

**THE EXEMPTION OF IMPROVEMENTS  
FROM TAXATION IN CANADA AND THE  
UNITED STATES. A REPORT PREPARED  
FOR THE COMMITTEE ON TAXATION OF  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

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The Exemption of Improvements from Taxation in Canada and the United States. A Report  
Prepared for the Committee on Taxation of the City of New York by Robert Murray Haig

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**ROBERT MURRAY HAIG**

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PREPARED FOR

THE COMMITTEE  
ON TAXATION  
OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK

BY

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NEW YORK

1915

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APPOINTED APRIL 10, 1914  
BY HONORABLE JOHN PURROY MITCHEL, MAYOR

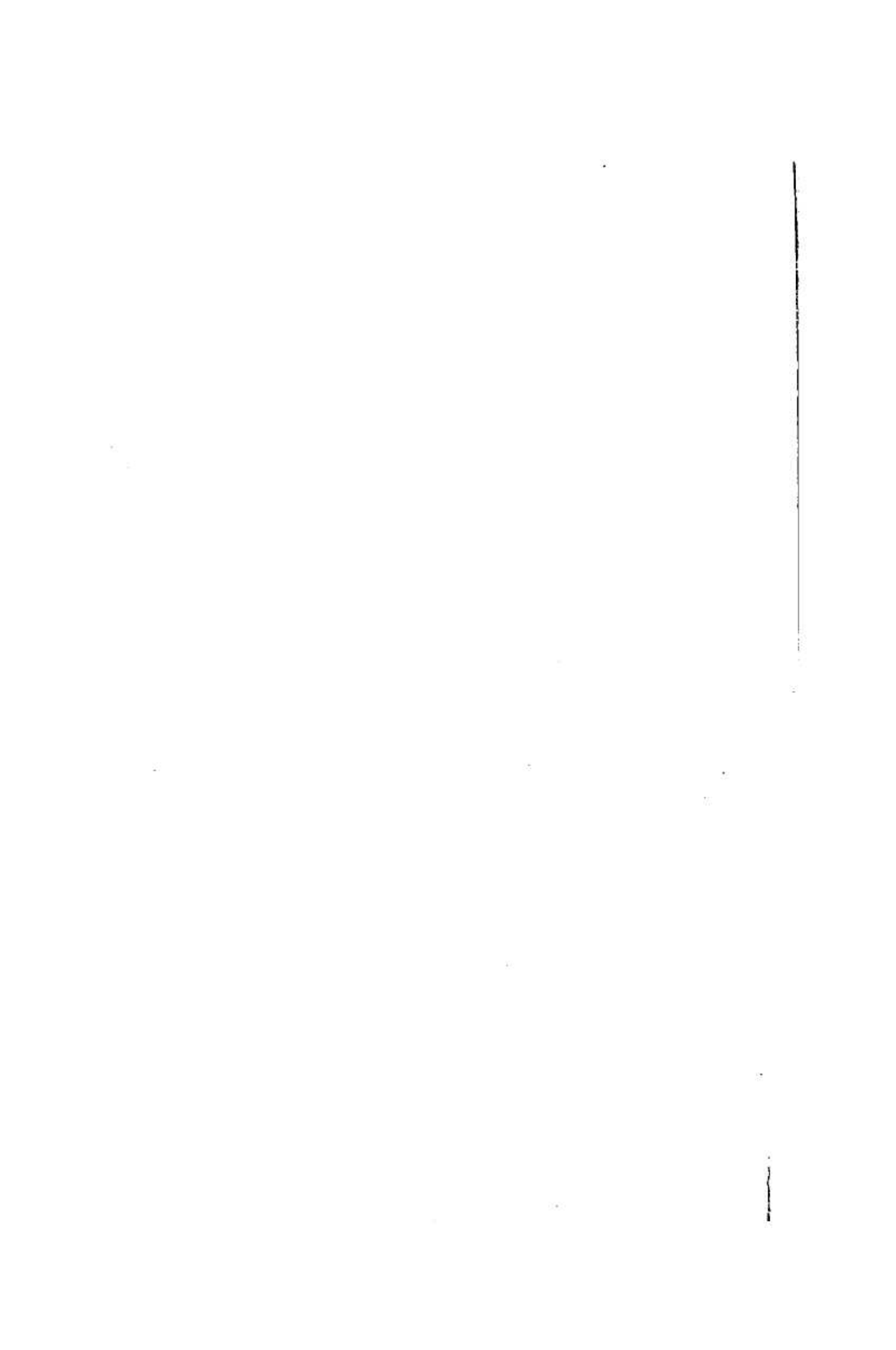
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## INTRODUCTION

