the Liberal regime. This did not preclude the threat of strikes. While the Sindicato de Braceros Lancheros was more likely to seek accommodation; the Sindicato de Braceros Portuarios, through their membership in FEDENAL, was more likely to use strikes. In both cases, they expected a favorable response from the state.

Liberal Reform

The leadership of “The Revolution on the March” consisted of politicians and intellectuals members of elite families whose wealth rested on large-scale commercial enterprises such as industry and the coffee trade. These sectors directed reforms with the support of urban labor and middle sectors (Dix 1967: 84). The most significant reforms instituted during the López Pumarejo administration included the expansion of the suffrage, limiting the power of the church, protection of domestic industry, and the support of workers’ right to unionize and to strike, with the exception of those in the public service sector (*ibid.*, 87).

The most significant of López Pumarejo’s reforms was his Law 200 of 1936 aimed at bringing security of land tenure to squatters and to reducing agrarian conflict. This however was not a full agrarian reform. It legalized titles of uncultivated land that had been already invaded. Cultivated large estates were not affected. Yet, Law 200 became a mechanism that peasants could mobilize around in their struggle for land, particularly in areas of frontier expansion (Dix 1967: 88; LeGrand 1986).

The rise of fascism and the Liberal reforms of the López Pumarejo regime undermined the possibilities for radical communist politics. In addition to the Comintern policy in defense of liberal democracy through the Popular Front, the Secretary General of the Communist Party of the United States, Earl Browder, had a significant impact on Latin American communist parties with his thesis of greater cooperation between capitalism and communism. Although notions of class collaboration preceded the influence of Earl Browder in Colombia, Venezuela, and Cuba, these are the countries where he is credited with having had the greatest

impact. After the dissolution of the Comintern in 1943, Earl Browder turned the Communist Party of the United States into a political association and many communist parties in Latin America took similar actions. According to Caballero, Earl Browder's ideas were basically the same as those proposed by the Comintern. His actual responsibility for Latin American communist parties taking the position of class collaboration was likely to have been amplified as he became the focus of purges to cleanse the party of this "deviation" (Caballero 1986: 135; Edelman 1987: 16).

Given the international context and with the rise of the extreme right represented by Laureano Gómez, the defense of López Pumarejo's regime became an important goal for Colombian labor and communism. Although a slow down in the reformist thrust was taking place at the end of López Pumarejo's term, it was his successor, Eduardo Santos (1938-1942), who put a halt on reforms and his government became known as The Pause (La Pausa). López Pumarejo was elected to a second term (1942-1946) during which he faced the concerted opposition of sectors of the Liberal Party, Conservative forces, and the Church.

The Liberal Party was divided into old-line Liberals committed to the nineteenth-century goals of laissez-faire, civil and political freedoms, administrative decentralization, and reducing the power of the church; and reformist Liberals who advocated a larger role for the state in the social and economic spheres. In addition to the old-line Liberals, opposition to the reformists came from the industrialists who benefited from the reforms but now wanted to preserve their gains and opposed further concessions to labor. Industrialists sided with landowners in a common

resistance to López Pumarejo. For the church and the Conservative forces, “The Revolution on the March” was nothing else but a front for communist forces. López Pumarejo resigned in 1945 and Alberto Lleras Camargo served for the remainder of his term. Some Liberals accused López Pumarejo of “treason to leftist ideas;” those on the left accused him of being an “unscrupulous demagogue who deceived the revolutionary hopes of the people!” (Dix 1967: 94).

The political conditions were hardly favorable for the successful outcome of a strike. Yet, in 1945 FEDENAL launched a major strike along the Magdalena River. With this strike labor pushed the boundaries of “The Revolution on the March” and uncovered the limits of Liberal reformism.

The Strike of 1945

After the National Strike Committee announced that a strike along the Magdalena River would start on the following day at 7 am., the president took a series of measures to try to stop the strike and to contain its possible effects. He declared the strike illegal and gave 24 hours to the workers to return to work; otherwise he would cancel the personería jurídica of all the unions involved. In addition the national government authorized transportation companies to hire the people they needed to move the ships and to load and unload cargo. Aware of the implications this strike could have for the national economy, the president announced measures to unload maritime ships in Cartagena and not in Barranquilla and to increase the movement of cargo via the Pacific railroad which had the capacity to mobilize 40,000 tons of cargo monthly (AHAGM, 1945, paquete #77, no. 373).

The president recognized the potential for violent outcomes when he announced the investigation and punishment of all acts of sabotage against ships, cargo, or passengers. From the beginning the government took a strong stand against the strike and announced that since it was an illegal strike there would not be negotiations with any union or federation. It considered the strike a deliberate act organized by FEDENAL in rejection of the labor legislation for workers in the public service sector which made their use of strikes illegal (AHAGM, 1945, paquete #77, no. 373).

The strike started on December 18 as scheduled. The governor of Antioquia and the authorities in Puerto Berrío became particularly concerned after December 21 when the Sindicato de Braceros Portuarios joined the strike. The first measure of the national government was to send one hundred soldiers to Puerto Berrío (AHAGM, 1945, paquete #77, nos. 374, 375). The night of December 21, colonel Villamil from Medellín, the superintendent of the railroad, members of the national police, and one hundred soldiers arrived in the port. The colonel, the superintendent, and the mayor would become the main authorities in the port during the strike. At that moment there were in the port twelve ships where the clear slogan was not to work. According to the mayor the workers showed a strong determination to stay on strike. In a meeting in the mayor's office, the striking workers were "...absolutely determined not to work until FEDENAL order[ed] otherwise." The unions published fliers every two hours animating the workers and in support of FEDENAL (AHAGM, 1945, paquete #77, no. 377).

For the local authorities the main preoccupation was to provide the ships with

workers and to try to maintain the movement of cargo. Although they seemed to have achieved this to a minimum, transportation on the river was largely paralyzed. They asked the national government to send qualified personnel to be able to at least get two ships moving, one upriver to Barranquilla and the other down river to La Dorada. Immediately twelve technical workers were dispatched. The ships that continued to arrive were overcrowding the port and by December 22 some ships started to stop in Puerto Olaya, on the other side of the river, where striking workers attempted to evade the authorities (AHAGM, 1945, paquete #77, no. 377).

On December 22, the Antioquia Workers Union (UTRAN) made evident the divergent perspectives that different sectors of the organized working class followed. The UTRAN published a public letter in the major newspapers in support of the governor of Antioquia. It described the social policy of Alberto Lleras Camargo as beneficial to the working class and applauded the government's response to the strike (AHAGM, 1945, paquete #77, nos. 378, 379-381). In its communications UTRAN reflects a view of the Magdalena River workers as foreign to the cultural ethos of Antioquia's highlands. It describes the strike as provoked by professional communist agitators directed by foreign countries, refers to FEDENAL as the workers federation of the Atlantic Coast, and states that UTRAN represents the "...true working classes of this important sector of the country..." (AHAGM, 1945, paquete #77, no. 378).

UTRAN made clear that its purpose was to act within the boundaries of the law and that under no circumstances would it promote class struggle, that on the contrary it would promote a friendly relationship with employers in order to resolve amicably all conflicts that could emerge in the relation between capital and labor

(AHAGM, 1945, paquete #77, no. 378). Even more, showing its alliance with the government, UTRAN expressed its readiness to sacrifice and to take any positions ordered to defend the government (AHAGM, 1945, paquete #77, no. 378). The letter ended with: "...Antioquia's workers close ranks around the government and gladly see the national front that has formed to close the door to communism and the Nazi fascist systems that some demagogues wish to install in Colombia. We emphatically condemn the arbitrary and illegal actions taken by FEDENAL, CTC, and Fedeta" (AHAGM, 1945, paquete #77, nos. 379-381).

Available correspondence for two days of the strike provide us with a window into the daily atmosphere and worries of local authorities. By December 23, the fifth day into the strike, all ports along the river were filled with soldiers. Colonel Villamil announced that more ships continued to arrive in Puerto Berrío with more striking workers. He was concerned with the large number of ships and workers that were concentrating in the port and was able to dispatch some of the ships to other ports by using soldiers for crew. He also asked that ships going up river be sent without soldiers because there were too many already in the ports. Yet more soldiers and police continued to arrive in the port, some of them arriving in ships that they had already occupied. For the next day, the mayor expected the number of ships in the port to reach fourteen (AHAGM, 1945, paquete #77, nos. 382-384).

Beyond the issue of striking workers, local authorities had to deal with issues relating to passengers, cargo, and the general impact of the strike as it affected all aspects of life in the port. Several examples illustrate this. Half the crew from three ships refused to continue working as they had promised. The ships could not be

moved until they could complete the crew. These ships carry cargo and passengers, one of them had 100 students in their way to Barranquilla. As workers and passengers continued to concentrate in the port, local authorities expressed preoccupation in anticipation of a health and social crisis when the 1,200 workers who had concentrated in the port had no more resources to subsist in Puerto Berrío (AHAGM, 1945, paquete #77, nos. 382-384).

Negotiations to ensure the movement of some cargo suggest differences between FEDENAL's leadership and rank and file. FEDENAL in Barranquilla authorized the steamer Salcedo that was in Puerto Berrío to continue its trip. To ensure this, a FEDENAL representative from Barranquilla had to travel to FEDENAL in Bogotá to secure permission there. Dr. Hoyos spent the afternoon trying to secure some farms for unloading the cattle from the steamer Salcedo in case the permit was not obtained. The morning of the following day and after securing permission from FEDENAL, local authorities had been unable to force the crew from the Salcedo to continue the trip with the cattle and arrangements had been made to bring the cattle to nearby farms that same morning (AHAGM, 1945, paquete #77, nos. 382-384).

Things went on like this for about two weeks. In the first week of January workers were returning to work. The strike had been defeated. President Alberto Lleras Camargo emphatically opposed the workers' demands. Clearly the alliance between labor and the Liberal state was over.

During the 1930s and 1940s workers achieved high levels of union organizing and with the support of the Liberal state advanced their interests vis-à-vis transportation companies. However, this support did not translate into workers'

acquiescence as the emergence of FEDENAL and the strike of 1945 indicate.

The defeat of the 1945 strike must have been a severe blow to river workers. Yet, dockworkers' narratives do not recall any major defeats. In fact several of them actually referred to the 1945 strike as a victory. Dockworkers and the population in general point to the construction of the bridge across the Magdalena river as the cause of dockworkers' decline. The most common thing remembered was that the plaza for a long time was filled with *costeños* (people from the Atlantic Coast) who were supported by the dockworkers union. The first thing dockworkers and non-dockworkers remembered when asked about this strike was president Alberto Lleras's response to it that "... There can not be two governments in Colombia, one in Bogota and one in the Magdalena river...." This sentence emphasizes the end of the support of the Liberal governments and the harsh response to the strike. It is also a recognition of the strength the workers had achieved.

By highlighting this sentence and emphasizing the history of workers' strength, popular memories of the strike give continuity to a history of working-class culture. In a volatile context of political violence, the statement made by a president becomes an accepted way to maintain this history.

The experiences of workers in Puerto Berrío are similar to those documented by Gould for Nicaragua. Working-class people from diverse geographic regions articulated their sense of community, and their demands, through the language of Liberalism, in the case of Puerto Berrío, and through the language of "obrerismo" – a Liberal discourse through which the Somocista regimen mobilized labor, in the case of Nicaragua. Similarly, as workers in both countries pushed the limits of Liberalism,

they encountered violent responses in the form of a repressive dictatorship in Nicaragua and in the form of La Violencia in Colombia.

Chapter 8

Memories of Liberalism: The Assassination of Jorge Eliecer Gaitán, La Violencia, and Historical Narratives

Two significant conferences were taking place in Bogotá on April 9, 1948. One was the Pan-American Conference where the U.S. Secretary of State was to convey his post-war concern with subversion and to enlist the Latin American nations in an anti-communist proclamation. The other was an anti-imperialist student conference scheduled to coincide with the Pan-American conference. Fidel Castro, the future Cuban leader, who was attending the student conference, waited in the offices of the newspaper *El Tiempo* for the arrival of Gaitán whom he was to interview. Although he had rights as the leader of the Liberal Party, Gaitán was barred from attending the Pan-American Conference (Sánchez 1983: 24-25). In his way to the newspaper offices, Gaitán was shot. "A vendor of lottery tickets made a rush for the assassin. Another man run from a nearby café and smashed a chair over the killer's head. In an instant a mob had gathered around the assassin, and literally kicked him to death" (Fluharty 1957: 100). With the same momentum that the mob gathered around the assassin, the city was engulfed in waves of rioting, looting, and fires. The U.S. embassy was attacked and the records and equipment of the Pan-American Conference destroyed (Gott 1970: 173).

