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MIT removes protesters from Tent City

Campus Police arrest 10 including four homeless



David M. Watson/The Tech

Ronald P. Suduiko.

By Thomas T. Huang

The MIT Campus Police — under administration orders to clear "Tent City" — arrested ten people who refused to leave the site early Friday morning. The camp consisted of homeless people and supporters who were occupying a section of the MIT-owned Simplex site to protest the conditions of the homeless in Cambridge.

An administration source said late yesterday afternoon that the "Tent City" situation had degenerated to the point that MIT had to act. The source also said that MIT would try to make sure that the location would not be occupied again.

The major reason for the removal of Tent City was MIT's concern over the cold weather forecast for last night, involving a wind-chill factor of -20° F, according to Ronald P. Suduiko, the MIT official who oversaw the operation.

President Paul E. Gray '54, Provost John M. Deutch '61 and Walter L. Milne, assistant to the chairman of the MIT Corporation, were out of town and could not be reached for comment.

The Campus Police arrived at the site shortly after 6:30 am, said Suduiko, who is MIT's special assistant for governmental relations and community affairs. At about 7 am, after discussions and warnings, those who refused to leave the site were arrested on trespassing charges, and some were also charged with disorderly conduct. Those arrested were turned over to the Cambridge Police for booking.

"The solution to this problem — long-term or short-term — cannot be reached by the actions of a single institution," Suduiko explained in a public statement. "This is a national, state and local policy problem. It is also a tragic problem for the individuals involved, and requires collaborative and concerted efforts on the part of many."

Among those arrested were one resident of Tent City, three other street people, one MIT student, one former MIT student, and four other supporters. They included: Beret Anderson, Miriam Ansara, Susan Durkee, Charlene Gilbert, Bruce Greenholtz, Carlos Gonzalez, Ralph S. Guernsey, Steven Fernandez, Evelyn Parks and Steven Penn G.

The arrests came four days after the Cambridge City Council appointed a representative from the Cambridge Department of Human Services to mediate

negotiations between MIT and the homeless and two weeks after the City Council asked MIT not to evict the homeless until a mutually acceptable agreement was reached.

The homeless had been living on the site since Oct. 16, following a weekend demonstration initiated by the Simplex Steering Committee, a group opposed to MIT development in that area. The homeless had asked for decent living conditions and had tried to increase general public awareness of the problems of the homeless. They had also tried to garner support from the City Council.

Immediately before the arrests were made, Suduiko said he offered to give the street people a ride to a shelter or to a health facility, or to motel rooms which MIT would make available for the weekend. Seven people accepted MIT's offer at that time, he said.

But Daniel J. Glenn G, a protester who avoided arrest, claimed that only two of those seven ultimately took the offer.

MIT made such a move because it was concerned with the health and safety of the people at Tent City, as well as citizens who live in the vicinity, Suduiko said. According to the MIT News Office, the Institute had expressed concern about open fires on the site, the use of candles in the tents, the oncoming cold weather, the lack of sanitation and running water, and occasional fights.

But Ralph S. Guernsey, an advocate for the homeless, called such claims an excuse to remove the homeless in order to continue real estate development at Simplex. "I am outraged and embarrassed for MIT," Guernsey said. "I sincerely hope that this is not the caliber of education and morality that MIT students are receiving. When one of the largest and wealthiest universities in the world marshals all of the resources available to it to suppress rather than assist homeless people, something is dreadfully wrong."

Several protesters later claimed that the Campus Police treated them roughly, but Captain Anne P. Glavin said she saw no evidence of police brutality. She said, "When they're warned and warned and warned, and they don't go, we have to place hands on people to remove them."

Gilbert, who works for the Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless and who was one of the people arrested, said, "I am disturbed by what I've seen. The homeless had agreed to leave, and supporters were helping them leave. The homeless asked for a few more minutes to pack up, but the arrests started almost randomly."

"Either [the patrol officers] have not been trained to handle protesters in a professional way, or they were not told to exercise any restraint," said Nancy Ryan, director of the Women's Commission for the City of Cambridge, who witnessed the arrests.

Associate Provost S. Jay Keyser said, "I'm sorry it happened, but it was inevitable."

City Councillor David E. Sullivan '74 said that the city government "will not be happy [to hear of the arrests] because more than a week ago it had passed resolutions asking MIT to not do precisely what it did." He said it would further complicate matters between MIT and the city.

Suduiko said that, before the arrests took place, he handed out a Cambridge Department of Human Services list of facilities for the homeless in Cambridge, including shelters, free meal services and other social services.

