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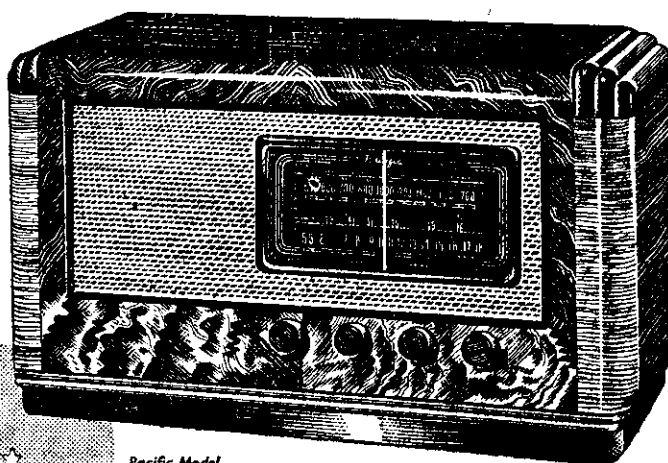
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think of Tolaga Bay. It was in Tolaga Bay that I first heard of a land problem that was clouding the minds of many leaseholders: LAND FEAR the original Maori owners. The danger I found to be real and the anxiety natural. I don't know how real the risk is in Lees Valley, but I was made clearly aware of the anxiety.

The Government, I was told, had given such wide powers—far wider than it at first intended—to the Soil and Water Conservation Boards that these could, if they liked, withdraw any high-country run from occupation. When I pointed out that the Government itself had always had this power, and had occasionally exercised it—in the case of Molesworth, for example—the answer was that Governments are politically vulnerable while Boards and Commissions are not.

"Besides," my informant went on, "the present Government has no knowledge of these problems. It has a far better grasp of industrial problems than any of its predecessors, but it doesn't understand farming. In any case it knows nothing about high-country farming, and has turned the problem over to these irresponsible Boards."

"You think they are policy-making Boards?"

"They must be. Even if that isn't the Government's intention it must happen."

"Are there no farmers on them?"

"Yes, some very good farmers. But not high-country men. Anyhow farmers never get their way in situations like these. Experts and politicians always dominate them."

"But why do you think they endanger Lees Valley?"

"Partly because of our situation, and partly because of our history. New Zealand is at present erosion mad, and a valley like this is a standing invitation to fanatics."

"What do you fear?"

"Fear is the wrong word. But what could happen is resumption by the Government on the advice of a committee whose minds work one way only."

"But you have no erosion here."

"Nothing to speak about."

"Isn't it more likely that a Conservation Board would co-operate with you here in setting an example to other areas?"

"It would be more sensible. But I think we'll have to stand on guard. The Boards have power without responsibility—a bad situation anywhere."

* * *

It is clearly a part of a larger situation which a Commission has been investigating for some months. It does not seem very alarming to me that the use we are now making of high-country land should come under review. A new conception of the whole problem might prove as helpful to the runholder himself as to the low-country victims of floods. But if I were one of the six remaining runholders in Lees Valley I should certainly wish to be heard before any decisions were made affecting my own holding, and I should not think it unreasonable or rude to ask by whom my fate was to be judged.

(To be continued)