

OUR CENTURY

1937

AT A GLANCE

City leads the way in public housing

Dreams came true in 1937. Eighteen-hundred Cleveland families were able to move from rat-infested tenements or relatives' spare rooms into gleaming new apartments at the Cedar Apartments, Outhwaite Homes and Lakeview Terrace, the first public housing in America.



Bohn

Dreams also came true for a 36-year-old councilman from Hough, then a middle-class neighborhood. Ernest Bohn had moved city, state and federal governments — and, it seemed at times, the heavens, too — to create the Cleveland (now Cuyahoga) Metropolitan Housing Authority, also the first entity of its kind in America.

As a freshman councilman in 1930, the diminutive Republican had talked his colleagues into setting up a special housing committee with himself as chairman. Its hearings turned a spotlight on the wretched conditions in which thousands of Clevelanders lived. In 1933, he invited U.S. and world housing experts to a meeting in Cleveland, which drew nationwide attention.

Bohn wrote legislation and pushed it through the legislature. He got Sen. Robert Taft to help move laws through Congress. (Taft, who would be known as "Mr. Republican," was called a Communist by private apartment owners.) When the courts threw out Bohn's legislation, he drafted new laws to take its place.

In 1935, he heard that President Franklin D. Roosevelt had appointed a housing director for the Public Works Administration. He took the night train to Washington: When the man arrived at his office for his first day on the job, Bohn was waiting for him with plans under his arm for a demonstration project.

Bohn also was the first chairman of the City Planning Commission and the first president of the National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials. By the time he retired in 1968, after 35 years as CMHA director, he was known as "the father of public housing in the United States."

For the first time in four years, the Indians scheduled 15 of their games in the Stadium, and they asked to play seven as the first night games in American League history. The league turned that down.

The team had a new look. Gone, among others, was slugger Joe Vossnik. Roy Weatherly, who had batted .335 as a rookie, slumped to .201 and was sent to the minors in midseason. Bob Feller, now 18, had a sore arm and won only nine games, though he struck out 16 Boston Red Sox in a game at League Park.

Johnny Allen and Mel Harder each won 15 games; Allen's 15 were consecutive, four short of Rube Marquard's major league record. Catcher Frankie Pytlak hit .315, while outfielder Moose Solters hit 20 home runs and batted .323. Earl Averill and Hal Trosky both dropped under .300, but Trosky hit 36 homers and Averill 21.

After a midseason slump, the team won 40 of its last 60 games to finish fourth. But general manager Cy Slapnicka wanted a manager who was tougher than Steve O'Neill. He found one who would win a place in baseball history two years later: Oscar Vitt.

A fan contest decided that the Cleveland franchise in the new American Hockey League would be called the Barons. Owner Al Sutphin was determined that the team, the former Falcons of the International League, would be a winner, and it was. So was the \$1.5 million, 10,000-seat Arena that Sutphin built for the team at 3717 Euclid Ave.

John D. Rockefeller, probably the most famous Cleveland in history, died May 23 and was buried at Lake View Cemetery. He had moved his Standard Oil Co. and himself to New York more than 50 years earlier, but he spent his summers in Cleveland until the death of his wife in 1915. Clevelanders remembered him for Rockefeller Park and for the millions he had given to churches, charities and Case Western Reserve University in what he always considered his hometown.

Double and even triple features were the rule at the city's nearly 100 movie theaters. Among the movies were George Bancroft in "Racketeers in Exile" at the Lexington on E. 55th St.; Edward G. Robinson and Bette Davis in "Kid Galahad" at the Denison Square on W. 25th; Warner Oland in "Charlie Chan at the Olympics" at the Lyceum on Fulton Rd.; and Joe Penner and Harriet Hilliard (the future Mrs. Ozzie Nelson) in "New Faces of 1937" at the Liberty on Superior Ave.

Rousing calls lure labor

Strikes hit businesses across Midwest; violence reigns

By Fred McGunagle

"Organize!" John L. Lewis shouted in halls across the Midwest, his voice booming off the rafters. Worker after worker took up the chant:

"Organize! Organize!"

Akron listeners had responded in January 1936 with a spontaneous strike against the Goodyear Tire & Rubber Co. Two months later, the company agreed to recognize the United Rubber Workers. That emboldened workers across the country. Their tactic was the "sit-down strike," in which they seized a plant and dared the company and police to remove them.

Lewis' militancy didn't sit well with the craft unions, which dominated the American Federation of Labor, and in August 1936, his Committee for Industrial Organization, a group of 12 industrial unions, was kicked out for "dualism." The bushy-browed United Mine Workers president continued to preach his gospel.

Spontaneous strikes against General Motors Corp. broke out across the country. In December, workers seized the Fisher Body Division plant on Coit Rd. The strike quickly spread to other plants and effectively shut down the big automaker.

The bitterest strife was at the giant Fisher Body plant in Flint, Mich. On Jan. 11, 1937, the company turned off the heat in the plant and guards tried to block outside strikers from delivering dinner to the 1,500 men in the plant (the women had been sent out). A battle broke out. Police shot tear-gas canisters into the plant and the strikers replied with a barrage of stones and bottles. Police opened fire with pistols and riot guns. When the "Battle of the Running Bulls" was over, 14 strikers and two bystanders had been wounded, but the union still held the plant.

