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Cambio en el modelo
de relaciones laborales
en el Perú, 1970-1996

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- 1. Introducción**
- 2. La inversión del modelo de relaciones laborales**
- 3. Enfoques para analizar la situación laboral**
 - a. Enfoque de mercado de trabajo
 - b. Enfoque de relaciones laborales
 - c. Comparación de enfoques
 - d. Definición de modelo de relaciones laborales
- 4. La reforma laboral de 1991 a 1996**
 - a. Análisis global
 - b. Flexibilización de la estabilidad laboral
 - c. La subcontratación
 - d. Relaciones colectivas de trabajo
- 5. Principales cambios en el modelo de relaciones laborales**
 - a. Estabilidad laboral
 - b. Subcontratación
 - c. Sindicalización
- 6. Política salarial**
 - a. La drástica caída de los ingresos
 - b. Instrumentos de la política salarial
 - c. Determinantes de la evolución de los sueldos y salarios reales
- 7. Efectos**
- 8. Perspectivas**
- Referencias**

**THE JAPAN CENTER FOR AREA STUDIES
NATIONAL MUSEUM OF ETHNOLOGY**

SUITA, OSAKA 565-8511 JAPAN

PHONE : +81-(0)6-6878-8343

FAX : +81-(0)6-6878-8353

The change in the model of labor relations in Peru, 1970-1996

Francisco VERDERA V.

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to evaluate the effects of the change in the model of labor relations in Peru between 1991 and 1996 as a consequence of the labor reform and the labor policy implemented by the Fujimori government. One way to make this evaluation is to compare the main characteristics of the current model with those of the model in force before the reform, that is to say, the model originated in the 70s during the Velasco regime.

Our central argument is that the current model of labor relations, the one resulting of the labor reform, is a complete inverted model of the 70s model. While the 70s labor relations model was biased in favor of workers, the new model is also biased but this time in favor of employers. The paper presents and discusses empirical evidence of the main aspects of labor reform, namely, labor flexibility, unionization, collective bargaining and wage policy.

The change in the model in the 90s has been possible because of the authoritarian character of the government: the Fujimori regime has eliminated almost all workers labor rights through decree laws in five years. This could happen because of the union movement weakness as a result of the continuous attacks from different governments from 1976 to 1990. The current model, that can be qualified as a model of imposition, could not hold when the government changes, say after the 2000 elections. It could also not hold if there is an economic recovery and if productivity and wages increase are needed. In the long run, the current model precludes productivity and worker's standard of living growth.

The old model meant large scale state intervention in the labor market and excess state regulation on labor relations. It also encouraged union organization and confrontation and implied an important degree of labor and social protection. The new model has liberalized hiring and dismissal, but has increased state intervention to restrict workers rights to collective bargaining and unionization. As a consequence workers labor and social protection has been drastically reduced. Under the old model there was a labor stability regime in favor of the worker, direct and internal to the firm labor relations and wage expansion. With the new model, labor relations are unstable, indirect and external to the firm. In this conditions workers unionization becomes almost impossible, affecting wage recovery.

The first model was favorable to workers in excess. The current model leads labor relations to the other extreme: it is too favorable to employers. Neither of the two models can be accepted by the two sides of the labor relation. If a stable model of labor relations is wanted it has to be reasonable and acceptable by workers and employers. Thus, it has to recognize both sides rights and obligations. In this way labor conflict can be minimized and productivity and social cohesion can improve in a long run perspective.

Key words: labor relations, labor reform, labor flexibility,
collective bargaining, wage policy