12 arrests made on T-Hall Lawn at pro-Palestine Demonstration

The following story is developing and The New Hampshire will update as needed

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On May 1 at the University of New Hampshire (UNH), 10 students and two non-students were arrested after an encampment began on Thompson Hall (T-Hall) lawn.

The University of New Hampshire Palestine Solidarity Coalition (UNH PSC) organized a May Day event that was hosted on T-Hall lawn this past Wednesday at 5 p.m. The goal of the event was to “demand the UNH administration divest from weapon manufacturers and companies that are involved with the Israeli regime and occupation of Palestine, defend the First Amendment rights of students taking part in pro-Palestine activism and the Palestinian, Arab, Muslim and Jewish students who have been targeted as a result, and declare their support for an immediate permanent ceasefire and an end to the ongoing genocide in Palestine,” stated a press release from UNH PSC following the events of May 1.

The conflict in Israel and Palestine has been ongoing since October 7. On May 6, Israel invaded Rafah, a previously designated safe zone for Gazans, after rejecting a ceasefire agreement proposed by Qatar and Egypt and agreed to by Hamas.

In accordance with UNH’s Freedom of Expression Guidelines on Peaceful Dissent, UNH PSC did acquire a permit for the May Day event. The university guidelines state, “Overnight events, camping in vehicles, tents, or other structures as well as sleeping in public space of any kind on-campus is prohibited.” The permit also states that the protest would not require “staking of any kind (ex. Temporary perimeter, tent, inflatables, carnival rides, etc.).” As outlined in the permit, the event was originally approved to begin at 5 p.m. and last until 8 p.m.

A student organizer who wished to remain anonymous and was verified as present at the event by The New Hampshire stated that none of the tents the group had set up had any stakes in the ground, as they had been set up on a concrete area on T-Hall Lawn that surrounds the flagpole. The student mentioned that there was no “camping” nor were there “overnight events” taking place as the tents had only been set up for 30 minutes before police and administration got involved.

Another requirement of the permit disallowed any event tents, but the PSC stated that this specification was only designated to large-gathering tents and not the camping tents the demonstrators used on Wednesday.

“This happened because the tent has become a political symbol,” said the organizer. “We want to emphasize that there are no universities in Gaza anymore. This happened because thousands of students have been killed in Gaza, hundreds of professors have been killed for simply raising a voice.”

The student organizer mentioned that there had been an attempt at opening a dialogue with the university about divestment, but the school rejected any idea of divestment as it was not a “responsible way to operate an endowment” according to Tania deLuzuriaga, UNH’s executive director of public relations.
“We understand that the university can not just divest their funds overnight,” said the student organizer. “We just want a conversation and an acknowledgment that this is something the university can do.” They referenced schools like Brown University in Rhode Island where encampments cleared once the school agreed to vote on the issue this October.

“Before the violence began, it was a beautiful event,” said the student organizer. “It was wonderful. We had live music and art. We wanted to have a space for learning, to get together as a community, while also demanding divestment.”

The event included a Refaat Alareer memorial library to honor the poet killed in an Israeli strike in Gaza. When the police cleared the scene, the student organizer said they watched the police throw everything away, including the library materials.

UNH Police appeared at the scene about 20 minutes after the first tent was set up.

The following timeline was detailed to The New Hampshire by deLuzuriaga. At approximately 6:30 p.m., protestors erected tents on Thompson Hall Lawn. Shortly before 7 p.m., UNH Police arrived at the scene. According to deLuzuriaga, the protestors were informed via loudspeaker at 6:56 p.m. that their permit had been revoked due to tents being erected. They were also told that New Hampshire state police would be called and that protestors would be arrested for trespassing if they did not disperse. At 7:24 p.m. protestors were informed via loudspeaker for a second time that their permit had been revoked. They were also informed that the state police had been called. At 7:36 p.m. New Hampshire state police arrived on the scene. The state police appeared to be in full riot gear.

