

Aboriginal Tent Embassy



On 26th January 1972, a group of young Aborigines erected a beach umbrella on the lawns of Parliament House in Canberra, with a sign saying 'Aboriginal Embassy'. Over the next months, thousands joined their demonstration, which captured national and international attention, before being finally dispersed by police in July.

"Although the 1967 referendum was an important event marking the beginning of change in Black/white relations, most notably in the sphere of politics, the establishment of the Aboriginal Embassy in Canberra was a much larger event in the minds of most Blacks. The Aboriginal Embassy is credited with bringing more immediate and much wider changes, although the possibility of some of these changes stemmed from the results of the referendum".

Roberta Sykes. Black embassy, white violence

The young Blacks were getting buses ready now to go up to Canberra to put the Embassy back up. I went too, to help if I could. I took some very young children with me because I knew this would be a marvellous moment in history and I didn't want any Black kids to miss it. What I saw up there would put a shock into anyone. The police came running over in hundreds . . . and began beating up on the Black women who had grabbed each other's hands and were standing in a big circle around the tent and the men who were protecting the tent . . . They punched them knocked them to the ground and then jumped on their guts. I couldn't believe my eyes. All this was taking place right outside Parliament House, that great white building where I was told the laws were made and the country is governed. The television cameras were everywhere but that didn't stop them.

Mum Shirl - an autobiography

(with the assistance of Bobbi Sykes), 1981, p.79. The Embassy symbolised that blacks had been pushed as far back as blacks are going to be pushed . . . First and foremost it symbolised the Land Rights struggle. But beyond that, it said to white Australia, 'You've kicked us down for the last time.' In all areas. In education, in health, in police victimisation, in locking people up en masse - in all these things. It said that blacks were now going to get up and fight back on any or all these issues.

Source: Australians for Reconciliation Study Circle Kit.