The following report represents results obtained from an investigation of the plan of exempting improvements from taxation carried on under the direction of the Committee on Taxation during the summer of 1914. The field work of the investigation was begun June 19th and completed September 17th. During this period the following cities and towns were visited in the order named: in the province of Manitoba, Winnipeg; in the province of Saskatchewan, Regina, Moose Jaw, and Saskatoon; in the province of Alberta, Edmonton, Leduc, Lloydminster, Ponoka, and Calgary; in the province of British Columbia, Vancouver and Victoria, and in the United States, Houston, Texas. The material presented which deals with the situation in other cities than those enumerated was gathered by correspondence, by conferences with persons acquainted with conditions in those cities or from printed sources.

The instructions under which the investigation was conducted were given through a letter signed by Professor E. R. A. Seligman, chairman of the executive committee, dated June 1, 1914, and through interviews with various members of the committee.

The method followed was first to present to the mayor of the city under investigation the credentials, signed by Mayor John Purroy Mitchel and Chairman Alfred E. Marling. In every case the resources of the city departments were thrown open without reserve. Inquiry was made among the various officials as to the general economic position, the financial situation and history of the city and the present system of taxation and its history. With these facts in hand, attention was turned to securing data which might be used to judge the effects of the system in force. Such statistics of value as were available were gathered and the opinions of the officials and the citizens of the town were sought. Particular care was taken to inquire as to the exact nature and composition of the statistics gathered, in order that such comparisons between cities as are desirable might intelligently be made.

The report is divided into two parts. Part One is an effort to state concisely all the available facts which may aid in understanding the system of taxation in force in the various cities or throw light upon its effects. So far as possible the critical analysis of the data has been reserved for the second part. Several members of the committee have emphasized their desire to be furnished with the facts—the raw material—in order that they may draw their own conclusions. It is hoped that the arrangement adopted will enable this to be done. One necessary result of such a policy, however, was the inclusion of some material which is of relatively slight value.

Even though all the cities were not visited by the writer, it was deemed advisable, in order to make the report comprehensive, to present a brief

statement of the facts in regard to the law in force for each city on the continent which, so far as is known, has made any change in its laws in the direction of exempting improvements. Moreover, some information is given as to the progress of the agitation for change in several places where modifications have not been made, as in the eastern provinces of Canada.

Part Two is devoted to an analysis of the material presented in Part One. An attempt is made to summarize the evidence, to make comparisons and to draw deductions. The conclusions reached are, of course, not based entirely upon the material presented in Part One, for it is impossible to transcribe the entire complex of facts and conditions which influence an investigator on the ground in forming his opinions.

Something should be said concerning the use of the term "single tax" in the report. What has been done in the cities of the United States and Western Canada has nowhere resulted in all revenues being raised from a tax on land values. Therefore it is inaccurate to describe the systems in force by the term single tax. Nevertheless, the systems in several of the cities closely approach the single tax and the term is very generally used by the residents of all of these cities to describe them. Moreover, the term has been used in this connection in print both by single taxers and by their opponents. As it is very convenient, it has been decided to adopt it in the discussion which follows.

The investigator is under deep obligation to many people for assistance given in connection with this undertaking. City and provincial officials have in all cases been most kind and generous in giving information and private citizens in every city visited have been most accommodating and unselfish in giving their time and attention to the needs of the committee. Specific acknowledgment of obligation is usually given where the material furnished is presented in the text, but the number of cases where acknowledgment is due is so great that many have doubtless been overlooked. It is hoped that a general expression of appreciation will be accepted by persons of whom this is true.

ROBERT MURRAY HAIG.

NEW YORK CITY, March 23, 1915.