Given the significance of his political trajectory and the wide popular support that he enjoyed, this event came to signify a major point of rupture in Colombia's history. Particularly for the generations of this period, narratives of Colombian

history are clearly divided into before and after Gaitán. The events in Bogotá came to be known as El Bogotazo and sparked a series of revolts throughout the country. One clear element of commonality that all these actions had was that all social sectors referred to the events as the Revolution (Sánchez 1983: 19). Sánchez (1983) found important distinctions between the uprisings in cities and towns. In major cities the revolts were anarchical explosions of short duration. In towns the revolts were more complex as the people took the authority to establish mechanisms of political and military authority. At the basis of this distinction are cultural and political traditions that served as cohesive forces in the towns. In addition, most uprisings in towns were directed by middle sectors (*ibid.*, 32, 153-154).

This chapter traces the events that unfolded as news of the Bogotazo reached Puerto Berrío. It examines the articulation of this event with the web of local politics, the role of middle sectors, and the role of local traditions in establishing alternative authority. As Sánchez (1983) points out, April 9 is a paradigmatic case of how local and regional processes articulate with national events (*ibid.*, 159).

Gaitán-Turbay Conflict

There was a lot of political activity in Puerto Berrío during the 1940s. There were primarily three political forces - one Conservative and two Liberal. One of the Liberal forces supported the campaign of Gabriel Turbay, the other that of Jorge Eliecer Gaitán. The majority of the people in the port were Gaitanista. Political rallies in support of one candidate or the other were common and political debates were carried out through newsletters published by each group. The Gaitanistas published El

Yunque (“The Anvil”) and the Turbayistas published *El Martillo* (“The Hammer”). Descriptions of the widespread adherence to Gaitanismo included the simple and matter-of-fact assertion that the majority of the people in the port were Gaitanista or that all the dockworkers were.

The continued strength of the dockworkers was clear in their ability to continually elect a couple of council members to a local council that during the 1940s seem to have been dominated by Gaitanistas. For several dockworkers, the union served as a base from which they went on to occupy official positions in the local government.

Luis Cárcamo Jaramillo played an important role during this decade, holding the position of mayor for two terms. Some considered him to be probably the best mayor Puerto Berrío ever had. Although the majority in the port was Gaitanista, the governor sent a Turbayista as a mayor who tried to win the support of the Gaitanista workers. Luis Cárcamo put up the statue of The Worker and initiated the construction of the Parque Obrero. Tensions between the two currents were openly expressed as when Luis Cárcamo organized an event for the inauguration of the Parque Obrero which was attended by a special official, that is Turbayista, Liberal committee from Medellín. The Gaitanistas ordered their people not to attend the event (Héctor Garces. Interview).

The local division between Turbayistas and Gaitanistas was a reflection of the divisions taking place within the Liberal party at the national level. It was also a reflection of the growth of the Gaitanista movement. Gaitán maintained a dynamic relationship with the Liberal party. During the early 1930s and in search for an

alternative to the bipartisan political system, he abandoned the Liberal party to form an independent political movement, the Unión de Izquierda Revolucionaria (Revolutionary Left National Union). At other times, he occupied high positions in various governments during the Liberal period. Regarding the working classes of the country, Gaitán gained their admiration for his actions in 1929 when he led congressional debates concerning the 1928 massacre of United Fruit workers in the Atlantic Coast, and later for his role as Minister of Labor when he worked for the application of the emerging labor codes which sought, under the Liberal regimes, to institutionalize and regulate capital and labor. Long argues that Gaitán's relationship with organized labor and the social composition of *Gaitanismo* show the working-class character of Gaitán's movement (Long 1995: 225-235). Sánchez and Meertens (2001: 12) characterize Gaitán's program as an attempt to unite popular forces under a petit-bourgeois leadership and a program that was not anti-capitalist but democratic and which constituted the most advanced political option of the moment.

The name of Olaya Herrera carries great significance for the people of Puerto Berrío not only for his role as the first Liberal president (1930-1934) after the Conservative Hegemony but also because he launched his presidential campaign from the port. His successor, Alfonso López Pumarejo (1934-1938) carries greater significance for Colombian workers in general. As we have seen, his government, the Revolution on the March, created great expectations for its reformist impetus. Workers in Puerto Berrío used this impetus to gain the government's support vis-a-vis navigation entrepreneurs. For right-wing elements and sectors of the Conservative party, the Revolution on the March was a cauldron of social disorder.

After the term of Eduardo Santos (1938-1942) which became known as The Pause, López Pumarejo was elected to a second term (1942-1945). The failure of his reformist program and the elites' reaction to it culminated in his resignation in 1945 at a time when the state was attacking and dismantling workers organizations such as FEDENAL. Eduardo Santos election reflect the intense conflict within the Liberal party between left and right Liberals. Workers rejected Eduardo Santos, the party's official candidate, and made an impressive show of electoral abstention. Of 260,000 possible Liberal votes in the departmental capitals, Eduardo Santos received only 60,000 (Long 1995: 221).

With few alternatives left, Gaitán received the widespread support of the working classes for the 1946 elections. The division between Gaitán and Turbay reflected the increasing class polarization within the Liberal Party and *Gaitanismo* represented the continuity of left Liberalism (ibid., 247). CTC's support for Turbay in the 1946 presidential elections is a manifestation of the institutionalization of organized labor which made it unable to lead the popular mobilization that *Gaitanismo* represented (Pécaut 1973: 210). Yet, unionized workers clearly voted for Gaitán, as was the case in Puerto Berrío. This conflict opposes, in Pécaut words, a labor organization tied to the political institutions against a populist and anti-institutional movement (ibid., 209). The division in the Liberal Party made possible Conservative Ospina Pérez's ascendancy to the presidency and the end of the Liberal Republic.

Attacks on organized labor were not an exclusive action of the Conservative party. Ospina Pérez followed the interim government of Liberal Alberto Lleras

Camargo who served as president during the last year of López Pumarejo's second term. Lleras received the negotiating committee of the 1945 strike, among whom there were dockworkers from Puerto Berrío. After telling them that there could not exist two governments in Colombia, one in Bogotá and one on the Magdalena river, Lleras ordered the militarization of all river ports. Most likely, Gaitán appeared to be the only possible alternative for the working classes and there were few doubts that he was headed for the presidency in 1950. Reflecting the polarization of national politics, while Gaitán was calling for a struggle against the oligarchies of the Conservative and the Liberal parties, Conservative candidate Laureano Gómez was calling on the national elites of both parties to unite.

“Mataron a Gaitán”

This reconstruction of the events that took place in Puerto Berrío following the assassination of Jorge Eliecer Gaitán is based on oral narratives of people who lived the events. Indicative of its significance, Gaitán's assassination and its aftermath was the most common topic discussed by all informants. Workers, colonists, and employees in urban and rural areas, from different angles, narrated what happened on April 9, 1948, yet all shared a common understanding of the meaning of Gaitán's death.

As with any major event that shapes a generation or 'a people', everybody can clearly remember what they were doing when they heard the news. Jesús González was unloading a ship when he heard the news. All dockworkers stopped working right away. Arcesio, another dockworker, also remembers that they were unloading a

ship when somebody arrived and announced that “they just killed Dr. Jorge Eliecer Gaitán.” Arcesio explains that everybody stopped working, lancheros and braceros, and went home. Gerardo Martinez, who worked for the railroad, was on his way with his co-workers to load a train with petrochemicals when a Liberal manager from Esso said to them “...there is no work because Gaitán was killed.” Luis Eduardo Berrío who had arrived from Cisneros two months earlier, had been hired by Emilio Luna, a wealthy man from Cisneros who had just opened a soft drink factory and brought with him several workers from Cisneros. He was in the factory when Emilio Luna walked in and said “*muchachos*, the factory is closed because they killed the boss” (Arcesio Antonio Delagado, Jesús González, Gerardo Martinez, and Luis Eduardo Berrío. Interviews).

The radio and the telegraph played a central role in making this a national event and a primarily urban phenomenon. As they put it, the news spread like gun powder through the towns and the telegraphs and people gathered around the nearest radio to learn about Gaitán’s death. Once people learned that a revolt had started in Bogotá, they took to the streets with Liberal flags chanting “down with the Conservative Government.” Although the events in Bogotá played an important role in stimulating other revolts, the people of Puerto Berrío, rather than simply imitating what was happening somewhere else, took on this moment of crisis to address their grievances.

Everything started to happen spontaneously after first hearing the news. People ran to the building of the local government and in front of the mayors’ office Liberal leaders stood on a table and started to address the crowd (Eloisa Duque.

Interview). Followers of Gaitán, apparently the majority of them railroad and dockworkers, spontaneously rallied around the town waving Liberal flags, chanting against the Conservative government, and some of them throwing stones. A couple of hours later, they went around again but this time there was looting and damage caused to several businesses.

The bar "El Berrío" enjoyed a good reputation partly due to its juke-box. This afternoon, the rallying people seem to have been offended because the music in the bar went on. The protesters walked into the bar, unplugged the juke-box and said "we demand silence" and with an ax split the juke-box in two. Regardless of the veracity of the particulars, such as actually splitting the juke-box in two, this is a powerful event and a powerful memory in that the people took on the authority to demand silence and respect for the death of Gaitán from relatively well-off merchants and began to take control of the town.

After the incident in the bar, they went on to a pharmacy owned by a Conservative and destroyed it. Pawnshops, proveedoras, and some offices were the main targets of the looting and destruction that followed. They all had in common that they were important known businesses owned by Conservative men. Juancho Arango, a prominent Conservative, owned two haciendas and had a dairy and hacienda administration offices in the port which were the only private offices that seem to have been destroyed (Eloisa Duque. Interview).

Beneath a seemingly widespread chaos there was a concerted effort and an emerging structure. People refer to this as "the revolution." The people took control over key elements such as trains and telephone station. The current Turbayista mayor,

Luis Cárcamo Jaramillo, was deposed and together with the police jailed in Puerto Olaya. Joaquín Sánchez, train station manager, was first named by the Gaitanistas as mayor. According to some accounts, he was too passive. According to others, he was giving telephone reports to the governor which the revolutionaries learned when they intercepted the telephone lines and then deposed him and took him prisoner to Puerto Olaya. Floro Zuluaga was named as the new mayor. Zuluaga seemed to have been a committed Liberal and a relatively well-off cattle man and merchant who traded in wood and horses. Some of his friends remember him as a member of a very Liberal family and remember how earlier on in Puerto Lievano he had a big celebration that lasted three days during which he rode his horses and gave beer to everybody while yelling "long live Olaya Herrera!"

Under Floro Zuluaga there was a small corps of men each of whom had thirty men under his direction. They were armed with sticks, machetes, and the few rifles they had taken from the police. Luis César Gómez, who had recently finished his military service, was one of the leaders in charge of thirty men. Some of the other leaders were men who had also recently finished their military service. According to him, most of the people participating were dockworkers and he calculated the number of dockworkers at that time to be about four hundred. For Luis César the sense of 'revolution' was present not only in the looting and destruction taking place but also in the appropriation of roles usually out of these leaders' reach. As he explained, "you arrived to the front of the church as a sub-teniente, when you arrived to the mayor's office you were a captain, and if from there you were sent on an assignment then you were a major ... That was a revolution" (Luis César Gómez. Interview).

Eloisa Duque worked in the mayor's office and after learning that the police station had been burned and that the prisoners had been freed, was concerned that they would try to set the mayor's office on fire. She tried to hide some of the files but finally no damage was inflicted on the mayor's office. Eloisa is very proud that during April 9 not a single file was lost in the mayor's office.

The revolutionaries were taking many of the Conservative people to the Palacio Nacional. Others who managed to escape sought protection in the Hotel Magdalena. Among the latter appeared a "gringo" who was buying wood, asking Juancho Arango for advice. Conservatives who were not taken to the Palacio Nacional went to one of Arango's haciendas.

During the days of "revolution," the main square became the center of the movement. The women of the zone cooked to feed "the soldiers of the revolution." They went to the *proveedoras* for pots, aprons, and food. From one of Arango's haciendas, the protesters took cattle and from Conservative Jaramillo they took some of his largest and fattest pigs. By this point the protesters had taken control of key positions of authority and had control of public spaces, including El Cerro where the revolutionaries concentrated. The central square and the streets were in their hands. "The revolution" also had its own nurse. Eloisa Duque had been named "the nurse of the revolution."

On Saturday a hydroplane arrived. Thinking that the plane carried not only government officials but also soldiers, Carlos Valencia, who was commanding the group that was by the river bank, ordered his men to shoot at it, causing it to take off. Another group tried to extend the revolt to other settlements outside of the port. After

freeing the prisoners from the local jail, Arturo Roldán left with a group to take Virginias, a settlement on the railroad line. Most of the men in the group while in possession of dynamite were taken prisoners in the Malena station before reaching Virginias. An army unit was approaching on the railroad line, among which was one of Arturo's brothers, who was a Captain. Their train was derailed. He would later tell Arturo that they were very scared as they approached, thinking that the fields and the line were mined (Luis Eduardo Berrío and Arturo Roldán. Interviews; Sánchez 2000: 341).

