Many aspects of the southern California economy lured Huntington to the region. The area possessed a warm, dry climate conducive to a tourist industry; its citrus orchards were booming; tremendous potential existed for growth and expansion; and, thus, large profits were a possibility. Equally as important in enticing Huntington to the Los Angeles basin was its lack of strong labor organizations and therefore its relatively low labor costs. “One reason Mr. Huntington invested heavily in the southern part of the state was his dislike of labor conditions in San Francisco and his preference for the open shop. He was a quiet but determined opponent of any outside interference in business and had no use for . . . labor organizations, and no sympathy for strikes.”

During the first two decades of the twentieth century, Huntington, the largest employer in the rapidly growing Los Angeles basin, squared off with his workers in a series of confrontations over unionization. The conflict pitted his dictatorial paternalism against labor’s desire for recognition in the sprawling Los Angeles metropolis. In his continuing drive to stamp out unions, Huntington, whose widespread southern California business empire employed more than five thousand workers, used several tactics utilized by other entrepreneurs of the time. He fired workers who were involved in unions, made use of strikebreakers, joined other employers in local and national anti-union organizations, and tried to placate his work force with various paternalistic programs.

The vastness of the Los Angeles basin also helped shape Huntington’s labor strategy, for he encouraged internal divisions among his workers, counting on their diffusion throughout the southland
to frustrate attempts to resolve differences and unite against him. This dispersal, however, eventually thwarted Huntington as much as his workers, because he found it impossible to stamp out worker unrest spread over such a large geographical area. The ultimate outcome was no resolution of the conflict between Huntington and his employees.²

Huntington adhered to a “no concession to labor” policy, which had been shaped by his experiences during the Pullman Strike in 1894. He had come to believe that negotiating with a union was tantamount to turning over the running of a company to organized labor, and brought this anti-union attitude with him when he entered the Los Angeles basin’s trolley and electric power businesses. His ventures in the vast, sparsely settled area required a decentralized organizational structure, with workers operating out of numerous carhouses and power substations.³

Huntington’s first encounter with labor in southern California came in 1901 when the Los Angeles Railway’s platform men—conductors and motormen—demanded that their hourly wages be increased from twenty cents to twenty-two and a half cents per hour. In June these employees accepted the company’s counterproposal of a progressive wage scale based on seniority—men with under four years’ experience were paid twenty cents per hour, those with four years received twenty-one cents, and workers with five or more years at the LARY earned twenty-two cents per hour.⁴ These graduated pay levels tied to seniority became an obstacle to a unified labor movement. Rather than identify with other platform men, many individual workers focused on their own situation and endeavored to remain with the company so as to increase their wages. Their views were reinforced by Huntington’s announcement that he would fire any employee who joined a union.⁵

Later in 1901, the Los Angeles Council of Labor tried to organize streetcar workers in the Los Angeles basin. Created in 1890 as a representative body of labor in Los Angeles, the council’s goal was to form new unions and gain the affiliation of established ones. This attempt to unionize trolley employees, as well as another in 1902, was put down by Huntington and other street railway owners by firing those who joined the organization.⁶

Although anti-union, Huntington did not view himself as antilabor. He maintained a benevolent attitude toward employees. In 1902, the trolley magnate wrote to the Los Angeles Railway’s Committee of Trainmen: “It is the duty of every employer to endeavor to treat those whom the fortune of life has made his employees,
with as exact a measure of fairness and justice, as the limitations of human nature and intelligence permit, and such has been and always will continue to be my own determination."7 Despite such rhetoric, once in southern California, Huntington allied himself with other major "enemies of organized labor." A chief member of this camp was Harrison Gray Otis, owner and publisher of the Los Angeles Times. Huntington heartily approved of Otis's bombastic anti-unionism and frequently corresponded with the newspaper publisher on the subject of labor. He also provided generous monetary support to various employers' associations pledged to smashing unions in Los Angeles.

