

# Building a Better World: News of the Prout Research Institute

September, October & November, 2024

## We're In!

During the last three years of construction work by brother Jeffrey Steen, I have often helped out as his assistant. However it feels very strange for me to be living here. It's a shared dream come true.

The Prout Research Institute building has received occupancy permit. The ground floor and upstairs yoga/meditation hall have 2600 square feet, plus 870 square feet of lovely outside decks.

Proutist filmmaker and farmer Wilder Nicholson moved in with me on July 31st. The very next day 20 people arrived to start a six-day training on Economic Democracy. Pamela and Howard Nemon and Shiraksha Mohan helped tremendously to organize our kitchen so that we could cook three delicious and nutritious meals for 20 people each day. All the granite countertops turned out to be a real blessing as we prepare food. The Nemons also bought 24 chairs for our meeting room.

The yoga and meditation hall, with wool carpeting, is 18 feet by 29 feet, a golden rectangle proportion known by the ancient Greeks. It is always very quiet and peaceful.

Our building has two bedrooms and two bathrooms now, so a maximum of five people can stay here now. Jeffrey Steen has already begun construction of the three additional guestrooms and two additional bathrooms in the basement. These will allow us to hold training sessions and house interns, which is the real

purpose of the PRI.

Dan Morgan, with my help, painted the interior. In the first week of September we will begin painting the exterior blue with white trim, and the decks gray. Sugar Hollow Solar workers will also begin installing solar panels on the roof.



*Thanks to your support, we have moved into our new Center! See more photos on page 2.*

Wilder Nicholson describes our gardens: "There's something to be said about the collective wisdom held in a group. During the Economic Democracy Training at the PRI, participants learned the basic principles of permaculture and applied them with the help of experienced gardeners. Three groups presented unique ideas for food forests, vegetables, and water storage. Now we have synthesized the designs and begun planting cover crops for the future gardens. The Steens generously donated nine

blueberry bushes, three fig trees, three mulberry bushes, a juneberry tree and a magnolia tree, and we have identified the best planting locations and spacing for them. A compost bin has been constructed with recycled materials, and terraces have been outlined for vegetables and flowers."

In this newsletter you will learn about the research, educational conference and courses that the Prout Research Institute has already begun.

I cannot hide the fact that we need more money to finish the building. HomeGuide.com informs us that the cost to build a house in North Carolina ranges from

\$180 to \$450 per square foot. The PRI building has cost only \$159 per square foot, including the cost of clearing the land, excavation, and building the extensive decks, all of which are not included in the above North Carolina calculations. We expect our cost per square foot to actually fall lower when we finish the basement, because the framing and initial plumbing has already been done.

Our initial campaign goal of \$500,000, which was only meant to get us to this point, will actually cover the entire building cost. We need less than \$40,000

more to finish. The PRI has received donations from 89 individuals and grants from three foundations. If you can find it in your heart to give a little more, now is the best time for that.

I would like to close with our mission: *The Prout Research Institute researches, publishes and develops practical policies and educates people in the holistic Prout model for the welfare and happiness of all.*

*In Peace, Dada Maheshvarananda*  
Director, PRI Institute



## What still needs to be finished?

We still have to paint the exterior and stain the decks, and complete the rooms in the basement. We are 90% of the way to finishing the PRI Center. We need your support to finish! Make donations at [pri.institute](http://pri.institute), send checks to the Center. Contact [info@pri.institute](mailto:info@pri.institute).

# Economic Democracy Training: A first for Activists Local and beyond

From August 1st through August 6th a group of activists, co-op developers and permaculturists gathered for an Economic Democracy Training with the Prout Research Institute in Marshall, North Carolina. As the inaugural in-person program, and with a newly constructed building, the training was a warm welcome to a group of 17 individuals, and focused on studying the principles and application of the Progressive Utilization Theory, or Prout, as a way to achieve economic systems change.

A diverse program included daily workshops, field trips, group exercises, and yoga and meditation classes. A few highlights included learning the principles and requirements of economic democracy, followed by a design charrette to implement a shift from the status quo economy to more localized and democratic socio-economic units. A workshop on leadership development and cooperation covered the role of ethics in activism, and how to live the values of an ideal society in everyday life with our own actions.

A local and well established ecovillage, Earthaven, hosted a tour on the 3rd day, and shared how a small group of individuals cleared land and applied permaculture principles to build a community of 120 residents today. Their success over the past 30 years has been largely in part due to their ingenuity for self suf-

ficiency and a diverse and adaptable community governance structure based on sociocracy. Unique solutions they implemented included a micro hydro dam, time banking where members contribute 16 hrs a month of service, a local currency and barter system, and nested neighborhoods and businesses (HOAs, multi-owner LLCs, and co-ops).

