



## **Professor Richard Pankhurst**

Few foreigners, if any, can proudly talk about their impact on Ethiopia, her freedom and her international presence, as the Pankhurst family did. Madam Sylvia Pankhurst, Professor Richard Pankhurst's mother, born in 1882 in Manchester to Dr. Richard Pankhurst and Emmeline Pankhurst, founded a newspaper (*New Times and Ethiopia News*) in England in 1936, which became the only mouthpiece for the war-torn Ethiopia against her bitter battle with the Italian fascists. At the time, when it was actually uncustomary to oppose the juggernaut fascists, the young Sylvia Pankhurst, conscious of the suffering of millions of Ethiopians, refused to back down even when seasoned politicians (who felt alliance with Mussolini was worth than any association with Emperor Haile Selassie) in England pleaded with her to discontinue her protest.

The British politicians, however, had underestimated the Sylvia's grit. She wasn't the type to be lured easily. Equipped with adequate energy and filled with passion, she scoffed at her detractors and ignored those who sneered at her mission. This pioneer activist for women's liberation and equal rights made the anti-fascist movement in

England her new passion. In fact, in the 1930s, she supported the Republican cause in Spain and she also assisted Jewish refugees fleeing Nazi Germany to England. She vilified the pro-Mussolini backers, including the press like *The Daily Mall*, *The Morning Post*, and the *Observer*. As historians bear witness to Sylvia's testimony, "in those irresistible eyes burns the quenchless fire of the hero who never fails his cause," that she said about Emperor Haile Selassie when she first saw him at the Waterloo Station in London.

The doggedness of Sylvia Pankhurst is the direct influence of her father who was the selfless supporter of the labor movement and who advocated on behalf of the poor in his discourse in public squares. Sylvia, thus, recalls "the misery of the poor, as I heard my father plead for it, and saw it revealed in the pinched faces of his audiences, awoke in me a maddening sense of impotence; and there were moments when I had an impulse to dash my head against the dreary walls of those squalid streets." It is with this background and psychological makeup that Sylvia committed herself to the women's cause in England and even wrote a book entitled *The History of the Women's Suffrage Movement* in 1911. She became active in *The Women's Dreadnought*, a weekly paper for working-class women, supporting the Russian Revolution of 1917, even going to Russia and meeting Lenin.

Sylvia's grassroots campaign, organized by a few loyal friends, along with George Steer, Sir Sydney Barton, Phillip Noel Baker, Colonel Dan Sanford, and Cosmo Lang, the Archbishop of Canterbury, acted vigorously to bring the story of the Ethiopians into the limelight. The *New Times and Ethiopia News*, she founded, had an Indian reporter named Wazir Bey, reporting from Djibouti and keeping her up-to-date with the latest Ethiopian news.

Historians attest to this day that Emperor Haile Selassie's quest to free his country from Italian occupation between 1936 and 1941 could not have materialized without the aid of this amazing woman, Madam Sylvia Pankhurst. The indomitable Madam Pankhurst was notorious for her tenacity. Hounding tirelessly the occupants of 10 Downing Street at the

time, she emphatically stressed to the civilized world the anguish of the Ethiopian people, their plight and their loss of freedom. The Prime Minister's office was brutally reminded then, in fact on a daily basis, of the responsibilities of the civilized world against fascism more than it cared to admit. She was deeply moved by Wal Wal incident of 1934. This was the beginning of her love affair with Ethiopia. For 20 years she published *New Times & Ethiopian Times* to keep interest the Ethiopian cause. Mussolini took this personally, and in the event of German occupation of Britain, he asked for the arrest of Sylvia.

Her passion and love for this ancient biblical land was also deep; in fact, after Ethiopia gained her freedom, Madam Pankhurst came and lived in Ethiopia for the rest of her life. Most Ethiopians of that generation felt a national loss when she passed away in 1960 at the age of 78. Emperor Haile Selassie's lugubrious face fully told the nation's huge loss of his true and loyal friend.

