

SM28 Dissolves

A Balance Sheet

Spirit of May 28

2023

SM28 formed in the fall of 2021. We knew we were behind the curve. We formed SM28 hoping to cohere a faction of the Party of George Floyd, i.e., all those who fought in the uprising, did jail or medical support, or who rallied around the uprising in any way. It had been over a year since the uprising, but our gamble was that the political terrain had changed, that more revolts were coming, and that many of the people who fought in the uprising were still out there, ready to fight again if the opportunity presented itself.

We created SM28 as an attempt to organize something more formal than the loose networks that constitute the revolutionary milieu in the United States. Together we read, wrote, debated, and experimented, using the uprising as our common reference point. We investigated the origins, events, ideas, and contradictions of this historic event. We centered Black liberation as the form that revolutionary struggle takes in the United States, recognizing in the uprising the historical potential for Black rebellions to radicalize the broader proletarian class and awaken it from its stupor. Many comrades in the anarchist and anti-authoritarian communist milieus were thinking along similar lines, some of them for the first time. This was a positive development we wanted to encourage.

Despite the relative quiet of 2021-2022, we theorized that subterranean networks of resistance had continued the struggle, with informally coordinated campaigns of sabotage appearing as flashmob parties, brazen looting, and small street riots against the police. We went to sideshows, raves and punk shows, anti-lockdown rallies, mutual aid gatherings, and occupations to talk about our memories of the uprising and how we felt about it now. We found some appreciation for our optimism regarding the future of revolutionary struggle in the US, but few people were willing to organize themselves along the lines we were proposing. Intense and inspiring as the uprising had been for us, most people seemed to see it as a unique moment of blowing-off-steam, resulting in little more than a few police being convicted. Many people ultimately saw the uprising as a defeat, leaving a sense of powerlessness and demoralization.

Against this pessimism we offered a counter-theory. Since the Oscar Grant riots of 2009, we'd seen a trajectory of sharp and escalating battles in the form of riots, highway blockades, and full-on rebellions in places like Ferguson, Baltimore, and elsewhere. With these experiences in the rearview, on May 28th, 2020, a proletarian vanguard spontaneously assembled with the confidence and intelligence to attack the state. In the aftermath of the greatest revolt of our era, we believed that the class struggle would continue to intensify. We felt that thousands of people had been transformed by the uprising and were poised to continue fighting, innovating new forms of struggle and organization. We expected the curve of struggle to escalate, raising the fundamental questions of the state, capitalism, and race.

But as time went on, it became increasingly obvious that we were in a period of overall de-escalation and decomposition of the class struggle. We thus ran into a deep contradiction: How do you sustain a group dedicated to rebellions and uprisings when these events are no longer in progress?

Two years after our formation, we have grown very little as a group, both quantitatively and qualitatively. We still retain optimism that more revolts are coming, but whatever we were searching for in the short term, both in the struggle at large, and within ourselves,

continues to elude us. As a result, we have decided to dissolve the group, in hopes that we can pursue new and more effective lines of thought and action. We will continue to think and act together as individuals, but not as SM28.

Mapping the Limits

This document represents our final discussions together, theorizing why and how we reached this disappointing conclusion. Some members emphasized that the class struggle had not developed in the manner that would have made a group like SM28 useful. Others asserted our own failings as individual militants and as an organization. Whether because of internal or external limits, we all recognize that the project has run its course. We offer here a brief outline of our conclusions.

External Limits

SM28 hoped to become a tree in a proletarian forest but ended up as little more than a shriveling vine of the ultra-left.

This condition is not unique to our project. No group of people in our time have been able to develop a revolutionary base among the proletariat. And while anarchists and anti-authoritarians were among the first and most effective elements of the left to intervene in the uprising, once it ended, the proletariat and the radical milieu mostly went their separate ways. As a result, our perspective and appeal remained limited, and our output uninteresting to those we hoped to meet outside of the radical scene.

SM28 was out of step with most of the ultra-left regarding the question of organization.

For many good reasons, the ultra-left is largely constituted through informal networks and personal relationships and has developed an important critique not only of vanguardism, but organizations in general. A membership-based group was going to be difficult to build in this environment, but because of the momentum of the uprising, we believed that we could do more than just make friends or write about what happened. We hoped that SM28 would be one among many new organizations that would emerge to give continuity to the forces that assembled in the summer and fall of 2020. There was, however, no such emergence. Unable to find a revolutionary movement to link up with, we had to eventually conclude that we were never going to be more than a small writing project.

Abolitionism and the Black Radical Tradition were co-opted into the movement for social democracy.

We had hoped that the uprising would bring about a proliferation of different radical and insurgent formations, which would create a new ecology for us to relate to. This has been the historical role of Black movements in the US, from the Civil War and Reconstruction to Civil Rights and Black Power. However, outside of a few relatively marginal examples, this didn't really happen after 2020. Whatever the new subjectivities, forms of life, and modes of organization are that were produced by the uprising, it is not at all clear. We didn't see

the development of a movement for revolutionary abolitionism or a Black revolutionary organization. What we saw instead were NGOs and academics colonizing the legacy of the uprising with their social democratic programs and their same old counterinsurgent narratives. Their idea of abolition is defunding the police and redirecting that money to some other state apparatus which reproduces class society, such as social workers. SM28 hoped to build relationships with revolutionary abolitionists who understood that the carceral state must be immediately destroyed, not progressively reformed. But by the time we began to form as a group, the watchword of “abolition” had already been subsumed into the confines of activism, which discarded all the lessons of the uprising. In effect, new forms of policing emerged in the name of protecting “our communities.” The only light of hope at the moment seems to be the struggle over the Weelaunee Forest, i.e. Stop Cop City, but this movement faces immense obstacles.