The following day the army arrived by train. Eight to ten cars with soldiers arrived at a station near Puerto Berrío from where they took paths on foot. Despite their poor armament, compared to the army, the revolutionaries organized a resistance to the army's arrival. The newly appointed officers left with their men to the outskirts of the port where they waited for the army. After running away during the first encounter, the army took positions and fired at the rebels. For the next three or four hours an exchange of fire went on until the army entered the town.

Some versions speak of dozens of deaths with bodies thrown in the river at night when the army ordered the lights out. Others give detailed account of four deaths. The event gave rise to its own quasi-mythical figures such as that of Uldarico Ibarra. He was described as a "big, black man from Puerto Tejada", "a black from Choco", or a policeman from Choco who was very tough and used to take drunks by their pants to jail. Some versions narrate how Uldarico took up a position on a strategic hill, probably a reference to El Cerro, from where he resisted the army practically by himself until he ran out of ammunition. Other versions narrate how

Uldarico, with only an old rifle, was running up a hill against the shots of the army's machine-gun that had been positioned on the strategic hill top. The machine-gun was probably the only one and the most sophisticated weapon at the time. When he was about to take control of the machine-gun, he was captured. He was about to be killed when Captain Triana ordered the soldiers to stop and started to praise Uldarico's valor. The captain seemed to have remarked that men as brave as Uldarico did not deserve to be killed and that with a few men like him he could take any town he wanted. In the most optimistic account, the Captain gave Uldarico his safe-conduct pass and let him go free (Luis Eduardo Berrío, Luis César Gómez, and Arturo Roldán. Interviews).

Many people experienced the revolution from their homes, where they locked themselves in once everything started and from where they could hear all the noises of the revolution taking place outside. Héctor had bought food provisions to last for several days and avoided going outside, especially after the army entered the town, until he started hearing the people outside walking by and commenting that they had been let free, that they had the *salvoconducto* or safe-conduct pass. Jesús, a dockworker, and his family choose to stay inside the house while "outside the people were creating damage, naming mayors, and expelling the police ... that is what the revolutionaries were doing." They were glad that they lived near the hospital and that made things easier for them because there was no shooting at the hospital. When rumors spread that the Palacio Nacional may be bombed with all the Conservatives inside, Eloisa's friend whose house was next to the Palacio was very scared and went to stay with Eloisa and her mother. When the army arrived, Eloisa moved both of

them to the hospital where they were safe and stayed for a couple of days (Eloisa Duque, Héctor Garces, and Jesús González. Interviews).

For the people in rural areas the revolt may not have been as dramatic as for those who lived in the port, yet memories of Gaitán's assassination and the revolt are equally significant for them. Urbano Vélez, in the Puerto Murillo region, recalls the day that the army entered Puerto Berrío: "We were in the farm when about 3:00 p.m. we heard the shots coming out of Berrío. After hearing the shots everybody left for the fields or the river. Boats and ships left the port. At about 7:00 a.m. the next day, I left with my cousin to go fishing. We heard ta, ta, ta, ta, ta,. My cousin said 'it was the maestro fixing boats'. Then in the river we saw two express ships, without the boats and with a white flag. That was strange. There should have been one going up and the other going down. They were both going in the same direction. They saw us and yelled 'get lost, run away to the mountains because in Berrío things are [so bad] that we are leaving defeated'" (Urbano Vélez. Interview).

During the days that followed the army's arrival in the town, a state of persecution and strict control was imposed. The army, the government, and "important" people from the town formed what people refer to as a junta, a tribunal, or the inquisition, that seemed to have been in charge, with the aid of the army, of establishing a strict control on people's movement and of cleansing the region of its most radical elements. The junta was composed of six or seven prominent local Conservatives. Some of its members included Don Polo, who was in charge of railroad warehouses and dealt with railroad cargo. He received cargo from the ships and send it to Medellín in the railroad. Also included were Juancho Arango, a

prestigious man who had been personero and mayor; Ezequiel Calderón, owned a soft drinks warehouse; and Luis Cárcamo Jaramillo, Liberal mayor at the time of the revolution (Jesús González. Interview).

The army took over the Hotel Magdalena and begun patrolling the streets and searching house by house “asking people where they worked.” All the men were taken to the railroad yards. They called one by one and asked the junta if they had seen the person participating of the revolt. The men were separated into two groups: those who, according to the junta, participated and those who did not. Those not accused received the *salvoconducto* that allowed them to move freely and to search for employment. The permit consisted of a piece of paper with a stamp and the signature of Captain Triana, in charge of the army in the port. “If you did not have the pass, you could not walk around freely. The army would take you and there had to be somebody who knew you.” All the workers kept in the yards experienced this as a degrading and arbitrary action committed against them. Workers were kept in the open yards for several days without access to bathrooms and suffering from thirst and hunger, with “...the judges of the inquisition up there, all the *godos* (Conservatives).” Héctor describes these events as the biggest abuse committed in the port. He emphasizes the arbitrariness in how everybody who was caught on the streets was taken in front of the railroad warehouses and accused of having participated in the events. All the prisoners were taken to the Macarena, a bull ring in Medellín, “in railroad cars filled with cattle shit.” In the end 560 men were taken as prisoners to Medellín. Puerto Berrío was among the municipalities with the highest number of people imprisoned (Roldán 1992; Sánchez 2000: 341; Jesús González, Héctor Garces,

Gerardo Martinez, and Luis Eduardo Gómez, interviews).

Luis Eduardo Berrío claims that the locomotive that stands in the central square is the one that took all the cars with the prisoners to Medellín. The trip to Medellín was a tortuous time of wondering what was going to happen to them. The prisoners heard rumors that they were going to be killed in a valley in Rionegro. According to Luis Eduardo, they were finally received in the Macarena with “cannons pointing at us, walking with hands up... running around with hands up [until] we dropped on the sand, tired, exhausted and it started to rain” (Luis Eduardo Berrío. Interview).

They were kept in the Macarena for three days when they were moved to the city’s Carcel de Menores (Minors' Jail). Many of the prisoners were freed after the first three days in La Macarena. Luis Eduardo Berrío was among the ones taken to the Carcel de Menores, where he was kept for thirty-five days but, compared to the Macarena this was “much better, because it looked like a hotel. It was very good and there were more freedoms and halls where we slept.” He calculates that when he was freed there were about sixty-eight prisoners left in jail. Jesús who had stayed in his house during the revolt went outside to try to do some food shopping when things calmed down. After returning, his wife told him that the army had been in the house and had taken his cousin who, according to them, was not participating either. The cousin was kept in jail for two months. Luis Eduardo Gómez, the president of the Sindicato de Braceros Lancheros, ended up in La Macarena but, after paying a fee, he was able to stay outside on condition that he remain in Medellín and report everyday to the offices of the Colombian Intelligence Service (SIC). After many days, when he

was unable to keep paying for a hotel to stay in the city, he was allowed to return to Puerto Berrío (Jesús González, Luis Eduardo Gómez, and Luis Eduardo Berrío. Interviews).

Liberal-Conservative relations

Although the oral narratives of the April 9th revolt in Puerto Berrío present a very consistent picture of the sequence of events that unfolded and a picture that conforms to the dominant understanding of the conflicts of this period as a confrontation between Liberals and Conservatives, a closer look presents a series of nuances that suggest a much more fluid relation between them. A consideration of the particular ways in which some people experienced the revolt will illustrate the existing cross-party solidarities and some of the tensions that differentiated people within them. First, we will take a brief look at some characteristics of the revolt's leadership.

It seems that the leadership of the "revolution" consisted primarily of merchants and people who occupied influential positions in the local government. Several of the leaders of the revolt were men of some means. They were entrepreneurs who traded goods between Puerto Berrío and Medellín or people who owned local businesses. They were all known Liberals. This supports Roldán's (2002) argument about the significance of middle sectors in challenging the elite of the Liberal Party and mobilizing workers.

Floro Zuluaga traded wood which he bought from local colonists and sold in Medellín. Emilio Luna had recently arrived from Cisneros and established a soft

drink factory. In addition, Liberals in positions of authority played important roles in stimulating participation in the revolt. Several workers heard the news about Gaitán's death from their bosses while they were at work. In all cases their bosses gave the same basic message: Gaitán was killed. Stop working.

Many of these leaders were the workers' Gaitanista allies but there were also members of the wealthy strata in Puerto Berrío. El Ñato Pizano was commonly described by dockworkers as the wealthiest man in the port. He seem to have been the largest landlord in town. He apparently made his wealth from the construction and rental of housing units in the port. While dockworkers may have perceived him as a Liberal ally, on a daily basis he was experienced as charging high rents for small and badly kept housing. Although Pizano may not have been a leader in the revolt, he also ended up in La Macarena. When a dockworker explained that "the wealthiest man in Puerto Berrío," referring to Pizano, also had "to go out like a 'sissy' with his hands up," he seems to be indicating that not even his wealth shielded him from the Conservatives' wrath.

Despite the clear emphasis on attacks on businesses owned by Conservatives, there are important nuances suggesting the complicated intersection of this national event with a web of local alliances. It seems significant that the Pinillas, owners of the bar and the pharmacy, who seem to have suffered the most damage, were not only Conservatives but were not from Antioquia. They were Conservatives from Santander. Also, not all Conservative-owned businesses were attacked during the revolt.

Some Conservative businessmen sympathized with the poor and they in turn

enjoyed the sympathy of the Liberal workers. When people went to loot the Conservative owned Proveedora Antioqueña, the leaders did not allow the people to attack it. Its owner enjoyed sympathy among the people and it is said that on that day he actually gave machetes to the Gaitanistas. One of the leaders described the owner as being good to the peasants and being very humanitarian. He recalled that the poor would come to him without money and he would help them. On this day, they protected his store. The pawn shop of Conservative Emilio Restrepo was also protected while that of Conservative Sosa was destroyed.

During the 'revolution', Conservatives in the countryside were also able to find the assistance of Liberals. Román Antonio Rodríguez, a colonist, was working on his maize crop when his Conservative neighbor arrived from Berrío and told him "I am coming here because Berrío is fucked up. The country is at war." According to Román, his neighbor was very afraid because he was a Conservative of some wealth. He had 600 head of cattle and a dairy in Berrío. He was delivering milk when the news of Gaitán's assassination reached the port. He returned in his canoe because the Liberals were taking all the Conservatives to jail and sought refuge in Román's house (Román Antonio Rodríguez. Interview).

The particular ways in which people obtained the *salvoconducto* or were taken prisoner highlight not only the arbitrariness of the junta but also the role of cross-party friendship networks in buffering repression. After Jesús went back home and found out that his cousin had been taken by the army, he went to the Hotel Magdalena and walked up to where the army was while the soldiers were walking by the side with all the people they had taken. As he was walking up, he saw Don Polo who was

in the junta. "He was Conservative but, he was a good person." The soldiers asked Don Polo if Jesús was good. He answered positively and Jesús was told to go pick up his *salvoconducto* so that he could go searching for work. Jesús explains that he was one of the lucky ones but that he also had good relations with the people from the railroad (Jesús González. Interview). A few who had influential friends to talk in their favor were allowed to go free.

When the army arrived at Héctor's house, he could hear from the inside when a neighbor yelled that he had left the town and that there was no one inside. Later Héctor could hear from inside the house people outside commenting that they had been left free, that they had a *salvoconducto*. One Conservative man who went to Héctor's house because he needed something repaired, after hearing from his wife that he had left, replied that Héctor was a good person, that nobody had anything against him, and that he could help him get the *salvoconducto*. Héctor came out, did his job, and the following day the Conservative man gave Héctor a note to present to the Captain (Héctor Garces. Interview).

Others had their luck reversed. The president of the *lancheros* was picked initially and went through with no problem but later he went back apparently to try to find the way to unload a boat that was waiting when the boss of the Conservatives, probably referring to Juancho Arango, said "...That is on the streets? He damaged my machines and spilled a lot of milk..." and that is how he ended up in La Macarena. Luis Eduardo Berrío had obtained his *salvoconducto* but later when he walked by the Hotel Magdalena, a junta member called him and asked him who was it that he worked for. When he answered "Emilio Luna," the junta member replied "Ah! That is

a revolutionary. We broke one of his legs for being Liberal. Give me that *salvoconducto*.” And he ripped it up, costing Luis Eduardo Berrío 38 days in jail (Luis Eduardo Gómez and Luis Eduardo Berrío. Interviews).

Acts of solidarity between Liberals and Conservatives were the outcome of long-term relations in which socio-economic position seemed to have been more important than political affiliation. Juancho Arango’s hacienda bordered lands belonging to Eloisa’s father. Eloisa describes Arango as a very good person. Other accounts suggests that he was reluctant to be a member of the junta and that in contrast to other Conservatives he was not accusing people he did not see participating in the revolt. Eloisa explains that during twenty years as neighbors they never had any conflict. She continues, “ he is very Conservative and I am very Liberal. If one of his animals crossed over to my side, I called him and he took it over and vice versa.” According to Eloisa, the other Conservatives disapproved of his practice of hiring Liberal workers. In addition to his two haciendas, he had a dairy. All the bosses and people in charge of his offices in the port were Liberal (Eloisa Duque. Interview).

