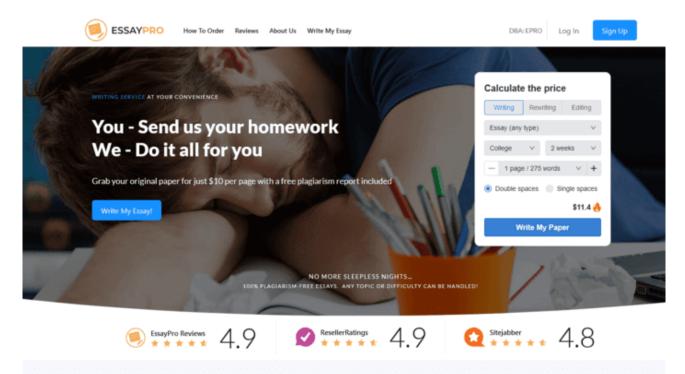
## **Labor and the World Trade Organization (WTO)**



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Labor and the World Trade Organization (WTO)
Seven years of trade negotiations at last gave birth to the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 1995, the U.S. labor movement was one of its leading skeptics. A world trade organization, labor supporters argued, would only accelerate the headlong rush to laissezfaire by dismantling national regulations. It would overwhelm attempts by nations to defend living standards and the ability of unions to fight for wages and health and safety laws—and it would make it harder for nations to defend the rights of workers to join unions. Labor lobbied hard against the WTO. But now, ironically, the WTO could become a critical venue for advancing workers' rights worldwide. For the WTO has the power to review nations' domestic laws that create unfair trade advantages including, potentially, labor laws. The WTO could define fair trade to include labor standards. Such linkage would be a historic change in the world's trading regime, and labor's stake in it. The idea of linking labor rights with trade policy has been around since shortly after World War II when efforts to create an international trading regime began in earnest. However, the WTO represents the first opportunity since 1948 to give the issue serious attention. Proponents of linking labor rights to trade rules build on the conventional case for free trade. For international commerce to be free, markets within countries must not be rigged to encourage exports

and discourage imports. This is the fundamental principle of free trade and it is the central precept of the WTO. Labor markets are a special case, because they are not conventional free markets. Minimum-wage laws and guarantees of free collective bargaining change the wages that market...

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...ost marginalized people in Third World countries.

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