Otis had been conducting the fight against organized labor since the 1880s. His primary aim was to keep the Los Angeles Times union-free. Leading the city's struggle against unions, Otis viewed strikers as deserters who should be "denied a job," "blacklisted," and "driven from the community."8 He used his newspaper to spearhead the business community's effort to make Los Angeles a model open-shop city, helping to create an atmosphere of battle between capital and labor. Whether for protection or to threaten others, Otis rode through the city in a luxury automobile with a cannon mounted on it.9

When Huntington came to the Los Angeles basin, he instinctively sought out men whose conservative views paralleled his. Both he and Otis were convinced that honest American laborers were being led astray by radical, un-American "dictators—otherwise known as labor leaders"—who sought to undermine an owner's rightful control of a company. In addition to the almost-daily publication of bellicose anti-union editorials, the Los Angeles Times frequently quoted the views of powerful businessmen on the labor situation in the southland. In June 1904, Otis printed Huntington's position: "I believe in free labor, and I shall employ no man who owes allegiance to a labor organization. . . . There is not a union man on our payroll now. I cannot trust a union man because he is not a free agent."10

Huntington also collaborated with other prominent labor foes, including David Parry, the president of the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM). Established in 1895, the NAM originally promoted trade and commerce, but by 1903 it had turned stridently anti-union. Huntington agreed with the ideas of the NAM, and he joined Parry in demanding legislation outlawing boycotts and protecting strikebreakers and nonunion workers.11

Huntington became an active member and generous supporter
of national and local anti-union employer associations that stressed the open shop. Nationally, he belonged to the NAM and the National Street Railway Association; locally, he did battle against organized labor as a member of the Los Angeles Merchants' and Manufacturers' Association and the local branch of the Citizens' Alliance. The Merchants' and Manufacturers' Association, or M&M, was formed in the 1890s to encourage business and industry in the Los Angeles basin, and it was initially neutral in disputes between employers and workers. But in 1902, after observing a union-orchestrated boycott against the Los Angeles Times, the M&M began to look less favorably on labor organizations. A year later it hardened its position against labor, publicly condemning boycotts and pledging both moral and financial aid to members under union attack. It also pressured unwilling businessmen to follow its open-shop policies. With membership as high as 80 percent or more of the Los Angeles business community, the M&M coerced firms by withholding bank credit, denying advertising space in the Los Angeles Times, delaying shipments of needed supplies or raw materials, and encouraging people to buy from rival companies.

Working closely with the M&M was the Citizens' Alliance, established in Dayton, Ohio, and originally known as the Order of the Bees. Citizens' Alliances were part of a national open-shop movement that rapidly spread to hundreds of cities across the United States. The alliance was brought to Los Angeles in 1904 by Herbert George, who had already set up such groups in Denver and San Francisco. Once established, the Los Angeles Citizens' Alliance (LACA) grew quickly. Two months after its founding, the LACA had approximately six thousand members making it, in proportion to the area's population, one of the strongest alliances in the country. Membership was open to any company, employer, or citizen who did not belong to a labor union; most of the city's major businessmen joined the Citizens' Alliance. Huntington, however, did much more than sign on with the organization; he made an initial contribution of $1,000 and promised to provide, if necessary, another $250 annually. This money, along with other donations, went into a war chest used to support members who became victims of a strike or boycott. The LACA gave members one dollar per day for each worker who walked off the job.

With these alliances, Huntington hoped to crush unions in southern California, but in 1903, he found himself battling labor on several fronts. Following the Council of Labor's unsuccessful unionization attempts, San Francisco organizers came to Los Angeles, created Local No. 203 of the Amalgamated Association of
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Street Railway Employees, and soon claimed two hundred members. Huntington responded by firing all employees who joined the union. In March when some of the dismissed employees attempted to call a strike, Huntington obtained police help to break up the assembled workers, and, to avoid further trouble, ordered his managers to fire any employee seen talking to labor organizers. The following month, the union asked the Los Angeles Railway for recognition, reinstatement of the dismissed workers, and reasonable wages and hours. When the company refused, a strike order was issued for 29 April, but Huntington once more averted major trouble by asking the police for help. Officers went aboard streetcars and deterred most motormen from walking off the job. Thirteen LARY employees were fired. Then, after hiring detectives to spy on the local street railway union and prevent its revival, Huntington rewarded his loyal employees with a wage hike of nearly 10 percent.

