

PC 11122/54

SEME . PIXLEY KA ISAKA

LAURENCE
DONE

1. Principal founder of the African National Congress and its president from 1930 to 1937. Shrewd and farsighted in his belief that the Africans needed a unionwide intertribal political organization.
2. Little is known of Seme's parentage or birth. He grew up on the Inanda mission station in Natal where an American Congregationalist missionary S. Pixley took an interest in him and arranged for him to go to the Mount Hermon School in Massachusetts. He attended Columbia University graduating with a B.A. in 1906. ①
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3. Seme then entered Jesus College Oxford to study law and in 1910 was admitted to the bar at the Middle Temple in London. Returning to SA the same year he established himself as an attorney in Johannesburg. ④
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4. During 1911 he began to rally support for the idea of a national African organization, drawing allegiance from both chiefs and commoners and from the protectorates of Bechuanaland, Swaziland and Basutoland as well as from South Africa. At the foundation conference of the South African Native National Congress (Later called the ANC) Seme gave the keynote address. January 1912. Appointed treasurer of the new organization, Seme also undertook the launching of an ANC paper Abantu-Batho which was to publish for the next 20 years. ONE
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5. Seme built up a large legal practice, was director of a land company 'The South African Native Farmers Association', married a daughter of Dinuzulu, the Zulu paramount chief and in 1928 was awarded an honorary doctorate of laws by Columbia.
6. Seme feared the possible alliance of the ANC with the Communist party during the late 1920's and at the annual conference rallied conservative support and was elected president-general in April 1930. Cautious and autocratic as a leader, Seme soon became the object of criticism both from his enemies and from his supporters who in 1932 publicly accused him of culpable inertia. He was replaced by Z R Mahabane in 1937.
7. In 1935 Seme joined D D T Jabavu in convening the first meeting of the All African Convention. In the 1940's Seme maintained his contacts with the ANC serving as "secretary for chiefs" and as a member of the Africans' Claims committee. He died in Johannesburg in 1951.

reference From Protest to Change Volume 4 pages 137-139
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