Her son, Professor Pankhurst, grew up getting to know and loving Ethiopia from his mother. Following in the footsteps of his great mother, Professor Pankhurst made Ethiopia the object of his love and the subject of his study, and wrote many remarkable books and articles. His son, Professor Alula, who bears the name of a mighty Ethiopian general, followed in the footsteps of his father, and is now a remarkable Ethiopianist by his own right. His wife, Rita Pankhurst, in her own right made a significant contribution in establishing and organizing the John F. Kennedy Library at Addis Ababa University.

It's literally impossible to give an adequate summary of Pankhursts work, nor should one really try. Left with the leviathan task of his mother's mantle of universal champion for justice, freedom and equality, Professor Pankhurst had, over fifty years, shown his love for Ethiopia beyond all measure. Professor Pankhurst was definitely influenced by his mother Sylvia Pankhurst and he may have also acquired the legacy of his grandfather, Richard Pankhurst, who was a liberal lawyer and popularly known as the "Red Doctor".

Professor Pankhurst earned his Ph.D. in economic history in 1956 and he began teaching the same year at the University College of Addis Ababa (later Haile Selassie University and now Addis Ababa University) that was founded and chartered six years earlier.

In 1962, Professor Pankhurst founded the Institute of Ethiopian Studies and served as its director from 1962 to 1972. Following the eruption of the Ethiopian revolution in 1974, sometime in 1976, he went back to England, the country of his ancestors, but after a decade of hiatus, in 1986, he went back to Ethiopia, his adopted home country.

Professor Pankhurst is an erudite and prolific writer. He authored 22 books, edited additional 17 books, and wrote 400 scholarly articles that have appeared in numerous academic journals, magazines and newspapers throughout the world. Equally brave and tireless like his mother, he has worked hard to bring back the looted obelisk to Ethiopia, and other confiscated treasures now in the hands of the Italians. As an educator and historian, he has also traveled and lectured all over the world, creating a formidable bridge between Ethiopia and the rest of the world. Professor Pankhurst's vision of guild, not often advertised, shows his unselfish expression of his love for the country and its people.

One of Professor Richard's enduring legacy, as mentioned, is the formation of the Institute of Ethiopian Studies (INS). Ethiopia, which prides on its 3000 years of history, actually did not have a national archive until he started single handedly the formation of the INS. The archive provides manuscript sources, published documents, contemporary accounts, sometimes impossible-to-get-materials. People no longer go to the British legation or to the French Mission Extraordinaire for permission to use their libraries for rare books on Ethiopia. The Institute has been the intellectual home of scholars all over the world. Professor Richard is also the person who established the Anglo-Ethiopian Community in Addis Ababa.

Among his magnum opus books, *An Introduction to Economic History of Ethiopia from Early times to 1800*, published in 1961, is a voluminous historical compilation of 454

pages. The book succinctly and cogently discusses the ‘geography and frontiers of the realm’, ‘government administration and justice’, ‘the seclusion of the royal family’, ‘Aksum, Lalibela, and Gondar’ etc.

Of the many important observations Pankhurst makes in this book with respect to land entitlement in the socio-cultural Ethiopian context, the following gives us a gist of how land played as the mainstay of feudal economy:

“The most unifying factor in land tenure was the granting of land by the sovereign on the basis of service. Such grants had their roots in economic and social conditions and were essential to the whole system of government. The existence of a large and highly developed hierarchy necessitated an extensive system of tribute, taxation, and rent, which in view of the primary subsistence character of the economy and the absence of agriculture slavery, could be met only by payments in kind and certain types of services. The granting of land was similarly almost the only way in which rulers could remunerate or reward their followers, servants and favorites or provide for monasteries, churches, and persons in need.”<sup>1</sup>