Huntington utilized similar tactics to put down attempts to organize a union among trainmen employed by the interurban Pacific Electric in 1902 and 1903. In May 1903, after Huntington fired those involved and rewarded nonstrikers, a group of thirty-five trainmen on the Long Beach line issued a statement of allegiance: "It is our desire to be always faithful in the discharge of duty; and [we] trust, that should the circumstances be repeated, you will feel assured of our unchanging loyalty and personal interest in the advancement of all that pertains to the PACIFIC ELECTRIC RY. Co."

This momentary quieting of the trainmen did not end Huntington's labor problems with the PE. The Amalgamated Association of Street Railway Employees decided to assist the Mexican laborers working in the Huntington construction gangs to organize a separate union. Mexican laborers had long been hired to lay track in the southwestern United States because their wage rate, $1.00 to $1.25 for a ten-hour day, was significantly less than other minorities, such as the Chinese, who demanded up to $1.75 per day for the same work. Although in 1901 PE officials had initially paid Mexican workers $1.85 per day to guarantee themselves a sufficient supply of labor to carry out the planned expansions, by mid-decade, as construction of the interurban lines slowed, large numbers of track layers were no longer needed, and wages fell to the level that other railroads were paying. In 1904, for example, Huntington noted that a Mexican laborer, costing $1.25 per day, was much cheaper than a white laborer who averaged from $2.00 to $2.50 per day.

On 23 April 1903, Lemuel Biddle, secretary of the Los Angeles
Council of Labor, announced the formation of the Mexican Federal Union. Within a week the new organization boasted nine hundred members and a $600 bank account. The morning after its creation, union representatives went to a PE superintendent and demanded a wage increase for the Mexican track layers on the Main Street line. Laborers were working day and night to complete this line for the annual Los Angeles Fiesta to be held in early May. The 1903 Fiesta was especially important because President Theodore Roosevelt was expected to attend. Caught off guard by the union’s demands, PE management agreed to its wishes: wages were raised from seventeen and a half cents per hour to twenty cents per hour for week days, thirty cents per hour for night work, and forty cents an hour for Sundays. But when Huntington, who was in San Francisco on the morning of the agreement, learned of the concessions, he abrogated the deal. The union promptly called a strike, and all seven hundred Mexican laborers working on the Main Street line walked off the job.20

The PE retaliated by firing the strikers and replacing them with Japanese, black, and white laborers whom it paid twenty-two and a half cents per hour. Again, Huntington received police protection for strikebreakers. The strike quickly collapsed, and the Main Street line was completed in time for the Fiesta.21

Despite his swift action against strikers, Huntington was faced almost immediately with yet another labor dispute. On 1 May 1903, the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, represented by Local No. 61 in Los Angeles, issued demands to the Home Telephone Company, Sunset Telephone and Telegraph Company, Southern California Edison Company, and Los Angeles Traction, as well as Huntington’s Los Angeles Railway, Pacific Electric, and Pacific Light and Power Company. The union called for a closed shop, wage increases, an eight-hour workday with time-and-a-half overtime pay, and the establishment of union regulations for apprentices. When the companies rejected the union’s demands on 5 May, about five hundred Los Angeles linemen struck. The strike quickly spread from the Los Angeles basin to much of southern California. The dispute dragged on into the fall of 1903 before a settlement was finally reached.22

