

Peggy's Speech

Since I was 7. Don't need much schooling to launder shirts. Me' mother - she got me the job. She worked there too. She used to strap me on her back whilst she worked. That or under the copper vats if I would sleep. All the mothers did it back then. The factory would have you back as soon as you could after dropping the babe. Sorry. She was a hard worker and a tough woman. Taught me everything, my mother did. She ain't no longer with us though God rest her soul. Vat tipped and scolded her, you see. She couldn't work no more, and she got sick. My father wasn't around. In fact, I never knew him. But me ma' well, she still wouldn't have no wrong word said about him. Love is love. They said that I was good at my job. Got the hands for it. I was made head washer at 17 and forewoman at 20. Been doing it since. Although, I don't know how much longer though. Laundry life is a short life for a woman, you see. You get you aches, chest cough, crushed fingers, leg ulcers, burns, headaches from the gas. We had one girl last year poisoned. Ruined her lungs all for 13 shillings a week. For the men, it's 19. But we work a third more hours than they do. They're outside most days on deliveries so at least they're outside in the fresh air. Hardly seems fair, does it? That's what I keep asking me'self. Over and over again. Why don't we get the same pay at least? But they just laugh at us when we ask. 'You're lucky to be at work.' And 'you should be at home.' That's what we get. But you see – that factory. It wouldn't work without us. Things wouldn't 'appen. We're not asking for much. We just want it to be fair. I don't want my children growing up in an unfair world. You see, that's my boy there. He loves books and reading, like. He dreams of going to school and being somebody. He's proper bright too. Gawd know's where he gets that from. And I've got a daughter. She's still a little babe, but I don't want her to have the same life as my mother or me. I want better for her. I know you think that might be daft. But this is Britain after all. I want everyone to have a say. That's why I want the vote. That's why it's important. Cos things ain't really working as they are. I believe there's a better way of living our lives. This vote might – just might be the start of making things better. It's about bringing people together as one. Singing the same tune and respecting each other, like. It's about making things better for everyone. Surely that would be a better life, wouldn't it?

(She looks around at the faces)

I'm sorry. I ain't very good my words.