One other small book, but nonetheless very important, edited and compiled by Richard Pankhurst, is *The Ethiopian Royal Chronicles*. The book begins with Emperors Ezana (4<sup>th</sup> century) and Lalibela (13<sup>th</sup> century) and documents of the following Ethiopian emperors: Amda Tseyon (1314-1344), Zara Yacob (1434-1468), Baeda Mariam (1468-1478), Lebne Dengel (1508-1540), Galawdewos (1540-1559), Sartsa Dengel (1563-1632), Susneyos (1607-1632), Yohannes I (1667-1682), Iyasu I (1682-1706), Bakaffa (1721-1730), Iyasu II (1730-1755), Iyoas I (1755-1769); the Era of the Mesafint or Princes (1750? – 1855); Tewodros II (1855-1868), Yohannes IV (1871-1889), and Menelik II (1889-1913). Despite the significance of the above chronology, however, the book unwittingly omits a very important emperor by the name Fasil or Fasiledas, the son of Susenyos, who reigned after 1632 and who is renowned for the construction of the castles still standing in Gonder.

On top of the chronicles of the successive emperors mentioned above, the book also has a 'note on the Ethiopian calendar' and a bibliography of other published chronicles. According to Professor Pankhurst, "the period after the restoration of the Solomonic dynasty is significant...in that it witnessed the production, as far as is known, of the first royal chronicles. These historical writings, which from the basis of the present book, were written at the command of most of the rulers since the thirteenth century, and were the work of learned men or scribes specially appointed for this task and whose identity is often recorded in the text. The chronicles were thus the work of court historians and as such are mainly concerned with court life. Their attention is centered on the sovereign's official life: his education, preparation for his high office, marriage and coronation, his wars and expeditions, appointments and dismissals of provincial governors and other officials, the issue of proclamations and decrees, the founding of towns and the building and endowment of churches, and the settlement of religious and other disputes and controversies, as well as various problems connected with the succession. Despite such emphasis on activities at court, the chronicles contain many passages of wider economic and social interest, affording us, for example, interesting descriptions of families and epidemics, systems of taxation and the utilization of foreign craftsmen."<sup>2</sup>

In 1999, Pankhurst presents a very important paper entitled "Italian Fascist War Crimes in Ethiopia: A History of Their Discussion, from the League of Nations to the United Nations (1936-1949)". This comprehensive paper was presented to the Northeast African Studies of Michigan State University and thoroughly examines themes such as 'the League of Nations: Initial Reports', 'The European War: Growing Interest in War Crimes', 'Changing Allied Positions: Mussolini and Bodoglio', 'Mussolini's Fall and Bodoglio's Appointment', 'Italy's Surrender and Proposed Allied Demand for War', 'Criminals', 'House of Commons Questions on Bodoglio and Mussolini', 'The UN War Crimes Commission', 'The Fall of Bodoglio', 'The Ethiopian War Crimes Commission', 'The 1947 Italian Peace Treaty' etc.

In the introduction to this paper, Pankhurst states, "in 1935-36 Italian fascist invasion and subsequent occupation of Ethiopia were accompanied by numerous atrocities: the use of

mustard gas, the bombing of Red Cross hospitals and ambulances, the execution of captured prisoners without trial, the Graziani massacre, the killings of the Dabra Libanos monastery, and the shooting of “witch-doctors” accused of prophesying the end of fascist rule. These acts are historically interesting, not only in themselves, but also in that they were brought to the international community’s attention on two separate occasions: to the League of Nations, when they were committed, and later, to the United Nations.”<sup>3</sup>

With respect to initial reports to the League of Nations, Pankhurst states, “the Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs supplied the League of Nations with irrefutable information on Fascist war crimes, including the use of poison gas and the bombing of the Red Cross hospitals and ambulances, from a few hours of the Italian invasion on 3 October 1935 to 10 April of the following year. Further charges were made by Emperor Hayla Sellase, to the League’s General Assembly on 30 June. Later, on 17 March 1937, he requested the League’s Secretary-General to appoint an Inquiry Commission to investigate crimes committed in Ethiopia. Such appeals made a deep public impression, but the League took no official action on the matter.”<sup>4</sup>