Huntington, however, was unwilling to have his companies brought to a standstill and, rather than wait for negotiations to end the strike, decided on individual action. The Los Angeles basin lacked a large reserve of qualified laborers ready to assume the positions of the skilled workers on strike, but Huntington tapped
into labor pools as far away as the East Coast. He operated much like a large corporation, transferring workers into struck plants or jobs from non-union facilities.\textsuperscript{23} To induce these workers to come to the Los Angeles basin, Huntington offered to pay their transportation costs, promised the linemen the same three-dollar-per-day wage they received in the East, assured them free room and board, and agreed to pay their fare home if they wished to return.\textsuperscript{24} He successfully quashed the strikes in his firms, noting in 1905 that “this country is having marvelous growth and yet quite healthy. . . . Our people here stand together and work together, and we are practically free from Union domination. Our different companies have between four and five thousand men employed and not a union man among them. Once in a while one joins a union, but he does not remain with us long.”\textsuperscript{25}

Huntington’s strategy of employing vigorous anti-union tactics and allying himself with like-minded businessmen proved successful. From the end of 1903 through 1909, he had no clashes with labor. His constant efforts to weaken unions in southern California led the Central Labor Council in 1907 to single out the trolley magnate: “In the city of Los Angeles is gathered some of the most notable and powerful enemies of organized labor in the United States, and probably the most wealthy and vindictive among them all is Henry E. Huntington.”\textsuperscript{26}

The council’s statement notwithstanding, Huntington followed a paternalistic policy in dealing with his work force, a policy that he used to strengthen his stand against unions. Like many other wealthy businessmen of the era, he realized the importance of lessening the sense of impersonality brought on by increasing plant size and tried to maintain close contact with his employees.\textsuperscript{27} When in Los Angeles, he spent hours talking to his workers and riding his streetcars, seeking ways to improve the system. In a 1930 interview, Myron Hunt, one of the architects who designed Huntington’s San Marino home and library, remembered: “Mr. Huntington derived much pleasure from talks on the back platform with conductors or on the front platform with the motorman while riding into town. He would get suggestions on the system or just exchange a few words with his men.”\textsuperscript{28}

Concerned with his workers’ well-being, Huntington offered laborers several employee-benefit programs. Similar programs were already in place in many firms throughout the country; companies such as H. J. Heinz, National Cash Register, and International Harvester led the way with welfare plans that were
fairly successful in limiting union activity. These benefit packages often provided housing, hospitals, athletic facilities, movie theaters, schools for employee children, profit sharing, and pensions. Huntington's policy of welfare capitalism was an attempt to improve the workers' quality of life, increase their loyalty, improve their attitude toward the job and the company, and, most importantly, avoid unions.

One of the earliest aspects of Huntington's paternalism was a voluntary medical insurance program for employees of the Los Angeles Railway. To participate, workers had fifty cents taken from their paychecks each month. The company physician not only treated sick employees but also kept a check on malingering. The plan's benefits included "medical and surgical treatment, medical and surgical dressings, artificial limbs and appliances, and treatment for serious injury or illness." Through the health program, Huntington also hoped to mold better employees and create moral, upright citizens. Toward this end, the LARY did not extend medical benefits to ailments resulting from activities considered either improper or immoral. Maladies such as venereal disease or injuries caused by intemperance or fighting were not covered by the insurance plan.

Another element of the LARY's fringe-benefit scheme, and possibly the most important, was the establishment of recreational facilities for employees. Like many other entrepreneurs, Huntington had at least two reasons for building recreational clubhouses. First, out of a sense of guilt, employers occasionally felt obligated to reward employees who worked long and grueling shifts. To improve the motorman's life, Huntington set up indoor and outdoor recreational facilities. Second, Huntington reasoned that after the workday ended, employees had some free time, time that might be detrimental to the firm if workers engaged in drinking and gambling. Worse still, they might attempt to organize a union. To occupy workers' free time and channel their energies away from destructive activities Huntington considered it an inexpensive and wise investment to provide a variety of diversions. The Los Angeles Herald in 1908 commented approvingly on the firm's recreational program: "This way of looking after the ease of the employees is one of the best investments of the management because it is realized that this little recognition of the men and their comfort has been the means of winning their loyalty and securing the best work from the best class of men."

