This year marks 50 years since the Australian people voted in favour of Aboriginal rights by an unprecedented 90.77%. The vote ‘yes’ campaign, an extraordinary, nationwide effort, raised hope that racial discrimination would end.

Although Aboriginal Australians already had the right to vote, this Bill allowed the Commonwealth to create laws for Aboriginal Australians and count Aboriginal people in the national census. The culmination of a long campaign, driven by many Indigenous and non-Indigenous organisations and people, it was a turning point in race relations in Australia.

Today the formal process to recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Australians in the Australian Constitution continues with the work of the RECOGNISE movement and the Referendum Council.

The State Library has leaflets, posters, photographs and other ephemera related to the referendum campaign in its collection. These help to tell the story of the successful 1967 referendum campaign.

**Vote YES for Aboriginal Rights on May 27th, issued by Eureka Youth League of Australia, Sydney, 1967**

The Sydney-based Eureka Youth League consisted of a group of activists associated with the Communist Party of Australia. Formed in 1941 during World War II, the league acted as an educational, social and political organisation. It aimed to support the war effort while protecting the rights and conditions of women and young people in industry.

Screen-printed poster

ML MSS 5021 / Box 113 / Folder 14

**Right Wrongs Write Yes! for Aborigines on May 27**

**Right Wrongs Write Yes for Aborigines.jpg**
RIGHT WRONGS
WRITE
YES
for
ABORIGINES!
On May 27

Authorised by J. McGuinness, 9 Gough Street, Cairns. Issued by Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders.
This iconic poster was widely distributed by the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders to promote a 'yes' vote in the 1967 referendum. Run by Aboriginal people, the council was the primary driver for the referendum.

A photograph of a Aboriginal baby was used in the poster to appeal to voters and to suggest a more inclusive future for Aboriginal people.

Purchased from Len Fox, 2001
ML MSS 8085 / Box 32

Letter from Gordon Bryant M.P.

Gordon Bryant was a passionate advocate for Indigenous people’s rights, and an active member of the Aborigines Advancement League and Federal Council for Aboriginal Advancement. Bryant’s parliamentary office in Canberra was pivotal in organising the successful campaign for a 'yes' vote with over 90% of voters supporting change. Bryant was the first Federal Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, serving from 1972 to 1973.

Addressed to ‘Dear Fellow Campaigners’, Bryant urged helpers to contact their MPs and the parties of their choice to support a ‘yes’ vote.

ML MSS 2999 / Box 6 / Folder 8 (Y 604)

Australian Labor Party and Liberal Party of Australia how to vote leaflets, 1967

Both major parties supported a 'yes' vote for Indigenous Australians. These leaflets were handed out at polling booths by volunteers to instruct voters how to vote according to their political affiliation. The other proposed constitutional amendment on the ballot concerned the number of senators for each state relative to the number of House of Representatives members. Even though both major parties also supported a 'yes' vote for this change to the constitution, almost 60% of voters were against it.

ML 328.26/2

Aboriginal speakers at a lunchtime rally for the ‘yes’ vote meeting on Indigenous rights, 25 May 1967

‘Constitutional discrimination is a blot on our country and must be removed as a first step’ - Ray Peckham
A rally at Wynyard Park was one of a series of Sydney events held to raise awareness of the issues related to the 'yes' vote. These images were taken for the Tribune newspaper just two days before the referendum was held on 27th May. The State Library has a large collection of original negatives from the Tribune newspaper (see ON 161).

**Aborigines Bill (Proof Copy), NSW Government, 1968**

This Bill increased citizenship rights for Aboriginal people in the Federal constitution; for the first time including Aboriginal people in the census and allowing the Commonwealth Government to make laws for them. The campaign for a 'yes' vote was also instrumental in raising awareness of Aboriginal issues throughout Australia.

Amendments to the Electoral Act of 1962 had already enshrined the rights of Aboriginal people to vote.

Purchased from Len Fox, 2001

ML MSS 8085 / Box 32

**Faith Bandler by Penny Tweedie, c. 1982**

A staunch advocate in the campaign for Aboriginal citizenship rights, Faith Bandler AC helped to establish the Aboriginal–Australian Fellowship in Sydney in 1956. She later became State Secretary of the Federal Council for Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders. These organisations raised awareness of Indigenous issues and lead efforts to change the Australian constitution.

If you would like to listen to some interviews with Faith Bandler and/or assist with transcribing them, visit the State Library's oral history online platform: Amplify [3].

**Author: Ronald Briggs**


**Links**