Many witnesses to the events documented the interaction between protestors and police. On PSC’s Instagram account, a video details the violence that occurred between officers and protestors. This is a warning for readers that the following video link can be difficult to watch.

“Once there [the police] moved in on students quickly,” said MJ Condon, a UNH student who was a witness to the event. “With displays of brutish force not just from the state troopers, but from UNH Police Department officers.”

Condon stated that once troopers moved in they forcibly moved all persons off the lawn, “nearly pushing protestors onto the street.”

According to the student organizer, Chief Paul Dean allegedly grabbed at a rainy and “shoved students on the ground” once the first tent appeared at around 6:30 before identifying himself and before the group was told their permit had been revoked.

UNH PSC has stated that around 200 protestors were present. There is no evidence to suggest that any protestors were armed.

According to UNH PSC’s press release, protestors were “brutally attacked” by police. The press release includes photos of injuries allegedly inflicted by police. The press release also states that counter-protestors present were “yelling racial and homophobic slurs” and “launched fireworks” while police engaged with protestors. There is no evidence that this behavior by counter-protestors was punished in any way. The student organizer said that some of the protestors were called “terrorists” among other racially-charged names while some of the counter-protestors held up the American flag and laughed at the chaos.

“There were so many disgusting displays of racism from student(s) who were counter-protesting,” said Condon.

According to arrest records, 12 arrests were made by UNHPD; 10 of the 12 were students. Also according to arrest records, all 12 individuals who were arrested were charged with disorderly conduct and trespassing. One individual was also charged with simple assault and another was also charged with assault and two counts of resisting. A member of UNH PSC stated that some of those arrested were outside of the encampment area.

The PSC press release described one student who was arrested and was allegedly placed in isolation for requesting batteries for their hearing device, while another student was allegedly denied medication for their disability.

According to deLuzuriaga, the Durham Police Department was never involved in breaking up the protest, but remained “on the periphery, ensuring that it did not go into the town of Durham.”

In an email to The New Hampshire, Durham Town Administrator Todd Selig stated that, “Durham officers ensured the downtown and our core Durham neighborhoods remained peaceful, that traffic could flow along our local roadways, and that the public sidewalks remained clear for pedestrians.”
The student organizer said that demonstrators were unaware of who Chief Dean was when he first attempted to shut down the encampment. The PSC described him as “undercover” in the press release and the student organizer said that his badge was not visible until backup appeared at the scene and that Chief Dean had refused to identify himself when asked by protestors. According to deLuzuriaga, who spoke on behalf of Dean, Dean was wearing “plain clothes” that deLuzuriaga says are often worn by campus police in an attempt to appear less intimidating. She also stated that his badge was being worn around his neck throughout the protest and that he did not have intent to deceive the protestors. However, she did state that Dean’s badge could have been obscured by his jacket.

In a statement issued to the university on Thursday, UNH President James Dean stated he was “extremely disappointed at the events that transpired in front of Thompson Hall” and that “[d]espite clear communication with organizers regarding the university’s expectations for conduct when exercising their free speech rights, those guidelines, as well as repeated requests and warnings from university staff and police, were blatantly ignored.”

In response, the student organizer said, “The only outside agitators were the fascists in uniform—there was no reason for them to do this. There was no reason for them to be in riot gear for a small group of students to place a tent on the ground.”

Following the events of May 1, UNH PSC has called for the resignation of Chief Dean, Senior Vice Provost Kenneth Holmes and UNH President James Dean.

The reporting for this story is ongoing. Please refer to https://tnhdigital.com/ for the most up to date information.

Correction (May 7 at 7:18 p.m.): A previous version of this article stated that “according to the student organizer, Chief Paul Dean grabbed at a rainfly and “shoved students on the ground” once the first tent appeared and the group had been informed that the permit was revoked.” It has been clarified that “according to the student organizer, Chief Paul Dean allegedly grabbed at a rainfly and “shoved students on the ground” once the first tent appeared around 6:30 before identifying himself and before the group was told their permit had been revoked.” The article has been updated.