With all these ideas the group returned to the Prout Research Institute and began to design the landscaping and gardens with a permaculture workshop. A cover crop was planted and the beginnings of a terrace for a food forest, edible for future residents and visitors, is now underway.

Lastly, a tour with a cooperative ecosystem in Asheville, PODER Emma, provided a glimpse of how communities can band together to ward off gentrification and secure accessible housing through the cooperative model. Beginning when Latino community members purchased their mobile home park, the initiative has grown to include three more housing co-ops, a language justice co-op, bookkeeping cooperative, property management cooperative, and a real estate cooperative who recently purchased buildings to host events, office space, and commercial spaces to incubate more cooperatives.



# PROUT: Action and Activities

## PU Denmark CONVENTION 2024: "Spirituality - The Radical Missing Link in Modern Activism"

Proutist Universal's Annual Convention was held on July 19-24th in Vig, Denmark, near Copenhagen. Here are some photos from that dynamic retreat.



## ProutSisters' Annual Retreat for Women

Held on July 16-18, 2024 in Vig, Denmark., it was both dynamic and refreshing. It was a:

## "Radical Recharge"



## Deep Strategies for PRI

The Prout Research Institute's Board and Advisory Committee met on August 17th, 2024 for a special Strategic Planning session. It was the first meeting after the inauguration of the PRI building. Mark Friedman and Arthur Pacheco facilitated a 3-hour meeting to help PRI determine the next steps.

We reviewed PRI's bylaws, reflected on a future vision for PRI, arrived at a consensus on the mission statement, determined immediate priorities, and discussed the overall strategy and growth areas. A few specific and time-bound goals were defined, with clear objectives to accomplish each goal in the next few months.

These goals will guide PRI's work in the areas of Prout education and training, Prout policy research, projects that practically demonstrate Prout, and a framework to collaborate with other Prout organizations.

### Prout Course for the Neohumanist College of Asheville (NHCA)

The Prout Research Institute has designed the syllabus and marketing material for a 12-week, instructor-led course to be taught online at the Neohumanist College of Asheville. The course is titled "Prout and Neohumanism: A socio-economic model for all beings", and is set to commence in the Spring 2025 semester.

This course will dive deep into the structure and implementation of the Progressive Utilization Theory or Prout.

Six Proutists—Dada Maheshvarananda, Howard Nemon, Roar Bjonnes, Matt Oppenheim, Craig Runde, and Shiraksha Mohan—met over the last few months to design the syllabus. Ricky Peterson recorded a marketing video.

Each session of the course will address a specific Prout topic with relevant readings and group activities. By the end of this course, students will be capable of understanding and advocating for Prout, as a new way of envisioning a society and an economy that promotes the wellbeing of all.

### PRI Policy Research

A PRI team is exploring how to best guide our policy research efforts. Three areas of economic and ecological significance have been identified. Shiraksha Mohan will focus on the topic of Climate Change and Economic Democracy. Mark Friedman will delve into the topic of Acceptance of Economic Democracy in Radical Economic Thinking. Michael Zimmerman will continue researching money. Each one hopes to produce a position paper in the next six months.

In Peace,  
Shriraksha Mohan



**Prout Research  
Institute Asheville**  
*North Carolina USA*

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# Come to a community forum

## Choosing Economic Democracy: Cooperatives, Local Economies & Regenerative Agriculture

October 11th, 10 am to 4 pm  
The Center for Spiritual Living Asheville  
2 Science of Mind Way  
Asheville, NC 28806  
Free Admission, donations accepted for lunch.

Imagine a world where everyone has access to the basic necessities of life, where workers have a say in determining their wages and are empowered to lead democratic businesses, where food, energy, and wealth can be generated locally and circulated in the local economy. Economic democracy seeks to empower all, especially historically marginalized communities.

By joining together in conversation we plan to identify common goals, opportunities for collaboration, and collective actions that can begin to shift economic power back to the hands of local people, and those most in need.

*We'd like to work together to establish an economic democracy for Western North Carolina!*



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### The day includes:

- Community Keynotes: 15 minute presentations from local leaders and activist,
- Skills training,
- Discussions and deep dives on progressive issues,
- Break out rooms for participatory workshops
- A harvest of ideas and shared visioning for collaborative next steps.

*Organizers and co-sponsors include:*



Alliance for Economic Democracy