One could question Eloisa’s account on the grounds that in a town with a strong Liberal majority there may have been few Conservative workers to hire. Yet, regardless of the veracity of these particulars, her account points to existing differences or conflicts within the Conservative elite and different perceptions of Conservatives. The somewhat sympathetic evaluations of Arango do not seem to have been shared by most of the people participating in the “revolution.” The president of the *lancheros*, for one, did not have good memories of him. But most significant, and

in contrast to other Conservatives, Arango's interests were not spared and his dairy and offices, which were the only private offices attacked during the revolt, were destroyed.

From looking at the extent of damage suffered by various Conservatives a basic distinction within the Conservative elite seems to emerge. The owners of the businesses that were protected were all Conservatives with a long tradition in Puerto Berrío. Although Juancho Arango suffered damages, many accounts had positive evaluations of him. Arango was commonly refer to as "the boss of the Conservatives." He was a man with a long history in the port and many Conservatives found refuge during the revolution in one of his haciendas. In contrast to this group of Conservatives were people like the Pinilla brothers who, according to the accounts of some of the participants, suffered the most damage. The Pinillas were not part of the traditional local Conservative elite. As relatively recent arrivals, they may not have been integrated into the local social fabric in the same way that the more traditional elite was.

1950s: Conservative harassment, La Violencia, and the emergence of Liberal Guerrillas

The establishment of the junta following the April 9 revolt, the imprisonment of hundreds of workers, and the tight control imposed by the military on the mobility of labor signaled a change in the articulation of political forces at the national and local levels. With the support of the army, Conservative forces initiated a process of constant attacks on organized labor, and particularly on the most radical labor

organizations. At the same time national Liberal elites were backing off from their alliance with organized labor. In this panorama, the assassination of Gaitán left labor with few national voices and practically no channels for political voice within the system of national politics.

In Puerto Berrío, workers experienced this period both as a general atmosphere of violence and as a direct attack on workers, and on Liberal workers in particular. Those known for their Liberal radicalism or union activism were the most likely not to receive the permit the army was issuing and as such would be severely limited in their search for employment. Official employment, an area directly influenced by political patronage, became the first target for replacement of Liberal workers with Conservative ones. The two most significant places of official employment in the port were the railroad and the local police. As we will see below, workers experienced this process as the “importation” of Conservatives. Violence and harassment were the main mechanisms to push dockworkers and rural workers out of their jobs.

Liberal workers had to contend with three main sources of harassment. In what amounted to paramilitary organizations, groups of Conservative men from other towns were brought to the port to harass the workers. They were known as the *aplanchadores* (flatteners) who in the mildest cases walked around hitting people with the flat side of their machetes. The feared police forces from the neighboring state of Boyacá known as the *chulavita* also made their periodic appearance in the port. In addition, the local police had been replaced completely with a Conservative police. In this context, insults, harassment, and beatings were part of the daily

atmosphere of fear. Dockworkers feared going to their job because there were always *aplanchadores* waiting around and pay days in the railroad became days to fear because the now Conservative workers would take on to the streets celebrating, yelling, and shooting.

The following memories illustrate the conditions of daily life during this period and they also indicate a common historical narrative. According to this narrative a golden past of “abundance” and work came to an end with the assassination of Gaitán and was followed by Conservative persecution of Liberal workers. The persecuted then had no choice but to organize in Liberal guerrillas. Two points to highlight from this narrative are that it creates a conflict-free past and sees the Liberal guerrillas as a legitimate outcome.

The following quotations illustrate the situation of harassment taking place in Puerto Berrio. "Under Laureano, Jaramillo (the one whose pigs were taken during the revolt) took thirty men and went *aplanchando* through the bars ‘this one ate pig too.’" "During the junta Conservatives who did not see anything accused people. Others, like Juan de Dios Arango, who suffered damages, did not accuse anybody because they did not see who it was. Some of the Conservatives who were harassing and accusing people later had to leave Berrio. That was the case of Juan Benavides" (Luis César Gómez. Interview).

After talking about the past of "abundance" and the good times before La Violencia, a former dockworker explained that "with La Violencia, Puerto Berrio started to go back and back. The police harassed the people, gave them *plan*, put them in jail. So, they were scaring the people away. Before La Violencia there was a lot of

activity, a lot of work. La Violencia even ended the work. From then on Puerto Berrío is nothing... [the assassination of Gaitán] was under the government of Ospina Pérez. They started to change the Liberal police for a Conservative one. They knew that Puerto Berrío was very Liberal and put a strong hand here with *la plancha*. They started to bring *aplanchadores* from Caracolí, Puerto Triunfo, and many other places" (Arcesio Antonio Delgado. Interview).

A former railroad worker recalls the changes taking place during this period: "Before April 9 nobody knew who was who in terms of politics. It was after Gaitán that you had to sign a book when employed stating your politics. There were many *recalzados*" (Gerardo Martinez. Interview). The latter refers to those who quietly changed their "shoes" or political affiliation in order to gain employment.

For dockworkers harassment came from "outside." A former dockworker remembers that "working as a *bracero* the salary was good and you could buy a lot of things. Then Gaitán was killed and La Violencia started. They came from other places to harass us (dockworkers), to hit us with machetes. That did not destroy the union. The union continued to work. We stayed here. Later came Jorge Leyva, who was of the same group of Mariano Ospina Pérez, and Ospina Pérez came too. Many left to work on railroad construction, there was no bridge at that time" (German Baena Sánchez. Interview).

The following two narratives illustrate the impact of violence in rural areas. Luz María Gil's Partner, Alejandro, "... returned to Araujo to wood cutting. La *contrachusma* attacked him (she lowered her voice and paused before saying the word *contrachusma* which refers to anti-Liberal forces). He was badly injured. An old

friend took care of him. A family took him and took care of him for four months.”

Luz wondered what had happened. She was pregnant and had his son. When the child was about four months old Alejandro appeared. He was very skinny and was sick for a long time, suffering from his lungs. He stayed in Puerto Berrío fishing. On one occasion he was attacked with a machete and was badly injured again. He died a few weeks later. The doctor who treated him was yelling at him "that is what happens for being a fighter. He likes to fight." Alejandro worked in association with Floro Zuluaga. Alejandro went into the forest for extended periods of time to cut wood which he sold to Zuluaga (Luz María Gil. Interview).

As violence worsened in rural areas people started to abandon the countryside and moved to Berrío. “All the *violencia* started in 1952. Gaitán was assassinated in 1948 and things stayed ...[quiet but tense] while the people were organizing. When the government started to do their things too [things got worse] and the people had to leave the fields to the towns because the problem was now in the countryside" (Urbano Vélez. Interview). Juana “La Poderosa” also had to abandon El Presidio due to La Violencia (see Chapter Four).

The following account illustrates the more gruesome content of La Violencia that characterized the 1950s. "In Berrío, on Saturdays, they took people and kept them there and at night put them in train cars and send them to Monos. Later they would be found in the river decapitated. If you went to give anything to the people, they would put you in there too. We have suffered this torment for many years" (Román Antonio Rodríguez. Interview).

Providing an overall picture of the transformations taking place, several

narrations are organized around national political figures making a direct connection between local events and national politics. According to Héctor, "everything fell apart after the assassination of Gaitán. First was the *aplanchada*, the abuse of the police with the citizens. People started to fear the police. They would not go out at night. People started to get angry. Liberals started to have clandestine meetings. Until things reached the point when they took to the mountains and became guerrillas. Many Conservatives also left Berrío." The person who helped Héctor get his *salvoconducto* "... had a bar and was involved in politics but he was a thief. He bought stolen goods. He was trouble-maker, *aplanchador* but, he never touched me. Every employee, every policeman who was Conservative was sent to Berrío. All the Liberals were fired or they had to leave. All employees of the local government, slaughterhouse, police, railroad, merchants were Conservative. There were few Conservatives before that and they were now importing them" (Héctor Garces. Interview).

After talking about the dockworkers' boom in contrast to La Violencia, Arturo continues: "La Violencia was something fearful... killings... It was the Conservatives who were in the government, when Laureano Gómez was the president, persecuting Liberals. He went to Spain to receive orders from General Franco, who with the use of violence kept control of the government for twenty years. He came back to carry out his orders. There he learned *el tabano* (an electric charge), which was the same that was applied to cattle. He also learned to seat people on ice. Then, the relentless persecution of Liberals began. The *campesinos* who came to town on Saturdays were persecuted and taken to jail. Then they would lose all the things they had bought. Then they started to organize as victims of the government, went to the mountains

and started to fire back at the police. They were then firing at each other. The people in town, members of one party or the other, had the risk of being assassinated" (Arturo Roldán. Interview).

Román Antonio Rodríguez recalls that "about a year after Laureano was in power, he started the persecution and to foment violence even more. They had rallies every week to harass people, beat them up, people tried to escape. The Conservatives did the rallies firing guns in the air. One of those shots hit an electric cable that fell and killed my brother. That is how things evolved so that the people started to take to the mountains because the *aplanchadores* from Caracoli used to come and harass everybody who was in the bars. The first one to take to Santander was a Santandereano called *carecrimen* (crime face). He was a driver. He organized a *chusma*. Then by 52-53 another group was formed by the Ciénaga del Opon. So, things were getting worse and worse. The fight was forming and has not calmed down, and who knows how far this is going. From 1950 on is when things got bad" (Román Antonio Rodríguez. Interview).

Luis Eduardo Berrío recalls: "Eduardo Santos said a famous phrase 'the Liberals should have faith and dignity.' But then the war between Liberals and Conservatives started. In about 1950-51, we all had to hide when it was pay day in the Ferrocarril de Antioquia. This town is of Liberal majority. The railroad workers got paid and they would go out to harass the Liberals with machetes while yelling 'down with Liberalism, long live la Virgen del Carmen, Long live the Conservative party.' The bravest joined the Liberal guerrillas. The railroad workers were all Conservatives. The town became dominated by a Conservative police and the

aplanchadores. Before Gaitán was the government of Ospina Pérez and the famous police *la chulavita* from a municipality in Boyacá, potential assassins. There was a street vendor who would get on a table to yell 'the Liberals smell like shit' and outside the bar ten policemen protecting him. Anybody who protested was a dead person. I had a Liberal ID hidden for many years. The party lost the elections and that is when Ospina Pérez came in and the persecution started, and the replacement of Liberal workers with Conservative ones, and everything became Conservative, the police too" (Luis Eduardo Berrío. Interview).

All this together became part of daily life during a decade of partisan strife that by the most conservative estimates claimed the lives of two hundred thousand people in Colombia. It is somewhat surprising that accounts of La Violencia in Puerto Berrío make few direct references to actual deaths. This is more so when comparing Puerto Berrío with the rest of municipalities in Antioquia. Official reports, quoted in Roldán (1992), show that between 1949 and 1953 in Antioquia less than twenty deaths were reported in 36 municipalities; more than twenty and less than a hundred were reported in nineteen municipalities; and between one hundred and two hundred were reported in eight municipalities. Beyond this, 342 deaths were reported in one municipality; 428 were reported in another municipality; 546 were reported in Puerto Berrío; and 561 were reported in Dabeiba (Roldán 1992: 533).

A possible explanation of the particular ways in which working classes in Puerto Berrío construct their historical narratives may be found in their present from which they are constructing these histories. This is a present in which many of the people narrating these histories saw their children assassinated in the 1980s as right-

wing paramilitary groups purged the region of alleged sympathizers of leftist guerrillas or any democratic voices. This context will be explored in the next chapter.

Memory and Political Identity

Through identification with Gaitán workers articulated a discourse against the elites while reaffirming their Liberal identity. This became a powerful tradition that integrated the diverse working classes of the region. The April 9th uprising is the best example of the wide support that workers in the urban center of Puerto Berrío gave to Liberalism and to Gaitán. We will look now at how the workers in rural areas along the railroad, presented in chapter 3, talked about political identity.

Carlos Holguín's recollections show the great level of politicization occurring along the railroad and the identification of the Liberal Party and Jorge Eliecer Gaitán in particular as advocates of the workers and the poor, views shared by most people in the region. Carlos Holguín participated in the initial efforts to create a peasant league in 1938. According to him, "there were a couple of individuals who were organizing the Peasant Leagues. They talked about the rights that we had at work. We were about ten individuals attending the meetings, but slowly we stopped attending. Then later came the Labor Office. That was a lot more organized." Holguín's recollections indicate the efforts of communists and Liberals to obtain workers' allegiance through the peasant leagues and the labor office respectively (Carlos Holguín. Interview).