Even when the whole world knew about the war crimes and atrocities the Italian fascists committed on Ethiopians, the Allied Forces were reluctant to acknowledge the extent of the crimes and bring charges against the fascists accordingly: “Allied thinking on war crimes underwent an important shift, in the summer of 1943. After the Anglo-American landings in Sicily on 10 July, it became apparent that Italy might soon fall. This led the Allies to reconsider their attitude on Mussolini, and the leaders who might succeed him. The American and British leaders took the view that the veteran Italian commander, Marshal Pietro Badoglio, was a man with whom they should collaborate. Though he had used poison gas in Ethiopia, they did not consider him a war criminal, but as a force for European stability. One of those supporting him was Carlton-Hayes, the American ambassador in Spain, who told his British counterpart, Sir Samuel Hoare on 20 July, that he favoured a regency in Italy, with Badoglio as ‘the strong man’”<sup>5</sup>

The indefatigable Pankhurst continues to write to this day, and on March 2007 he writes “A Chapter in the History of the Italian Fascist Occupation of Ethiopia,” in which he discusses “racism in the service of fascism, empire-building and war” as reflected in the Italian Fascist magazine “La Difesa della Razza.” In this piece, Pankhurst systematically reveals the silent ghosts of Italian racism and policy of segregation, including the implementation of this policy in Asmara in 1916. Furthermore, Pankhurst discusses, the ‘Declaration of the Fascist Grand Council, of 6 October 1938’: “The Fascist lurch to racism, for which La Difesa della Razza had been established, found expression in a much-publicized meeting, at the beginning of October 1938, of the fascist grand council: the Gran Conciglio del Fascismo. Its member, after some deliberation master-minded by Mussolini, issued a virulently racist “declaration”, on 6 October, which was dutifully reproduced on the opening page of the magazine’s issue of 20 October. It stated that: ‘Fascism for sixteen years has developed and formulated a positive attitude, directed to the quantitative and qualitative amelioration of the Italian race, an amelioration which could be gravely compromised, with incalculable political consequences, by inter-breeding and mongolism.’ The “declaration” further proclaimed: ‘the prohibition of marriage of Italian men and women with “elements” belonging to the Hamitic, Semitic and other non-Aryan races.’”<sup>6</sup>

Professor Pankhurst is a champion of human rights. He understands deeply the entangled webs of the Third World inexplicable problems. Many agree that his erudite wisdom earned from lifetime experience could be that much-needed conduit between the West and Africa. Having lectured at Oxford, Cambridge and other renowned universities around the globe, not to mention the life-time career at Addis Ababa University, his words are viewed as an elixir to the damaged souls of colonial brutality. The man, at 82, is still vibrant, still on the go, still vigorously sought for instruction and scholarly mentoring. In our eyes, he deserves the Nobel Prize for an outstanding lifetime contribution to a nation and her people by an outsider who gave it his all. The award would be a profound complement to the entire Pankhurst family for their unselfish dedication and love of their entire lives for Ethiopia and Ethiopian causes. We are very proud to pay homage and tribute to this distinguished educator whose inexorable writings



of the past five decades have presented Ethiopian history, culture, and tradition to a wide spectrum of readers all over the world. We invite others to supplement our effort in giving a well deserved tribute to this incredible man.

We love him. We love his family as well. And may he live a thousand years!

#### **Note**

1. Richard Pankhurst, An Introduction to the Economic History of Ethiopia, Haile Selassie University Press, 1961, P. 135; see also Ghelawdewos Araia, Ethiopia: The Political Economy of Transition, University Press of America, 1995, P. 8
2. Richard Pankhurst (ed.), The Ethiopian Royal Chronicles, Oxford University Press, 1967
3. Richard Pankhurst, "Italian Fascist War Crimes in Ethiopia," *Northeast African Studies*, 6. 1-2 (1999) 83-140, Michigan State University
4. Ibid, PP. 1-2
5. Ibid, PP. 2-3
6. Richard Pankhurst, "A Chapter in the History of the Italian Fascist Occupation of Ethiopia," *March*, 2007, PP. 5-6

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P.S. Interested individuals who want to share their love and tribute to Professor Pankhurst can email to [Teela7@msn.com](mailto:Teela7@msn.com) and we will pass it to him. Thanks.