Clubhouses were built at several division headquarters, adja-
cent to carbarns. The recreational centers included libraries, card rooms, swimming pools, movie theaters, pool tables, tennis courts, and restaurants where food was served at cost. Because the facilities were established at scattered locations, workers of the various divisions were prevented from fraternizing and possibly creating a union or organizing a strike.

In addition to these employee recreational complexes, the Los Angeles Railway organized an interdivisional baseball league. Designed to create team spirit within each division, the league also boosted company morale. Management reinforced employees' ties to their individual divisions by holding annual competitions to see which division could maintain the best trolley safety record with the fewest accidents. This creation of a competitive atmosphere among divisions also inhibited workers from cooperating with one another to form a union.

Another reflection of the LARY's paternalism was its company-sponsored employee organization. Called the Los Angeles Railway Recreation Association, the group was strictly a social club. All employees and officers were eligible to join the organization, which sponsored a company band and put on events such as monthly dances, discussions, picnics, and "smokers" (informal social gatherings for men). Although the organization was companywide, events were most often held separately within each division.

The struggle between capital and labor was renewed, however, in the explosive year of 1910. In June, Los Angeles experienced its largest strike to date when workers engaged in the metal trades walked off their jobs. To assist metal trade employers and encourage them not to compromise with the strikers, the M&M promised financial aid. Along with many other area employers, Huntington was concerned with the outcome of this strike and, according to Socialist leader and trade union lawyer Job Harriman, contributed $100,000 to the M&M's fund to support struck employers.

Probably to placate his railway work force during the conflict (it continued for two years and resulted in only modest gains for strikers), Huntington held a large company picnic at Redondo Beach for all LARY employees. The outing, which became an annual event thereafter, was sponsored by the Los Angeles Railway Recreation Association, and all the costs—including PE trolley transportation to and from the festivities—were borne by Huntington. Typically, the picnic involved a baseball game, aquatic sports, and a dance, with music provided by the Los Angeles Railway Company band.
Following the strike of 1910, tensions between employers and workers increased, and the Amalgamated Association of Street Railway Employees strove to take advantage of this rift by organizing Los Angeles trainmen and creating Carmen's Local No. 410. The new organization joined with the Central Labor Council in 1911 to lobby for a state law limiting the workday to ten hours on both local and interurban railways. Local 410 failed to gain many adherents from the Los Angeles Railway, because management made it clear that workers who joined the union would be fired.

Yet labor leaders remained determined. By 1913, Amalgamated, using the same issue of a shorter workday, renewed its efforts to organize Huntington's carmen. This time the company fended off the attempt by obtaining between two thousand and three thousand trainmen's signatures on petitions against the proposed legislation. In 1914, however, it was disclosed before the U.S. Commission on Industrial Relations that the carmen had been coerced into signing the petition out of fear of losing their jobs if they refused.

Because the call for a shorter workday failed to gain union members, labor organizers took up the issue of wage rates. In 1914, hourly pay of the Los Angeles Railway trainmen started at twenty-five cents an hour; then, from the workers' second through their sixth year of service, wages were increased a penny annually. The maximum wage was thirty cents per hour. In appearances before the Commission on Industrial Relations, a Los Angeles Railway spokesman claimed that the firm paid high wages. Its pay scale was comparable to lines in other large cities such as St. Paul, Minneapolis, Chicago, Denver, and Portland; however, the LARY paid lower wages than the local street railroads in San Francisco and Oakland, two California cities with strong trainmen's unions.