Carlos Holguín continues: "Working conditions started to change with the arrival of the políticos, such as López Pumarejo and Eduardo Santos. Payment of overtime, and rest on Sundays were achieved with these políticos. Many wealthy

entrepreneurs went to jail during this time because they did not comply with the new laws. In Puerto Berrío there was a man known as Zapato Blanco who worked with the Labor Office. He always wore white clothes and white shoes. He was very correct and did a lot of favors for the people. One time there was a case with one hacienda owner from Puerto Alicia who was also a lawyer. He had made a contract with another man and when the hacienda owner realized that the man was going to make a profit he wanted to break the contract. The man complained to the Labor Office and the owner did not want to keep the contract. He walked into the Labor Office harassing the inspector, but at the end he was put in jail and had to pay the workers."

With this story, Holguín highlights that the hacienda owner, despite being a lawyer, could not do whatever he wanted and he had to follow what the Labor Office dictated. This was a period of high levels of political agitation and workers remember various political groups constantly circulating political fliers. The local Liberal office told people to complain to the Labor Office when owners did not want to pay the benefits to which they were entitled.

Carlos Holguín's opines that "the poor are always under the domination of capital" and that "men are saleable. We just do not know the price." This, in his view, was reflected in the history of the Labor Office. According to Carlos, the Office helped a lot at the beginning but eventually the wealthy started to buy it. That is when the workers started to get agitated and Gaitán, "the man of the people" appeared.

In workers' narratives, Gaitán's assassination became a point of demarcation of Colombian history. One common basis for the distinction between before and after Gaitán rests on workers' understandings of politics. In their view, people had political

ideals before, while today, it is all about vengeance and money. These early generations of workers create a history of their political identity through a clear sequence of Liberal figures that starts with the hero of the War of the Thousand Days, Rafael Uribe Uribe, continues with Olaya Herrera and López Pumarejo and ends with the assassination of Gaitán. Workers talked about this political identity as a natural thing and as a family tradition passed down from generation to generation. To my queries about her political affiliation, Carmen, a former hacienda worker, before offering an answer, replied "what about you. Are you Conservative?" To my evasive answer that I kind of liked Liberalism but that I was not really either one, she replied "No, no. You know from the time you are a child what you are" (Carmen Emilia Henao. Interview).

Ramón Arturo Tabares elaborated on this essentialized nature of political identity when he pointed out that although as a child you did not really know what was one party or the other, you still had an identification with one or the other because you were born with it. He compared political identification with religious identification. In his view, "...this is the same as when you are born with one religion or the other. There are now many religious sects but you do not change yours because you can not change it. I have my sect. The one I was raised with" (Ramón Arturo Tabares. Interview).

Although political identity was often described as an essentialized family tradition, it is also a central part of workers' understandings of themselves as social subjects. Through Liberal political identity workers emphasized their working-class condition and articulated opposition to their exclusion from political regimes.

Workers in Puerto Berrío sought political integration to the nation through their allegiance to Liberal reform during the first half of the twentieth century. During the second half of the century, they continue to experience exclusion, but they and their children found new mechanisms to express discontent.

Chapter 9

Leftist and Popular Political Traditions During the Second Half of the Twentieth Century: Challenges to the Survival of the Bipartisan Political System

Although La Violencia signifies a major break in the history of Colombia, it also highlights the continuity and resilience of a bipartisan political system throughout the nation's history. Attempts to create autonomous working-class politics during the 1910s and 1920s failed in favor of alliances with traditional parties. Gaitán's initial efforts to create an independent popular political alternative to the Liberal and Conservative parties, and later to create an anti-oligarchical, popular voice from within the Liberal Party, came to a halt with his assassination, for many, the event that originated La Violencia from which the Conservative and Liberal parties reemerged as the sole voices in the national political field. Paying attention particularly to the emergence of guerrilla movements and leftist politics in the period following his murder, this chapter analyzes a national political development characterized by resistance to the incorporation of third political movements and the continuation of the bipartisan system. Yet, the exclusionary nature of this system, institutionalized in the Frente Nacional, turned political violence and revolutionary guerrilla movements into alternatives for social and political mobilization.

The chapter also looks at the expression of these developments in the Magdalena Medio and ends with a closer examination of leftist politics in Puerto Berrío, visiting the daily realities of violent conflict experienced by the inhabitants of

the region. The continuation of a bipartisan political system implies the continual suppression or co-optation of alternative or autonomous political movements. The persistence of such movements in the Magdalena Medio and the Puerto Berrío region indicates the limited integration of such frontier regions in the nation and the importance of their oppositional and alternative political traditions. The strength of leftist politics in Puerto Berrío during the 1970s and early 1980s gives continuity to a tradition of radical politics forged during the first half of the twentieth century and demonstrates the centrality of politics more generally in national integration.

Although the labor-state alliance during the Liberal governments of the 1930-1946 period may not be viewed as an example of radical politics, it nevertheless constituted a moment in which workers used the state to advance their interests and, in the case of transportation workers in the Magdalena river, to maintain control over the labor process and the working space. Following Chernick and Jiménez (1993), this period represents a reformist phase of popular liberalism. In the form of political agitation, conspiracies, and the failed insurrection of 1929, this tradition had taken the form of popular liberal resistance during the first three decades of the twentieth century and had reemerged as an insurrectionary force during the second half of the century (ibid., 61-67). This reemergence is explored in this chapter. Whereas the preceding chapters deal primarily with workers' culture and politics during the 1930s and 1940s, the aim of this chapter is to suggest historical continuities between these two decades and more recent developments. Moreover, this chapter serves to highlight the *present* from which workers in Puerto Berrío are reconstructing their memories about their past.

National Politics and Leftist Opposition

The 1948 assassination of the Liberal Party presidential candidate, Jorge Eliecer Gaitán, ushered in a decade of violent confrontation between followers of the two traditional political parties, Liberal and Conservative in Colombia. This civil war finally came to an end after engulfing the whole of Colombian society and claiming the lives of at least two hundred thousand people. Known as *La Violencia*, the years of civil war were followed by the emergence of armed revolutionary guerrilla movements, some of which grew out of the foundations laid down by the Liberal peasant militias that resisted Conservative repression during *La Violencia*. In addition, right-wing paramilitary forces consolidated into full fledged armies during the 1980s and 1990s.

At one level, *La Violencia* represented a Conservative reaction against the Liberals, in power during the 1930-1946 period. At another level, it represented a reaction against the advances of organized labor. As Conservative president Laureano Gómez (1950-1953) boasted of his alliance to Spanish dictator Francisco Franco, his regime implemented repressive measures which increased and continued political violence, and aimed at a greater concentration of power in his hands. In 1953, however, both Liberal and Conservative opposition to him led to the military coup of Gustavo Rojas Pinilla.

Rojas Pinilla's populist attempt to attract the sympathy of the people and his inability to end political violence which threatened to escape the limits of inter-party confrontation, raised the concerns of the two parties' leadership and of economic

elites, resulting in a pact of joint rule between the Liberal and Conservative parties known as the Frente Nacional (National Front). With this pact, in place from 1958 to 1974, Liberals and Conservatives sought peace by alternating the presidency between the two parties and sharing political power at all levels of government. With the Frente Nacional, however, national elites ensured that there would be no political representation for the left.

Colombian political history in the twentieth century has been marked by a political structure consolidated in the nineteenth century. In contrast to other Latin American nations, Colombia did not experience viable and sustained middle-class reformist politics or working-class based political movements. Instead, with the survival of the Liberal and Conservative parties and the use of violent repression, Colombian elites have blocked the emergence of national political movements outside of the two traditional parties. The Frente Nacional institutionalized the exclusionary nature of this system. Most important, the closed political system of the Frente Nacional left no spaces for alternative politics; dissent took the form of armed guerrilla organizations.

Although largely determined by local conditions, the emergence of these guerrilla organizations were also part of more general trends in Latin America. Yet, although in the 1960s attempts to create guerrilla organizations could be found in practically every Latin American country, by the late 1970s, guerrilla warfare had been abandoned in many countries (Gillespie 1993). This was partly the result of military setbacks and the establishment of military regimes, as in Brazil, Chile, Uruguay, and Argentina, or because of highly repressive elected governments as in

Colombia under Turbay Ayala. After the initial military setbacks, a renewed interest in armed revolutionary action had taken place during the 1970s with the appearance of urban guerrillas in Uruguay and Argentina, which must have served as a model for the appearance of the M-19 Movement in Colombia and similar movements in Ecuador and Peru. Yet, by the end of the decade many of these movements had been defeated and rural guerrilla movements survived only in Colombia and Central America (Gillespie 1993).

Chernick and Jiménez (1993) characterize leftist politics in Colombia during the 1970s and 1980s as oscillating between the two political traditions of radical democracy and popular liberalism. Radical democracy was present in small, local, and regional movements against local elites and the state. These movements sought transformations at the local level, had only a limited national projection, and predominated in the countryside. Characterized by antagonism against upper classes, suspicion of political pluralism, affinity for armed struggle, and the search for the establishment of an egalitarian order from above, popular liberalism had originated in the antioligarchical and anticlerical struggles of the mid-nineteenth century (*ibid.*, 63-65). These distinctions serve to illuminate differences and commonalities among guerrilla organizations.

One of Rojas Pinilla's attempts to end La Violencia was his amnesty offer to guerrilla forces. Although it succeeded in having most Liberal guerrillas lay down their arms, pockets of armed resistance remained, especially in the communist stronghold of the Upper Magdalena valley. Since its formation in 1930 and with an orientation for a local peasant agenda that combined electoral challenges and armed

self-defense, the Communist Party had concentrated on the formation and protection of autonomous smallholder communities in the large-estate districts of Cundinamarca and the Upper Magdalena valley (Jiménez 1985). Rojas Pinilla's military repression of the remaining guerrilla forces and subsequent campaigns under the Frente Nacional against communist dominated regions led to the transformation of these communist, peasant self-defense units into a mobile guerrilla movement from which Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, FARC, emerged in 1966 (Chernick and Jiménez 1993; Pizarro 1991).

Other challenges to the Frente Nacional coalesced in the political opposition of the Movimiento Revolucionario Liberal (Liberal Revolutionary Movement-MRL) and the Alianza Nacional Popular (Popular National Alliance-ANAPO) both of which eventually became springboards for the emergence of guerrilla organizations. The MRL was headed by Alfonso López Michelsen and attracted intellectuals, communists, and former Liberal guerrillas sympathetic to the idea of armed struggle against the elites. Until its dissolution in 1964, the MRL represented the main middle-class revolutionary challenge.

Founded by Rojas Pinilla and with a language that combined attacks against national oligarchies with nationalism and an emphasis on values such as fatherland, family, and religion, ANAPO gained currency among lower and middle-class urban sectors. During the second half of the 1960s, it increasingly obtained electoral success and presented Rojas Pinilla as a presidential candidate in the 1970 elections. The official Conservative candidate obtained 40.6 percent of the votes with Rojas Pinilla trailing behind with 39 percent. For ANAPO followers this had been a clear

case of fraud which reaffirmed to many the futility of electoral participation. Nevertheless, ANAPO's performance in the 1970 elections remains by far the greatest electoral victory for a third political movement. Following the death of Rojas Pinilla in 1974, ANAPO never regained its earlier success. A less successful electoral challenge, the Union Nacional de Oposición (National Opposition Union-UNO), was led by communists in alliance with other leftist organizations in the 1974 elections.

In addition to FARC, the main guerrilla organizations were created in the mid-1960s and early 1970s. In 1965, former members of the MRL, students, and petroleum workers from Santander, influenced by the Cuban revolution and Che Guevara's theories of revolutionary warfare, founded the Ejército de Liberación Nacional (Army of National Liberation-ELN). A split within the pro-Soviet Communist Party in 1965 gave rise to the pro-Chinese Partido Comunista de Colombia, Marxista-Leninista (Colombian Communist Party, Marxist-Leninist-PCC-ML). In 1968, the PCC-ML founded its military wing, the Ejército Popular de Liberación (Popular Liberation Army-EPL).

While FARC, ELN, and EPL were rural guerrilla movements, the Movimiento 19 de Abril (April 19 Movement-M-19), founded in 1974, was primarily urban-based. Formed by former ANAPO members, the M-19 rapidly gained national notoriety due to its spectacular military actions in the main cities and its Robin Hood-style thefts of food and goods for distribution in poor neighborhoods. For Chernick and Jiménez, the ELN, EPL, and M-19 represent the reemergence of armed popular liberalism within the middle-class, while the FARC was linked to local, radical democratic

projects and was the only guerrilla movement to have a sustained base of support among the rural poor and especially in areas of peasant colonization (Chernick and Jiménez 1993).

