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Black Friday pamphlet

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On Friday 18 November 1910 approximately 300 suffragettes marched to the House of Commons to protest at the failure of the first Conciliation Bill. As they approached Parliament, the women were treated with unexpected brutality by the police who forced them back, kicked and punched them, twisted their breasts, thrust knees between their legs and flung them to the ground. Much of the assault experienced by the women was sexual in nature.

Events of the day, subsequently called 'Black Friday', were recounted in a letter to Winston Churchill from Mrs Saul Solomon. The letter was printed in the WSPU's (Women's Social and Political Union) newspaper *Votes for Women* in January 1911 and later reprinted in pamphlet form. Churchill was Home Secretary in charge of civil order at the time of the demonstration and was held responsible for the police violence towards the women.

Who was Mrs Saul Solomon (Georgiana Margaret Solomon)?

Mrs Saul Solomon (Georgiana Margaret Solomon) was a campaigner and activist who co-founded the South African Women's Federation (Suid-Afrikaanse Vrouefederasie, SAVF) in 1904. She was the wife – and subsequently the widow – of prominent Cape Colony politician and governor general Saul Solomon, with whom she settled in Britain in 1888.

Mrs Saul Solomon was a member of the Anti-Slavery and Aborigines
Protection Society and maintained her involvement in South African affairs
after moving to Britain. A member of a number of suffrage organisations, she
joined the WSPU in 1908 with her daughter, Daisy. She took part in several
deputations to Parliament and was imprisoned in Holloway for a month in 1912
for her part in the WSPU window smashing campaign.^[1]

What does the letter tell us about Black Friday?

The letter is a detailed first-hand account of the appalling events of Black Friday. In it Mrs Solomon describes how the 300 'honourable women' proceeded 'in a most orderly and ladylike manner' to the House of Commons only to be met 'by the relentless engine of physical force – the Metropolitan Police – an instrument under the control of the Government' [p. 1].

She recalls how women were 'knocked about, tripped up, their arms and fingers twisted, their bodies doubled under, and then forcibly thrown, if indeed they did not drop stunned, on the ground' (p. 2). Her own sexual assault ('I was gripped by the breast') is detailed in the context of 'younger women, women of an age to be my daughters, [who] were also assaulted in this and other repellent and equally cruel ways'.

The conflict went on for many hours and Mrs Solomon was so beaten and bruised that she almost passed out. She had only just collected her 'shattered senses' when 'the police forcibly pushed [her] right into the advancing ranks of the mounted police' (p. 3).

Mrs Solomon's sense of outrage at the behaviour of the police is clear. 'We had been led to believe', she says,

that, under British rule, the most abandoned criminals could not be

punished or put to torture by the police either previous or subsequent to arrest ... Political women have never struggled against arrest. May I ask if we have laboured under a misapprehension, and if male thieves, housebreakers, and other derelicts are indeed liable to be tortured in Christian England after a manner similar to that inflicted upon our Women's Deputations on November 18? (pp. 3–4)

She concludes her letter with the entreaty 'Sir ... may I respectfully beg to suggest a reversal of the Government policy of "methods of barbarism" hitherto applied to Women Suffragists?'.

Footnotes

[1] Elizabeth Crawford, *The Women's Suffrage Movement: A Reference Guide* 1866-1928 (London: Routledge, 2003) p. 643.

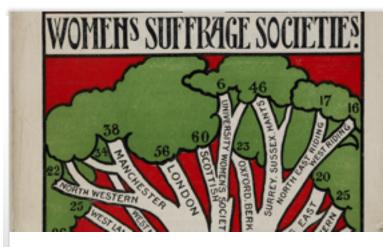
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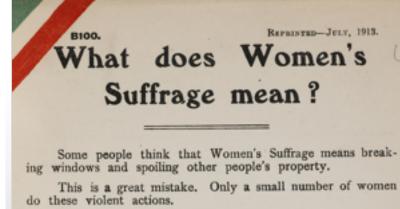


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