Attempting to improve this situation, the Amalgamated Association of Street Railway Employees continued its drive to organize the workers of the Los Angeles Railway in 1915. This effort failed when company management again made it clear that employees who joined the union would be fired. The firm then moved to ameliorate the growing labor unrest by adopting the company union, a strategy being used by a number of employers around the country. Known as the Cooperative Association of Employees of the Los Angeles Railway, it was organized in early 1917. Huntington chose General Manager George Kuhrts as the group's president, and the other officers were elected by the workers. The union established a board selected by workers to air employee grievances and make
recommendations to management. Although it made employee desires known to management, the union had no administrative authority, and it served in a purely advisory capacity. It did, however, create a fund that combined company contributions with the annual one-dollar union dues to purchase employees’ uniforms and watches, expenses previously borne by individual workers, and it established a voluntary life insurance plan.42

The company union, however, did not address the problem of inflation that accompanied World War I. In an attempt to keep their employees’ pay on a par with the rising cost of living, and thereby prevent union gains, the LARY raised wages between 1915 and 1918. By mid-1918 the hourly minimum of twenty-five cents had been increased to thirty-eight cents, and the maximum of thirty cents per hour had been raised to forty-four and a half cents.43 But the pay increases averaged only 50 percent over a period when the cost of living had risen nearly 75 percent. The loss of the workers’ purchasing power encouraged unions to organize trainmen.

The Amalgamated Association of Street Railway Employees made significant gains in 1918 among LARY’s platform men when the organization’s vice-president, Ben Bowbeer, arrived from San Francisco to launch a major unionization effort. With the support of wage adjustment boards and the Mediation Commission, established under President Woodrow Wilson in 1917, the federal government moved toward upholding workers’ right to organize. Armed with such backing, labor leaders redoubled their efforts to set up unions, and in Los Angeles, Bowbeer succeeded in gaining adherents to Amalgamated Division 835. The union applied to the National War Labor Board (NWLB) in the fall of 1918 for an increase in wages and an eight-hour workday. The Los Angeles Railway, however, claimed that because it was only an intrastate firm, the national board had no jurisdiction over it, and it would not be bound by the agency’s decisions.44

Before the NWLB made its recommendation, Huntington was looking ahead to a strike. Still implacable about negotiating with unions, he explained how he wanted the possible walkout handled:

If the Los Angeles Railway employees strike, and are violent, I would attempt to run as few cars as possible. I have no doubt but that we will receive protection from the Police Department. If say two-thirds of the men remain loyal, I would discharge every agitator, and see to it that they never have another day’s work with the Railway Co. We have always treated our men fairly, and now when it comes to a fight, if it is a fight, I want you to stay with them to the finish.45
In the spring of 1919, the NWLB handed down its decision. It called for wage increases and the institution of collective bargaining but rejected the eight-hour day. The Los Angeles Railway stood by its earlier statement and declined to act on the board’s recommendations. By July, however, in an attempt to fend off a strike, officials decided to grant a wage increase, which was higher than the NWLB’s suggestion, for the company’s conductors and motormen. They raised the beginning salary of platform men to forty-one cents per hour and the maximum to forty-seven cents. But the union remained dissatisfied because the Los Angeles Railway did not establish a plan for collective bargaining. The union then sent a list of additional demands—including an eight-hour day with time-and-a-half for overtime, and seventy-five cents per hour for conductors and motormen—to general manager Kuhrt. Management refused the wage increase but agreed to talk to a committee representing the workers themselves and not Amalgamated Division 835. Fearing a strike, the company hired 50 special law enforcement officers and began training 150 of its managerial personnel in streetcar operation. The workers did not accept the company’s offer, and in August approximately one-third of the streetcar motormen and conductors walked off the job.

Following Huntington’s “no concession” policy, Los Angeles Railway management insured the continuance of the open shop by using managerial staff, as well as hiring additional motormen to maintain streetcar operations, and refusing to negotiate with the union. The strike was broken and full service restored by mid-September.

Although Huntington rarely played an active management role after 1917 because he was devoting more time to his art collection and library, he continued to promote the open shop. In 1922, he told the New York Chamber of Commerce that there was no fight between capital and labor. The problem was the union organizers: “There would be but little difficulty between the employer and the employed if it was not for the pernicious influence of men who seek to control all workingmen, and so control the industries, and so control the country.”

Yet Huntington failed to crush his employees’ will to fight for a permanent labor organization. Regardless of the tactics he employed to counter labor activities, his workers continued seeking union representation to obtain increases in payscales and better working conditions.