With its emphasis on a local peasant agenda, FARC extended its initial area of operation in the upper Magdalena valley to new frontier zones in the mid-Magdalena valley, the eastern plains, and the banana producing areas in western Antioquia. But counterinsurgency operations caused major setbacks to guerrilla organizations and virtually destroyed the ELN and EPL in the early 1970s. This decade was also characterized by widespread popular social movements in the cities that organized local civic strikes to demand public services and by growing labor unrest (Santana 1989). The social mobilization and protest reached its highest point in a national strike on September 14, 1977. The strike had been possible due to the temporary unity of labor organizations in the Consejo Nacional Sindical (National Union Council-CNS). However, continued internal struggles within leftist, labor, and popular organizations, as well as official repression, ensured that social protest at the national level would not be sustained.

Official repression against guerrilla, worker, peasant, and popular organizations increased in the context of a reorientation of Colombia's economy from import substitution towards capital intensive manufacturing and renewed investment in agricultural and mineral exports, primarily petroleum, coal, nickel, and bananas. Expectations for social reform under the regime of former MRL leader Alfonso López Michelsen (1974-1978) soon proved wrong, especially after his harsh repression of the 1977 national strike. His fellow Liberal president, Julio César

Turbay Ayala (1978-1982) materialized the doctrine of national security in the infamous Estatuto de Seguridad Nacional (National Security Statute) which greatly expanded the possibilities for impunity of the National Army and which made no distinction between guerrilla forces and other forms of popular organization.

Nicaragua's 1979 Sandinista Revolution had the effect of stimulating the reemergence of guerrilla activity in Colombia. One of the effects of the Sandinista Revolution was to deepen commitment to insurgency in countries such as El Salvador and Guatemala. This was also the case in Colombia. All of these are regions where rural guerrillas enjoyed considerable peasant support and a long tradition of protest. In Gillespie's (1993) view an important shift took place. Providing pressure for change within the system, guerrilla violence in the 1980s became more tactical than strategic. The most notorious examples of this are El Salvador and Guatemala, where guerrilla actions became means to gain strong negotiating positions or to force opponents into negotiations. In other words, the insurgent left sought to enter a closed political arena through violent means. By contrast, in several countries, but primarily in those with a previous experience of military regimes, various mainly urban guerrillas sought to enter the political arena peacefully (*ibid.*, 190). As we will see below, Colombian guerrilla activity during the 1980s and 1990s reflects a mixture of these two tendencies.

During the 1980s the ELN strengthened its position in the mid-Magdalena valley and in the petroleum producing regions of Santander and Arauca. The EPL consolidated its presence in the banana producing region of Uraba in western Antioquia and in the cattle ranching areas of Córdoba, while FARC, assuming a more

insurrectionary position and seeking a nation-wide influence, expanded to new coca growing frontiers in the south creating, in Chernick and Jiménez's words, an autonomous rebel territory in Caquetá (1993: 76). This period also saw the reemergence of legal opposition, a new experiment in labor unity, and with the creation of the Coordinadora Guerrillera Simón Bolívar (Guerrilla Coordinator Simón Bolívar), a greater but limited military coordination among guerrilla organizations (Gillespie 1993). The creation of the Central Unitaria de Trabajadores (Unitary Workers' Central-CUT) in 1986 represented a renewed level of labor organization and mobilization since the 1977 national strike. FARC, ELN, and EPL experimented in the creation of political movements. Of these, the largest and most important was the FARC-sponsored Unión Patriótica (Patriotic Union-UP), created in 1985.

A backdrop to these developments was the political opening of the post-Turbay regime initiated by the peace negotiations with guerrilla organizations of Conservative president Belisario Betancur (1982-1986) and followed by Liberal presidents Virgilio Barco (1986-1990) and César Gaviria (1990-1994). These developments culminated in the rewriting, for the first time in more than a hundred years, of the national constitution in 1991 and the laying down of arms by the M-19, the EPL, and other smaller armed movements. However, these developments failed to give rise to leftist legal electoral opposition and instead strengthened the continued armed insurgency of the FARC and the ELN.

The failure of legal opposition is rooted partly in the newly emergent "dirty war" which resulted from the alliance of old and new elites. While the consolidation of a neoliberal economic program strengthened the position of traditional elites, the

boom in the drug trade stimulated the rise of new regional ones. In the 1980s and 1990s, powerful economic interests, drug elites, and local military officials allied to eliminate the influence of popular and leftist organizations. Their actions undermined the creation of political openings, the emergence of legal leftist opposition, and peace negotiations with guerrilla organizations. Organizations such as CUT and UP, former guerrilla members now conducting electoral opposition, and local popular leaders and elected officials, became the target of assassination by the forces of the “dirty war”.

Amidst the euphoria of the promises of the neoliberal economic project, renewed foreign investment, and a major increase in U.S. military aid to the Colombian government, the 1990s have witnessed an increasingly polarized social and political landscape. The right-wing forces unleashed during the “dirty war” have coalesced in paramilitary organizations that conduct attacks on the civilian population in regions of guerrilla influence or of strategic economic importance. Following a deepening in the crises of legitimacy of the national government during the presidency of Liberal Ernesto Samper (1994-98) and with increased guerrilla activity by FARC and ELN, Conservative president Andrés Pastrana (1998-2002) initiated a new round of peace negotiations with the guerrilla organizations. In contrast to the earlier peace negotiations, current guerrilla demands are not limited to political reform but also include economic and social reform. Paramilitarism and guerrilla insurrection face a weakened state in their struggle to maintain control over their regions of influence.

Leftist Politics in the Magdalena Medio

The war against popular, leftist, and guerrilla organizations was particularly intense in the Magdalena Medio. During the 1980s Puerto Berrío and the southern Magdalena Medio became the focal point of the national army and paramilitary organizations in their efforts to eliminate leftist influence. The combined effect of selective assassinations and increased army presence pushed any guerrilla presence out of the region. As the influence of drug capital contributed to strengthening both guerrilla and paramilitary forces, and as dissatisfaction with the peace processes bolstered the ELN and FARC in the 1990s, the intensity of the conflict shifted to the northern Magdalena Medio. Peasant communities in this region suffered scorched-earth counterinsurgency operations lasting from one to two months, with aerial bombardments followed by military occupation in which crops were destroyed and thousands of peasants forced to leave their land and seek refuge in urban areas, mainly Barrancabermeja (Murillo 1991: 31-32). This phase of the conflict has also seen a shift from traditional guerrilla warfare to a war of position in which the ELN and FARC occupy and defend large territories and mobilize hundreds of guerrillas in military operations. Similarly, the actions of the paramilitaries have expanded from selective assassinations to the mobilization of armed units that occupy towns, where they execute people and force those they spare out of the region.

While these conflicts have shaped national political developments, their daily realities have particularly characterized regions such as the Magdalena Medio, the inhabitants of which experienced this history as a successive wave of *violencias*. As one of the most conflictive areas of the country, where guerrilla movements, paramilitary forces, and the National Army struggle for control, the Magdalena

Medio continues to conjure up notions of a violent and lawless society, the causes of which are often ascribed to the moral and cultural character of its people rather than to the social, economic, and political processes that characterized the region's development.

In the late 1960s when it was seeking projection at the national level, FARC started to expand into the Magdalena Medio and established its presence in what were to become important centers of influence such as Cimitarra, Puerto Berrío, and Puerto Boyacá. Through the 1970s, FARC continued to grow and Puerto Berrío became an important link in their expansion to the northeastern and Lower Cauca regions of Antioquia and to parts of Santander where the ELN had suffered a major military setback in 1973. By the 1980s the FARC's influence in the Magdalena Medio extended to at least seventeen municipalities (Alonso 1997; Murillo 1991: 27-29).

The ELN's initial base of operations was the Magdalena Medio. It has maintained a strong presence in Santander and the Serranía de San Lucas in southern Bolívar. From its initial presence in the three municipalities of Simacota, San Vicente de Chucurí, and Barrancabermeja, it has expanded to most of the municipalities in Santander's Magdalena river valley and maintains de facto control in southern Bolívar. Since the mid-1980s, the ELN has focused its activities around issues concerning the oil industry. It questions national policies concerning oil extraction and production and the sabotage of oil pipes has become a "trade mark" of the organization (Alonso 1997: 127-131; Murillo 1991: 27). In addition to FARC and ELN, the M-19 had also established a presence, if somewhat less significant, in Yondó and Barrancabermeja.

Left political movements and dissident political sectors have also had considerable influence in local and regional politics. During the Frente Nacional, the MRL, the Communist Party, and ANAPO obtained victories in local elections in the region's municipalities. Through the 1960s and 1970s, the Communist Party emerged as a political force of great influence in the southern region of the Magdalena Medio and, through electoral participation, it gained control of the Municipal Councils in Puerto Berrío, Puerto Boyacá, and Cimitarra. The political predominance of the Communist Party in the southern Magdalena Medio continued after the Frente Nacional through the influence of the UNO movement, which continued to win majorities in the local councils of Puerto Berrío, Puerto Boyacá, and Cimitarra (Alonso 1997: 97-99).

An anticommunist, antisubversive, and right-wing economic, military, and political project consolidated in the southern Magdalena Medio in the 1980s. This process was accompanied by the emergence of paramilitary forces, the Communist Party's loss of political control, and the consolidation of regional political power by the Liberal Party. In 1982, local political bosses, large cattle hacienda owners, members of the National Army, merchants, and representatives of the Texas Petroleum Company met in Puerto Boyacá to create a private army to assist the National Army in fighting leftist forces (Medina 1990). In the subsequent two years paramilitary forces rapidly expanded in the region. Urban and rural areas of Puerto Boyacá, Puerto Berrío, and Cimitarra became main targets of death squads and paramilitary organizations. The main objective of these forces was the elimination of any influence by the Communist Party and FARC from the southern Magdalena

Medio region. In fact, Puerto Berrío and Puerto Boyacá eventually became the main centers from which paramilitary organizations expanded beyond the Magdalena Medio.

The state's presence in the region has been mainly a military one characterized by the deployment of counterinsurgency mobile army units. A major change in this policy took place in 1983 with the creation of the XIV Brigade headquartered in the center of Puerto Berrío and additional battalions throughout the region. The combined actions of the national army and paramilitary organizations resulted in the assassination of presumed guerrilla members, members of left political organizations, labor and popular leaders, massacres of civilians, and the air bombardment of peasant communities in zones of guerrilla influence. These events pushed the FARC into the northern Magdalena Medio region, where the ELN's influence was stronger, and stimulated the emergence of the Coordinadora Guerrillera Simón Bolívar. During the mid-1980s, expanding paramilitary organizations allied with sectors of the drug trade which were investing their money in land (Alonso 1997).

If the 1960s and the 1970s were characterized by the strong presence of and control by guerrilla movements, the 1980s was a decade in which the army, with the use of institutional and extra-legal means, attempted to curtail the presence of revolutionary and popular movements. With the objective of destroying the support bases of FARC, Puerto Berrío and Puerto Boyacá became the centers of paramilitarism in the Magdalena Medio. In the process, all forms of political opposition and worker and peasant organizations became subject to persecution by

paramilitary groups. Since paramilitary groups tend to act in zones heavily controlled by the armed forces, the increased militarization of the region resulted in a sharp increase in human rights violations and the partial achievement of the paramilitary forces' objectives.

Puerto Berrío: Conflict and State Presence

In 1982, thanks to 1,500 votes, the Communist Party had a majority in Puerto Berrío's local council. By 1990, communist influence in local government had disappeared. This political transformation that took place during the 1980s is marked in the memories of local residents by the presence of paramilitary groups and a series of assassinations.

Oral testimonies collected by researchers from the University of Antioquia indicate a consensus when describing the presence of FARC in Puerto Berrío in two distinct moments. A first period, roughly 1965-1975, notes the presence of the IV Front under the command of Ricardo Franco and Martín Villa. During this period the IV Front became the guarantor of order in rural areas. Its actions against petty criminals and cattle thieves brought it the support of peasants, agricultural workers, and owners of cattle haciendas. During this period "everybody had good relations with FARC" (Bonilla 1991). A second period starts with internal changes in FARC leading to the replacement of the IV Front by the XI Front under the command of Luis Emiro Avendaño. The period of the XI Front was characterized by the practice of kidnapping, a progressive increase in monetary demands on large cattle ranchers, and the expansion of monetary demands extorted from mid-size cattle ranchers and

the owners of large and small businesses in the towns (Bonilla 1991: 264-270). These changes undermined the support gained by the IV Front and caused large and mid-size cattle ranchers to become hostile to the FARC. In this context, the growing presence of the National Army and paramilitary forces consolidated a response against FARC.

President Turbay Ayala's (78-82) National Security Statute provided a legal framework for National Army assistance in the organization of self-defense groups. These were allegedly fomented to assist peasants against the abuses committed by guerrilla forces. However, kidnappings and large monetary demands made cattle ranchers the social sector most interested in the elimination of the guerrilla threat. In fact, FEDEGAN and FADEGAN, the national and departmental cattle ranchers' associations respectively, described as alarming the situation in the Magdalena Medio and specially in Puerto Berrío, where extortion, kidnapping, and cattle theft were causing many of them to become absentee owners (Bonilla 1991: 274-280). These associations pointed to the FARC as responsible for the situation and called on the presence of the state to restore order.