It was the beginning of the most tumultuous year in labor history. A record 4,740 strikes cost 28.4 million worker-days. It also was a year of rapid labor gains. Under pressure from Michigan Gov. Frank Murphy, GM gave in to most of the workers' demands. Two months later, Chrysler followed suit.

The biggest labor victory of all came without a strike, when the U.S. Steel Corp. — "Big Steel" — agreed to a contract with the fledgling United Steel Workers. Four other steel giants, led by Cleveland's Republic Steel Corp., refused to follow. The result was the "Little Steel strike" of 1937. The violence peaked in the "Memorial Day massacre" in South Chicago, when 10 were killed.



PLAIN DEALER FILE

Strikers watch Corrigan-McKinney reopen from a bluff high over the Cuyahoga River. They were barred from gathering within 1,500 yards of the plant of the Republic Steel Corp. A maximum of 12 pickets were allowed at each gate.

Republic's Corrigan-McKinney plant on Independence Rd. had shut down, but the company announced it would reopen on July 6. The governor sent in 2,000 National Guardsmen from southern Ohio; 384 of Cleveland's 1,400 police were detailed to strike duty and the sheriff sent 75 deputies and swore in 17 police cadets as special deputies to aid suburbs in keeping "invaders" out of the county.

Despite fears, the reopening was peaceful. The plant manager said 1,688 men returned to work. The strike organizers said the number was much smaller and many were not "real steelworkers." Except for minor vandalism, the city stayed quiet and the National Guard was sent home on July 16.

Nine days later, a striker was killed by the car of a worker leaving the plant. Strikers said the action was deliberate. Police said the car went out of control when the driver ducked to avoid bricks being thrown at him by strikers. The next morning, another striker was injured under similar circumstances. Fights broke out at Corrigan-McKinney and other Republic plants. A policeman was hit in the face with a brick.

At 10:30 p.m. on July 26, war broke out. "Fought in the valley in which the huge steel plant is located, on the rocky hillside leading to Broadway

S.E. and on that main thoroughfare itself, last night's battle was unlike any labor conflict this city has seen in many years," The Plain Dealer reported. "Republic workers wearing white armbands as identifying marks and carrying clubs, pickhandles, 8-inch iron pipes and other similar weapons sallied forth from the plant from time to time. . . . Strikers hurled stones from the hillside toward the enclosure in which the workers were massed and stoned automobiles carrying workers to the plant, witnesses reported."

Workers reporting for the third shift had told the second shift that the strikers were attacking those entering and leaving. Many of the second shift decided to retaliate with forays from the plant, which drove the strikers back.

"A steady stream of men and women with bleeding faces and blood on their clothes came into nearby St. Alexis Hospital," The Plain Dealer said. "About 11:15, a crowd of nearly 200 workers started up the hill toward Broadway, but turned back when some in the group protested that there were hundreds of women and children and curiosity seekers among the 5,000 held in check at the Broadway end of Dille Rd. by about 150 police."

Another group of workers stormed the strike headquarters at 4336 Broadway. The strikers said company police were among them. A reporter



PLAIN DEALER FILE

Union organizer John L. Lewis at the Hollenden Hotel in 1937.

saw a woman thrown through a window." Furniture was broken, windows smashed and glass and debris were thrown into the food that was to have been served to the strikers at 2 a.m.

All city police on duty were sent to the scene, but it took until 1 a.m. to restore order. There was no count of the total injured, but at least 60 were treated at hospitals. More than 100 automobiles were damaged.

In the morning, police set up restricted areas near the plant gates and barred everyone but workers entering or leaving. Strikers and sympathizers staged a peaceful demonstration at Broadway and Independence, marching in circles with their hands on the shoulders of the marcher ahead of them.

Gradually, calm returned, the resolve of the strikers wore down, and they returned to work without a contract. But three years later, on the eve of world war, the government pressured the steel companies into recognizing the union. Labor was taking its place at the table.

In time, the CIO became the Congress of Industrial Organizations and merged with the AFL.

McGunagle is a Cleveland freelance writer.



PLAIN DEALER FILE

A six-week strike at the Fisher Body Plant turned violent when workers overturned the cars of nonstrikers.

LOOKING AT A YEAR

Feb. 5: President Franklin D. Roosevelt submits to Congress his doomed plan to pack the Supreme Court with up to six additional justices.

March 18: About 500 people, most of them children, burn to death dur-

ing a devastating explosion and fire at a school in New London, Texas.

May 6: The dirigible Hindenburg explodes while landing at Lakehurst, N.J., killing 33 of its 97 passengers and crew.

June 12: Joseph Stalin orders the execution of eight Soviet generals.

June 22: Joe Louis defeats James J. Braddock to win the world heavyweight boxing championship.

Sept. 5: More than 600,000 men attend a Nazi rally in Nuremberg.

Born: Colin Powell, Saddam Hussein, Gary Hart, Vanessa Redgrave,

Jack Nicholson, Dustin Hoffman, Jim Henson, Bill Cosby, Robert Redford, Jane Fonda.

Died: Composer George Gershwin, Italian physicist Guglielmo Marconi, banker Andrew Mellon, American aviator Amelia Earhart, American actress Jean Harlow.

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