The uprising itself was limited in its potential.

The George Floyd uprising was an anti-police revolt, not a revolution. Its horizon was BLM, anti-fascism, Fuck 12, Abolition, etc. The uprising never penetrated the level of everyday life – that of work and the economy – nor was it necessarily against the state. The uprising, as widespread as it was, not only remained small compared to 1968-69, but also remained sectorally contained. While a small minority of proletarian militants sporadically rioted in the aftermath of the uprising, following the police murder of Winston Boogie Smith in Minneapolis in 2021, or in the wake of Jayland Walker’s murder in the summer of 2022, this did not cohere into a revolutionary continuity. When we did find new forms of life affected by the uprising, such as the parties at Washington Square Park, we found people who wanted to party, grift, and who had a cartoonish memory of past struggles. If Endnotes posited Camatte’s line that we live in an era of the production of revolutionaries without revolution, it is unclear where all the revolutionaries are. Rather, what we have come to understand is that only revolutions produce revolutionaries on a mass scale.

Internal Limits

We failed to develop a clear way of bringing people into the project.

For example, in our first gathering, people were expecting us to welcome them into an organization, which we did not. Our nervousness about appearing like ‘professional recruiters’ became one of our greatest obstacles. We did not want to come off like the Leninist, Trot, Maoist, and Stalinist sects, but we did not come up with an alternative method of inviting people to meet or join us. Unsurprisingly, few did.

We failed to build local formations.

There was some discussion early on about building locals, but we were unsure if that was the right model for us, and so it never happened. At the same time, many of us lived in different cities. Trying to organize across geographies without building local groups meant that our primary means of interaction was over the internet and phone calls. While this kept us in touch with one another, face to face meetings develop many of the intangible aspects

of effective groups. We held two in-person gatherings, but we never developed or stuck to a plan for how to build local relationships as part of SM28.

We never fully clarified the practical structure and intention of the group.

On the one hand, we thought some sort of formal organization was necessary, beyond being simply a publishing center, but on the other, we didn't want to reproduce dead-end models that have long ago been proven inept. Thus, we vacillated somewhere between publishing center and cadre organization. We were unable to innovate the new forms of organization we ourselves hoped would materialize out of the uprising.

We were unable to develop a larger network of writers and editors.

Most of the writing was done by a small number of people. Over time, the website looked less like a group project, and more like the archive of a few writers. Maybe both as a cause and effect of our increasing insularity, we could not brand ourselves in relevant ways, or ways that seemed to attract many people. Nor did we really make a very strong effort to recruit writers and grow our network.

We failed to connect meaningfully with the proletarians who fought in the streets in 2020, the very people that animated our group's formation.

We failed to overcome the segregations of class and race that surviving in capitalism imposes, particularly on the American proletariat. As we tended more and more towards a simple internet publication platform, we increasingly foreclosed the possibility of building with those who weren't already in our milieu. This meant that our project was effectively self-isolated from those we hoped to meet and build political relationships with, those who had by necessity returned to the grind of everyday survival in segregated America, intensified by rising cost-of-living, stagnating wages, and the everyday murder of proletarians.

Accomplishments

We took the uprising as seriously as we could.

We deepened our ability to think, talk, and write about this experience. And we were one of the only groups to consistently think and write about the uprising and what it meant for the contemporary moment, from a revolutionary perspective that emphasizes the importance of race in the context of the American class struggle.

We held two gatherings centered on Black liberation and class struggle.

Since the uprising, few large-scale meetings have happened amongst revolutionaries. We felt that one of our tasks post-2020 was to meet face to face with like-minded individuals we had met throughout the course of the uprising, in order to theorize the meaning of 2020. While unable to bring more than a handful of people into our group, our conferences seemed to have a wider political impact beyond simply recruiting more members.

We expanded our informal networks.

While we did not build a large membership organization, or become part of a mass revolutionary movement, we did build many informal political relationships which would have not developed otherwise.

The Way Out

We are dissolving but not giving up. As individuals we may work together in a variety of ways. However, we believe that organizations should be ruthlessly measured against the bar of class struggle. History tells us that organizations which are not involved in battle against the state and capital quickly become impediments to not only the militants inside the group, but also to the broader class. Some SM28 members have lived through this process in prior organizations which refused to dissolve, and, in fact, are zombies amongst us.

We know greater class struggle is coming. It is only a matter of time. The proletariat in the United States is not quiet, apathetic, or completely won over to reaction. It has been fighting the state on and off for over a decade, as part of a trajectory of global class struggle that has returned with a ferocity since the 2007 economic crisis. There are of course rests and pauses between battles. The class struggle is not an endless set of activist marches or the jibber jabber of leftist meetings, but a series of sharp battles, retreats, jabs, recuperations, thrusts, and counter-thrusts. The pauses certainly feel like ages to us, but the proletariat must take stock, recompose itself, and deal with the repression from both the right and the left.

Perhaps our dissolution is premature, a sign of our impatience. But we are as afraid as everyone else that time is running out. For us, that fear has manifested itself primarily as a fear of wasting time. We firmly believe that if our politics and group cannot field militants on the ground, cannot intervene in the immediacy of the struggle of the class, it is better to dissolve, and re-evaluate our theory and strategy.

find each other.



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