Overall, state presence in the region has mainly been a military one. Increased military presence and the emergence of death squads combined to create an atmosphere of fear and repression. Specific events mark this new period. In May, 1979, an ambush by FARC near the military base of Guasimal, only eight kilometers from the center of Puerto Berrío, which resulted in the death of twelve soldiers, indicated the military strength of the guerrillas and prompted a greater presence by the National Army. Following this event, Dario Arango, a UNO councilman in

Puerto Berrío, and four other UNO members were captured and died from torture inside the same military base (Bonilla 1991: 282). By 1982, *Muerte a Secuestradores* (MAS-Death to Kidnappers) and *Mano Negra* (Black Hand) made their appearances in the port with the objectives of eliminating communists and conducting “social cleansing.” At the same time, military authorities agreed about the need to establish a solid presence in the region with the creation, in 1983, of the Fourteenth Brigade housed in the center of Puerto Berrío. The first action by MAS in the port was the assassination in May 1982 of UNO councilman, Jaime Nevado. For most people this was the beginning of an era when MAS and the Army openly ruled. The “masetos”, as MAS members were called, are described as roaming around with sophisticated communication equipment in their Toyota trucks. With repression and assassinations occurring on a regular basis, people remember an atmosphere of terror in which both the National Army and MAS were equally feared.

However, fear did not inhibit open protest against these actions and denunciation of army abuses, and of MAS, were part of a growing national level social mobilization for peace, the right to life, and against death squads. In the Magdalena Medio the church played a leading role in these acts of condemnation. On October, 1982, a Magdalena Medio Peasant Rally for peace, bread, and work from Barrancabermeja to Bogota took place. At this rally priests from throughout the Magdalena Medio denounced disappearances, assassinations, and death threats by MAS. A month later, a local priest and the mayor of Puerto Berrío organized a peace rally in the port to denounce the assassination of five councilmen and demand the dissolution of MAS and the demilitarization of the region; approximately 500 people

walked in silence through the port. Following the event, the mayor was removed from office and local priests became the target of harassment and death threats (Bonilla 1991: 289-291). Bonilla Vélez points to the irony of the peace events organized a year later in Puerto Berrío by the same departmental authorities that removed the mayor from office and of the Great National Crusade Against Kidnapping organized in 1985 by national and departmental authorities, the military, the church, FEDEGAN, and FADEGAN (Bonilla 1991: 278, 291).

The alliance of old and new regional elites consolidated the social forces that sought to eliminate the left from the region. By the mid-1980s, drug traffickers from Medellín, who had been investing their capital in land in the Magdalena Medio, joined the alliance of cattle ranchers and the army. As landowners interested in the elimination of leftist movements and the defense of large landed interests, the “new rich” helped increase the operational and infrastructural base of paramilitary organizations. This alliance sought political expression in the creation in 1989 of the ultra-right-wing organization MORENA - Movimiento de Restauración Nacional (Movement of National Restoration). Even if short lived, this movement, promoted by the Magdalena Medio Cattle Ranchers Association (ACDEGAM), evidenced the collusion of interests of old and new elites and the political consolidation of their right-wing and authoritarian social and economic project.

In the context of growing national denunciation of paramilitary organizations and of the complicity of military authorities in their support, national authorities intervened against members of paramilitary forces in Puerto Berrío. This took place after the army had established control over the region and the violent conflict had

moved with new intensity to the northern Magdalena Medio. The army became interested in cultivating a benevolent image with civic-military campaigns consisting mostly of road repairs. By the 1990s, the XIV Brigade had become integrated into the social and economic life of the port. The daily functioning of the brigade and the hundreds of soldiers, whose relatives periodically arrive in the port for special military ceremonies, demand a wide range of services that are provided by local merchants and help stimulate commercial activity. Former dockworkers recalled how in the 1930s and 1940s a dockworker's wedding was one of the most ostentatious public events in the port. Today, young men educated in the region's public universities described the weddings of military officers in the same terms.

The violent conflicts of recent decades and their expression in the Puerto Berrío region become sources not only for workers' reconstructions and evaluations of the past but also for them to evaluate and position themselves in their present. However, this present is not the familiar one in which their political aspirations were articulated through radical factions of the Liberal Party. The support that alternative movements, such as MRL, ANAPO, and UNO, received in Puerto Berrío is an indication of the eroding grip of the bipartisan political system. In fact, as Dix (1967) argues, a concern with modern issues (in contrast to i.e. centralism vs. federalism), the existence of numerous opposition groups, the rise of anti-system protest vote, as represented by MRL and ANAPO, and we can add, the control that guerrilla groups maintain over large parts of the country are signs of decline of the bipartisan political system.

Conclusion

The history of Puerto Berrío workers illustrates their social, cultural, and political life as they wrestled to control a strategic link of an export oriented economy. Indeed, shifting global demand for natural resources and tropical commodities such as coffee, bananas, and cocaine translates into boom and bust cycles of development. Capitalist development in Latin America has, to a large degree, rested on the labor of rural workers who, under diverse forms of work organization, shaped economic development and national histories. Yet, they have also been absent from urban- and elite-centered histories and notions of national identity.

The working-class culture that emerged in Puerto Berrío was shaped by men's and women's negotiations of gender relations and a constant process of household dissolution and reconstitution. Constant migration in search of new jobs destabilized households. Although men assumed control of the formal labor market, women were an integral part of the working-class culture that emerged. They were essential not only in reproductive, but also in productive spheres, as the case of Luz Maria's work in the hinterland, and women's work in the informal economy, suggest. The constant process of household reconstitution and the predominance of single male workers favored the large public informal economy as the site for the fulfillment of subsistence needs and blurred the distinctions between public and private spheres. As Babb stated for Peru, "This commercialized 'housework' keeps the national house in order" (Babb 1989: 3). Similarly, women's labor in Puerto Berrío was essential for

the regional and national economy. While the particular forms of domestic arrangements and gender relations were a response to the economic forces that periodically uprooted workers, for the elites they became evidence of their “nature” and thus the basis for their views of the frontier workers as “other” to be politically and culturally excluded.

Through Liberalism, frontier workers sought integration into the nation. The working classes that emerged in Puerto Berrío became members of the nation on the basis of their political identity. Workers acquired a legal social status as a result of the reforms promoted by the Liberal party during the 1930s. Liberalism provided not only a language to articulate a working-class culture, but also membership in one of the few national institutions that defined the Colombian nation – the Liberal Party (the other two were the Conservative Party and the Catholic Church). This was particularly significant for lowland-frontier workers who were excluded from a nation defined by Conservative values associated with the highland coffee frontier experience. The various working classes of the region forged a community of workers with a shared Liberal political identity. Far from homogeneous, this differentiated community was integrated by its political identification.

The April 9th revolt made evident the significance of Liberalism and the centrality of the frontier in national development. Rather than a marginal space, the expanding Puerto Berrío frontier was a fluid space of economic, cultural, and political contestation of national significance. Political processes became a central dimension of working-class history in Latin America. As I have shown here, political identity was a central aspect of working-class life in Puerto Berrío. Put somewhat differently,

identification with the Liberal party was a constitutive element of working-class identity. As workers pushed the limits of Liberalism, they encountered an entrenched bipartisan elite that opposed the reformist trend initiated by López Pumarejo. Through the National Front, this elite blocked the possibilities for independent working-class politics and gave continuity to the traditional bipartisan political system. Significantly, identification with Liberal politics was but one choice within a field that included strong communist currents.

Erased memories of the 1945 strike, although not of the April 9th Gaitanista uprising, are emblematic of the ways in which these broad political processes have structured historical memory. In a very real sense, paramilitary violence and army oppression of popular politics has created particular silences in workers' historical narratives. While the strike of 1945 was a defeat that signaled the end of the labor movement forged during the 1930s and 1940s, it also made evident the powerful presence of working classes on the Magdalena River valley. This was a major action that disrupted Colombia's export economy. Yet, according to oral accounts, the strike hardly took place. Memories of this event were minimal. In fact, many dockworkers would explain that there were hardly any strikes at all. But they all clearly remembered the president's response to the strike "...there can not exist two governments in Colombia, one in Bogotá and one on the Magdalena River." This statement declared the end of labor-state collaboration but it also implicitly recognized the power workers had achieved.

Three years later workers mobilized as members of a political collectivity rather than as members of a class. Yet, they understood *Gaitanismo* as a movement

against national elites and in favor of the working classes. Memories of "*el nueve de abril*" are abundant and detailed. These are memories in which participants are active agents who demand silence from wealthy merchants or courageous, poorly armed fighters who battle the national army. They also tell mythic stories of a particular individual who showed great valor while fighting the army. Moreover, the image of "*nueveabrileños*," which implies a rebel spirit, has at times been appropriated with pride.

This rebellion is the most significant historical memory workers recall. For them, Gaitán's assassination is the pivotal moment that explains the violent history during the rest of the century. In contrast, strikes, including the strike of 1945, tend to be absent from workers' narratives. These memories and silences are the result of the particular significance of Liberalism for frontier workers and the particular present from which workers reconstruct their past.

Puerto Berrío workers' narratives of Colombian history are divided into before and after Gaitán. This distinction contrasts an idyllic past of tranquility, respect for labor, and non-violent partisanship with the violent processes of the second half of the century. National political history after 1948 and the current situation of armed confrontation is explained as a logical sequence of events that originated with Gaitán's assassination. According to workers' accounts, Gaitán predicted so himself when he said that if he was killed a lot of blood would be lost. For these workers, the present is proof of that. For them, with Gaitán's assassination "*todo se dañó*" (everything fell apart).

For many, the period known as La Violencia started with Gaitan's assassination. This was mainly an attack on organized labor. During this period Colombian elites succeeded in destroying a rising tide of democratic reforms of which the working classes had been main protagonists. Working-class discourses and identification gave way to a strengthened political identification as Liberal and Conservative workers and peasants sought to exterminate each other. La Violencia reinforced political identity rather than class identity and the national bipartisan political system forged a century earlier continued to show its resilience during mid-century. But, strong support for alternative political movements during the second half of the twentieth century puts into question the resilience of the system in regions such as the Magdalena Medio.

As I elicited these memories, the port lived under the control and visible presence of the national army, which established its headquarters in the center of town after paramilitary organizations paved the way with a series of assassinations and terror campaigns during the 1980s. This campaign sought to eliminate legal leftist opposition, particularly communist, and the de-facto control that the guerrilla organization FARC had established in the region during the 1970s. Oral histories clearly emphasize a Liberal and Gaitanista tradition and de-emphasize communist currents present among dockworkers. It seems safer to remember an armed Gaitanista uprising than a communist-led workers' strike. This emphasis results partly from the significance of Liberalism for workers' sense of membership in the nation. Workers' assertion that after Gaitan "everything fell apart" rests on their sense of exclusion and their continued experience of state-sanctioned violence.

Appendix A

Sources and Methods

Research for this study was conducted during twelve months of fieldwork and archival research in 1996. Previous research was conducted during the summer of 1995 when I visited Puerto Berrío for the first time. During 1996, I lived in Medellín and made frequent visits to Puerto Berrío. These visits lasted from one to three weeks. In Medellín I worked mainly at Antioquia's Historical Archives (Archivo Histórico de Antioquia), housed at the newly established Culture Palace Rafael Uribe Uribe. Some of the collections were at the time in the process of classification and binding. I researched about thirty years of correspondence exchanged between Puerto Berrío and the departmental government contained in the collection Gobierno-Municipios. I cite this archive AHAGM, followed by year, volume, and document number i.e. AHAGM, 1932, vol. 8119, no. 128. When documents were simply wrapped in numbered packages, they are cited in the following format AHAGM, 1945, paquete #77, no. 378. Most of the information in this archive consists of correspondence exchanged between local and regional authorities, but it also contains reports, complaints, and petitions sent to the Governor by individuals and organizations.

In reading this documentation, I sought to reconstruct the evolution of social conflict in Puerto Berrío and the perceptions of and ways in which regional governments dealt with such conflicts. While books for some years contain only a dozen documents, others have over two hundred. Documentation was missing

completely for a couple of years. The availability of this documentation and its uneven actual historical production results not only from changing departmental administrations' interest in the maintenance of archival collections, but also from the various ways in which regional and local government authorities at the time viewed their role in governing and of the significance attached to the specific issues they confronted. For instance, at various points administrations became particularly interested in the "social question" and the conditions of workers. Mayors appointed during these periods produced long and detailed descriptions of workers and social issues confronting the port. This collection also provided a means to map out a range of local powerful organizations and interests. These include those able to manipulate official channels to complain about local officials and to engage in long conflicts with the Governors' office, and those less powerful but with the monetary, social, or organizational resources to have a petition written and signed by dozens of people.

