"P. Eslens – Eugène Hins – Paul Robin, *[On Woman's Emancipation and Independence]*."
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P. Eslens – Eugène Hins – Paul Robin,
*[On Woman's Emancipation and Independence]*¹¹

Ancient religions considered work a punishment; today man sees in work his true destiny. Work then becomes a sacred right that cannot be denied to anyone. Woman can therefore claim this right by the same token as man, since only in work will she find independence and dignity.

Many arguments have been made against extending this right to women. We shall examine the most specious of them:

1. Hiring women in industry is said to lower the wages of men. This is simply a result of the current organization of work. One could just as well say that hiring too large a number of men would lower the wages of all of them, and then conclude that it is necessary to limit the number of workers and reestablish the ancient guilds. An easy way to prevent this problem would be to include women in the future system by which work is organized.
2. Workplaces are said to be sites of immoral behaviour. This arises from various causes that have nothing to do with the work itself – for example, pressure exercised by licentious bosses and foremen; inadequate wages, which drive women to debauchery; and ignorance, which leaves woman no other pleasures than those of the senses.

¹¹ This text is a document presented in the reports described in note 10. In the debate on the role of man and woman in society (the fifth issue discussed), the Belgian branch submitted two reports expressing opposed positions. The first, that of the majority, written by César de Paepe (see note 14) and two other internationalists, expressed conservative views and called for woman to return to the family, arguing that her emancipation could be achieved only through that of the working man. By contrast, the minority report prefigured certain goals that would later be advanced by the feminist movement, such as the socialization of domestic labour. Its three exponents were P. Eslens [unk.], of whom nothing is known; Eugène Hins [1839–1933], first a Proudhonian and later a Bakuninist, director of the newspaper *La Liberté*, member of the Belgian federal committee and a delegate to the Congresses of Brussels (1868) and Basel (1869); and Paul Robin [1837–unk.], a French schoolteacher who moved between Belgium, Switzerland and London, a follower of Bakunin since 1869, and member of the GC in 1870–71. The text may be found in PI, I: 220–1.

3. Woman is said to be weak. But if man is endowed with strength, woman may make up for this with dexterity. The field open to woman is therefore vast, and the machines that more and more diminish the importance of physical strength will increase the number of occupations that she can practice.
4. Motherhood. It is said that woman is destined for marriage and therefore will not have time to work. But one can answer that she may perhaps not marry, or she may be a widow without children, or she may have finished raising her children. Moreover, we should take away from the married women all that could be better carried out, with the division of labour, through specific institutions, such as preparing food, washing and ironing, making clothes, and teaching children in pre-school. Woman will then only be unable to work during the last months of pregnancy and the first three years of a child's life. During that time, the woman will be supported either by her husband (assuming the continuation of marriage) or by a special fund earmarked for this purpose.

If we reckon an average of four children for each woman, and if we allow roughly 4 years for each child, this would add up to no more than 16 years removed from work, and even then, not completely. There will therefore remain in the life of woman a sufficient part to be devoted to work.

A man can be free to support a woman entirely if he wants a full-time housewife, but the woman should not be bound to him as a matter of necessity. If she wants to leave him, she should be able to retrieve, in the exercise of her profession, an independent existence.

Conclusion. The International Working Men's Association should promote the development among women of associations that currently exist only for men. The women's associations should federate with the men's associations so as to fight together for the emancipation of labour, which alone will be able to assure independence for everyone.