

Press Bureau No. 955

EDITOR:

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THE AMERICAN ECONOMIC LEAGUE,
Cincinnati, Ohio.

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HOW TO GET BETTER HOUSING.

A member of Cincinnati's "Better Housing League"—an organization that ignores the cause of poor housing—defended his program in a letter to a critic as follows:

It is hardly necessary to state that there is barely a foot of ground in the down-town residential district that is not now covered with dwellings and tenement houses, and I will appreciate it very much if you will give me your opinion as to the best method to pursue to put those buildings, that were built some years ago, and perhaps were constructed according to the ideas and laws prevailing at that time, but have since become obsolete so far as the sanitary conditions and idea of construction of the present day is concerned.

Since there are better housing leagues of the same kind in other cities than Cincinnati, and since there is a similar relation between area and population where overcrowding exists, the reply to the letter is of general interest.

The answer to your question is that we should make it unprofitable to withhold sites from use and we should abolish taxes that needlessly increase the cost of housing.

Cincinnati has 72 square miles. Ten of these would be sufficient room for a separate house on a 25 x 100 foot lot, to each of the 80,000 families in the city, after reserving one-fourth of the area for streets. Yet a large number of families cannot even get decent accommodations in tenement houses and you make the amazing statement that "there is barely a foot of

ground in the down-town residential district that is not covered with dwellings and tenement houses." The expression "down-town residential district" is indefinite, but if you mean thereby the space between the river and the hills, exclusive of the business section, you are certainly mistaken.

Your letter shows that you have disregarded facts, which one interested in finding a proper solution of economic questions would have noticed long ago.

The first thing necessary to secure proper buildings is to free the sites that are needed for them. The way to do that is to make it unprofitable for the owner of a valuable lot, to keep it in an unused or a partially used condition. To accomplish this, is to require him to pay in taxes the entire rental value of the site, exclusive of improvements. Then taxes, now levied on buildings and other improvements should be abolished. If we want landowners to build properly we should not tax them for doing so. If this were done, owners of sites, not properly used, would find it to their interest, either to improve them or let others do so. Those who have buildings "built some years ago, constructed according to ideas and laws prevailing at that time," would be forced by competition with new buildings, either to remodel them or to sell them to someone willing to do so.

This is a reform that we would long ago have had in operation, but for the opposition and indifference of citizens like yourself, and most of those associated with you in the so-called "Better Housing League."