Government correspondence collections often contain summaries of the state of local government offices and supplies. At first these may appear to be a dull recounting of chairs, tables, books, and typewriters but, they may also provide an important indication of the characteristics of state institutional presence at the local level. The deficiencies and abandonment of schools, judicial, and executive offices in Puerto Berrío are an indication of the weakness of the institutional presence of the state. For instance, judicial officers often complained about the lack of books containing up to date civil and criminal legislation on issues relevant to their jurisdictions.

University of Antioquia faculty who had conducted research in Puerto Berrío

led me to a couple of people in the port who have the reputation of being the local historians and who in turn led me to key “old timers” who had played significant roles in events during the 1940s. Puerto Berrío students attending the University of Antioquia led me to families of ordinary people who had lived in the port since the first half of the century. From these initial contacts I expanded the number of informants by simply asking every person that I talked to if they knew anybody else who had lived in the port in the 1930s and 1940s. Formal interviews were also conducted in Medellín with people who had left the port in the last fifteen or twenty years. In addition, many informal interviews and conversations took place at the Parque Obrero and Parque Olaya Herrera. Not only are these centers of interaction where one first learn news or asks about somebody, but they are also the places where many old residents congregate and socialize and where some of them make a living from petty commerce.

It was not until the final months of fieldwork that I was able to visit rural areas such as Puerto Murillo and Malena. Puerto Murillo, located north of Puerto Berrío on the Magdalena river, is a small community of people who complement their wage employment in neighboring haciendas with subsistence farming and fishing. Part of what they produce and fish is also destined for sale in Puerto Berrío. Malena, located west of Puerto Berrío, is one of the train stations built early in the century where most people make a living from wage employment in cattle haciendas. In addition, I visited and conducted interviews in Puerto Nare, which was part of Puerto Berrío during the early part of the century and is now a separate municipality.

In Puerto Berrío, I was informed of the existence of historical archival

sources. These consisted of documentation produced by local governing bodies which had been literally decimated by a fire and a flood. Part of what was left was dumped into the river by the military in the mid-eighties as they made room for themselves. After my insistence, the mayor allowed me access to a locked room with volumes of documents lying on the floor amidst dust, humidity, and larva. Once the place was cleaned up, I made an inventory of the information and reviewed a collection of books containing documents describing the adjudication of plots for the construction of urban housing.

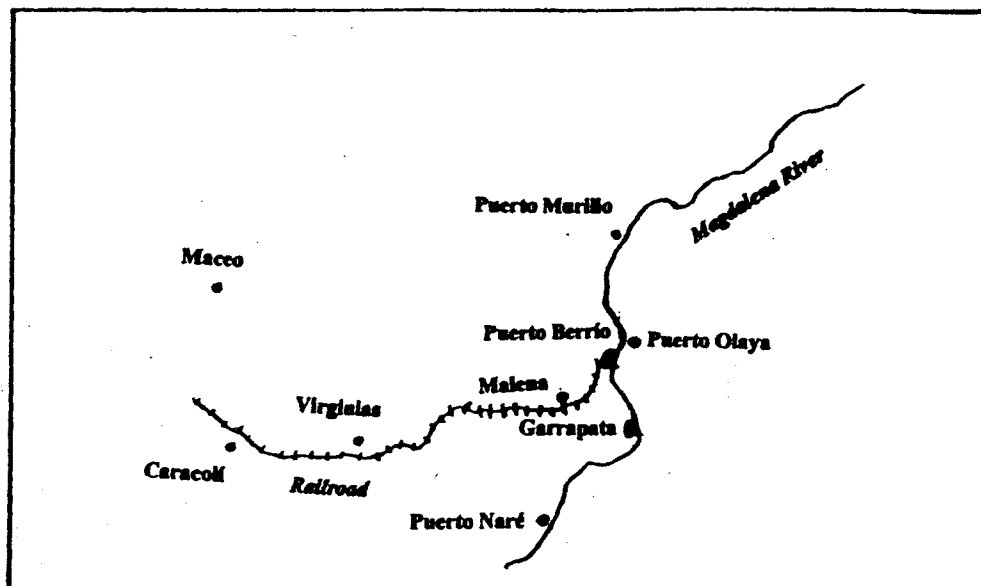
Most of the interviews took place in the afternoon or early evening and, with a few exceptions, all of them took place in the interviewees' home. Four interviews were conducted at a Crafts Center (Centro Artesanal) where I had working space and where the historical archives were located. Three of these interviewees were local residents and one a community leader from a rural area who was visiting the port. On another occasion while visiting Puerto Murillo a man who lived further away traveled to the village where I interviewed him.

I collected about sixty hours of taped interviews, several of which I cite using pseudonyms. Some of them were conducted with couples, while most were with individual persons. A total of twenty-two men and eleven women were formally interviewed and recorded. In several cases multiple interviews were conducted with the same informant. The length of the interviews ranged from one hour to four hours with most of them lasting for about two hours. I first reconstructed a family history built around migration and occupational history. Starting with their grandparents, I sought these histories to provide a sense of previous historical trajectories and family

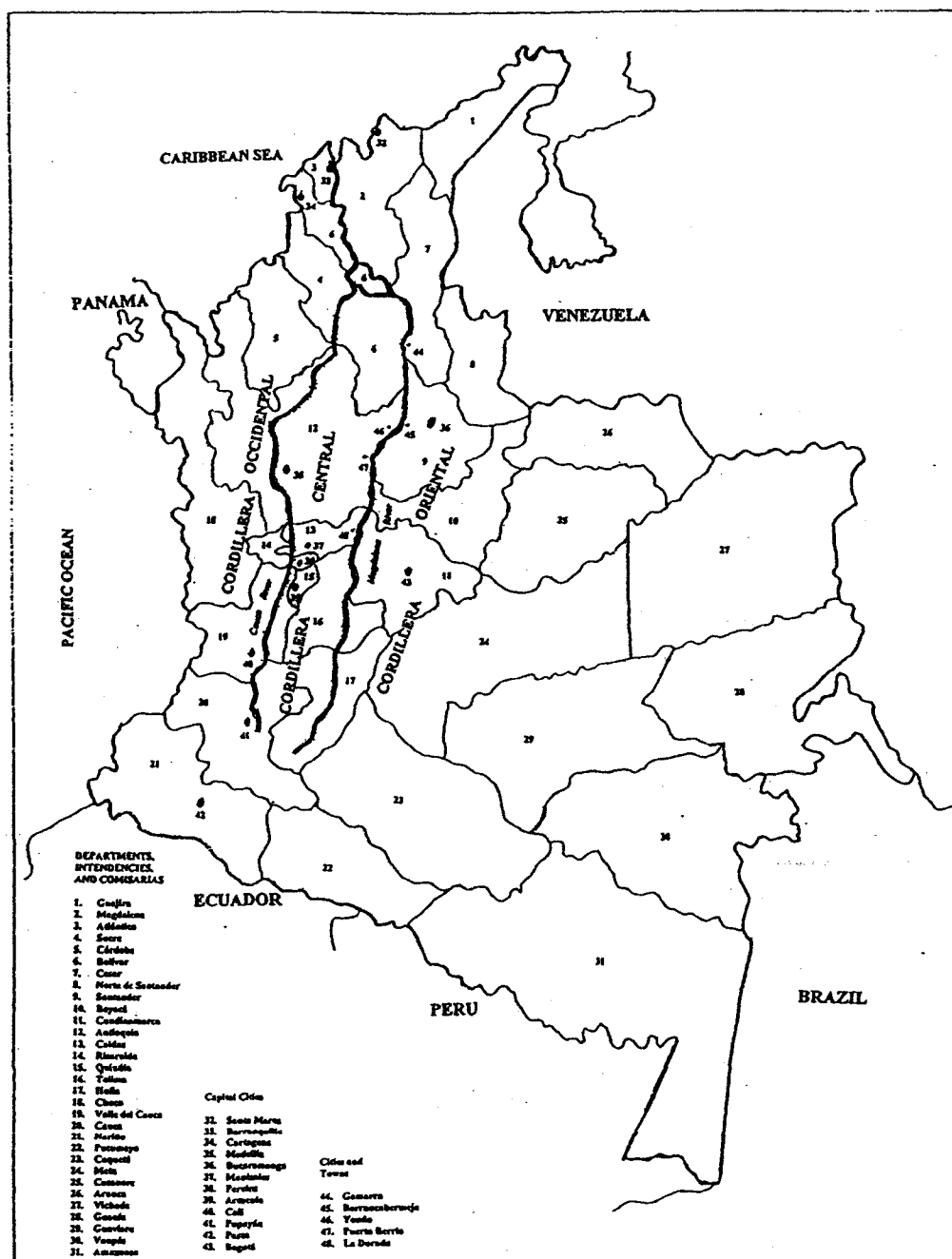
circumstances affecting work, migration, and responses to life in Puerto Berrío. I would then move to a more open-ended interview where we talked about the topics that had emerged in the family history, about life in Puerto Berrío and about the informant's work experiences.

Appendix B

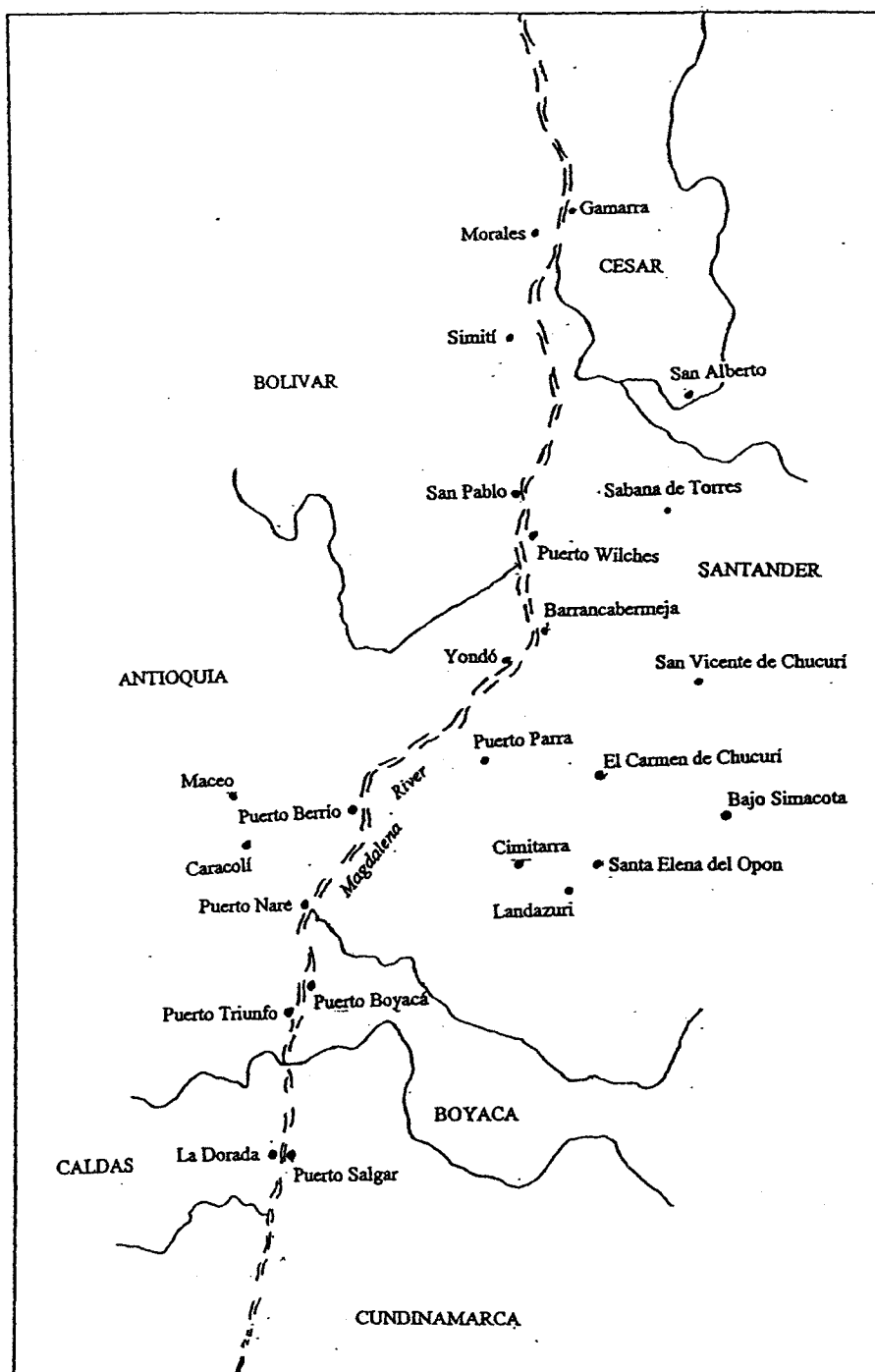
Maps



Map B.1. Puerto Berrío and Region



Map B.2. Colombia



Map B.3. Magdalena Medio

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