
1 Relating to: commemorating the Bay View labor strike and tragedy.

Whereas, Wisconsin workers and reformers have long made important contributions in the history of labor in the United States, having helped enact new state laws early in the 20th century such as Worker’s Compensation and Unemployment Insurance, that, in turn, were adopted by other states and the federal government; and

Whereas, decades earlier, in the late 1800s, workers were still struggling to attain basic rights in the workplace, and still generally labored at physically punishing jobs for 10 to 12 hours a day, six days a week; and

Whereas, in the 1880s, workers in Milwaukee began, like others in Chicago and across the country, to advocate for the eight-hour work day, an early cornerstone of the basic bill of rights of all people in the workplace; and

Whereas, facing no apparent efforts toward this reform on the part of employers, eventually workers’ organizations across the nation called upon all
workers to cease their labor if employers had not adopted a standard eight-hour
work day by May 1, 1886; and

Whereas, in Milwaukee, civil parades and demonstrations developed over the
first five days of May, 1886, as workers peaceably and without violence joined the
national work-stoppage to protest and abolish inhumane work hours; and

Whereas, on May 2nd there was a huge Eight-Hour Day Parade that many
German and Polish workers and their families walked in to the picnic grounds, and
on May 3rd thousands of workers from the breweries and the building trades went
on strikes and marched around from factory to factory; and

Whereas, by May 5th, 1886, unrest among Milwaukee’s laborers over the
struggle for better work hours had led to more than a dozen strikes in the city,
involving carpenters, coal heavers, sewer diggers, iron moulders, teamsters,
common laborers, and other workers asking for humane work hours; and

Whereas, the last grand factory in Milwaukee still in operation that day was
the North Chicago Rolling Mill, in Bay View, which manufactured rails for the
nation’s railroads; and

Whereas, on May 5th, despite the threat of violence from the state militia, a
crowd of striking workers started to walk, peaceably and unarmed, to the Rolling
Mill to enjoin workers there to participate in the general strike; and

Whereas, despite the law-abiding nature of their procession, this group of
walking laborers was fired upon by the state militia upon direct orders from
Governor Jeremiah Rusk to do so, killing seven people and wounding four, including
innocent bystanders; and

Whereas, some 50 of those workers who marched that day and were fired upon
were indicted on charges of rioting and conspiracy for merely exercising their right
of freedom to assemble, and three of them eventually served six to nine months in
prison; and

Whereas, the infamous events of May 5th, 1886, will remain a part of
Wisconsin’s cultural and economic legacy forever, and should remind us in the
present to honor the sacrifices our forebears made, including laying down their lives,
so that all those who labor might lead safer and more productive work lives; now,
therefore, be it

**Resolved by the assembly, the senate concurring, That** the Wisconsin
legislature recognizes the historic significance of this pivotal series of events in
Wisconsin’s and the nation’s history, and directs that, from this day forward, the fifth
day of May each year will be observed in our state as the anniversary of the Bay View
Labor Strike and Tragedy.

(END)