



No public holiday for New Zealand Land Wars

(Price, R., 2016)

ROSANNA PRICE

Last updated 12:25, August 23 2016

LAWRENCE SMITH/FAIRFAX NZ

Deputy PM Bill English says the govt has taken a view there's no need for a public holiday.

The Government has made it very clear: The Land Wars commemoration day will not be a public holiday.

A commemorative day was announced last week after pressure from local communities and a school-led petition asked for a day of recognition.

However, Deputy Prime Minister Bill English said some people have misunderstood what has been agreed.

FAIRFAX NZ

Otorohanga College students presented a 13,000-signature petition to Parliament in support of a national commemoration of the 19th-century Land Wars.

“We’ve taken a view that there’s no need for a public holiday and in any case, there isn’t yet agreement about a date even just for a commemoration.”

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The decision had come out of discussion with the Maori Party, and English was “pretty sure” it had approved by Cabinet. Yet, Maori Party co-leader Marama Fox called for a public holiday and believed it was “still up for debate”.

ANDY JACKSON/FAIRFAX NZ

Labour leader Andrew Little suggested provincial holidays could be scrapped in lieu of a national NZ Wars commemoration day.

English also said any commemorations on the day should be locally-led.

“The Government provides some resource, but this has to be something that people want to own, not something that’s pushed on them,” English said.

“It’s up to the people who want to see a commemoration occur. There was a bit of a ceremony last week with the handover of one of the pa sites to Te Anau where a significant battle occurred in the Waikato. There may be more of that. That’ll unfold as we go.”

Prime Minister John Key said no progress had been made yet on choosing a date: “We are saying it’s likely there might be agreement at some point that that commemoration date can be set, but it would be also subject, I think, to iwi agreeing.”

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SWAP EXISTING HOLIDAYS FOR LAND WARS?

A current public holiday could possibly be swapped out, says Labour leader Andrew Little - suggesting provincial holidays could be scrapped in lieu of a national New Zealand Wars commemoration day.

“I don’t understand why we continue to celebrate provincial holidays when we haven’t had provincial government since 1863.”

He agreed the Queen’s Birthday holiday could be another option.

“There is a case to be made for an observance by way of a day off,” he said.

However, Peeni Henare, Labour MP for Tamaki Makaurau, didn’t think it should be made a holiday.

“It was made clear in the first consultation that happened a number of months ago that it would not be made a public holiday, but simply a day for commemoration,” Henare said.

“Because of some costs involved, there are already a number of public holidays ... I’m quite clear as the Chairperson of the Ruapekapeka Pa Trust that it shouldn’t be a holiday.”

Little supported the Government setting aside a day in principle: “We ought to be observing our own internal land wars in the way that we observe conflicts and casualties in other wars that we’ve participated in.”



Little also believed more needed to be taught at schools about the New Zealand wars.

"We shouldn't be embarrassed by it, we should accept that it's happened in the past, and we should learn from it and embrace what we have now, which is a set of legal arrangements that ensure that the Treaty of Waitangi is starting now to be observed – not only in the law but in the spirit."

Green Party co-leader Metiria Turei said a public holiday during winter should be part of consideration by the Government.

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