"These people are not here because there is no place else to go," he said. "It is clear, based on a report to the City Council last Monday by the Director of Emergency Services, that sufficient shelter facilities exist in Cambridge. This small group of individuals have not availed themselves of these services in the past month." Specifically, the homeless had rejected an offer from a Cambridge businessman of six months of free housing, Suduiko said.

Suduiko said MIT was discussing ways the Institute, along with others in the public and private sectors, could find long-term solutions to the problem of shelter for the homeless. For example, MIT provides the land for the largest single homeless shelter in Cambridge, the Cambridge and Somerville Project for Alcoholism Rehabilitation facility at 240 Albany Street.

Councillors: arrests may impede Simplex plan

By Seth Gordon
and Akhar Merchant

Members of the Cambridge City Council yesterday said MIT's arrests of the "Tent City" protesters may undermine MIT's proposal for developing its 26-acre Simplex property. Even before yesterday's incident, several of the City Councillors had expressed opposition to MIT's proposals, which will come under review by the City Council next year.

Councillor David E. Sullivan '74 said MIT's eviction of the homeless protesters will "turn up the heat at City Council" in terms of requiring more housing to be built on the Simplex site. "I will be taking a very hard line on that issue," he said.

Four members of the nine-member Cambridge City Council had been endorsed by the Cambridge Civic Association in last month's elections, an organization opposing the current proposal for development at Simplex.

Alice Wolf, a councillor supported by the CCA, called the arrests "irresponsible," especially after the City Council had unanimously called for MIT to negotiate with Tent City through a mediator. "I don't exactly know how I, as a city councillor, will respond, except with outrage."

Wolf said she doubted MIT's claim that the action was taken to protect the homeless from the cold weather expected this weekend, since she said she thought the eviction was planned earlier



Photo courtesy Phil Barber
Stephen Fernandez, a former MIT student, was arrested by the MIT Campus Police early Friday morning.

in the week. "It sounds to me like a political decision."

Considering how MIT administrators have recently discussed the importance of social responsibility, Wolf wondered, "What kind of education is it for the students to see this kind of action?" The arrests expose MIT's hypocrisy, she said.

William Walsh, an independent councillor in favor of MIT's proposed developments, called the crackdown "unfortunate." He regretted that the former residents of Tent City had not accepted the offer of one private landlord, who offered them three apartments rent-free for six months in exchange for rent control exemptions. Because the Institute owns the property, MIT administrators have the right to evict trespassers, he said.

If the City Council were to take action against MIT, Cambridge might be sending the wrong message to other

landowners who would fear greater city interference in their own affairs, Walsh said.

The city could seize the houses Tent City wants under "eminent domain," according to Wolf. But the city would have to pay MIT fair market value for them. Residents and supporters of Tent City have asked that the city do this, while Wolf feared that the city could not afford it. Many others, she said, have asked the same for other properties because of problems with rent control, fire, or abandonment. Cambridge has turned these requests down. "The city is primarily not in the housing business," Wolf explained.

The problem of homeless citizens is not unique to Cambridge, she said. She attributed the causes of homelessness to a shortage of housing construction, the premature release of mentally ill from institutions and the increasing rift between the affluent and the poor in the United States.

Twenty demonstrators demand meeting with MIT officials

By Michael Gojer

Amid a tense protest in front of his office, Ronald P. Suduiko, special assistant for governmental relations and community affairs, said late yesterday afternoon that he would meet with "Tent City" demonstrators to discuss their complaints, but refused to commit to a specific time.

Following MIT's eviction of Tent City residents, about 20 protesters — staging a two-hour sit-in on the second floor of Building 5 — accused Suduiko of failing to negotiate with Tent City.

The protesters crowded the hallway at about 2:30 pm, chanting "We want Suduiko" in front of a swarm of local media television cameras. Among the protesters were about five homeless residents of Tent City, which was cleared early yesterday morning by MIT police. Also among the demonstrators were six students and about seven advocates of the homeless.

The clapping, rallying protesters asked for President Paul E. Gray '54 and Walter Milne, assistant to the chairman of the Corporation. Both were out of town.

When Suduiko arrived to meet the protesters around 3 pm, Daniel J. Glenn G, a supporter of the Tent City group, formally presented him with photographs of the Tent City dwellers being arrested early yesterday morning and with a copy of the Tent City proposal to which MIT has refused to respond, Glenn said.

Glenn claimed that even the Cambridge chief of police "was outraged by the actions of the MIT police."

Nancy Ryan, director of the Women's Commission for the City of Cambridge,

said she was pulled out of a tent by an MIT police officer while trying to help pack a Tent City resident's belongings. "All at once, they opened up the backs of the vans and started throwing people in," Ryan said.

Suduiko said that MIT had been in the process of talking to many people about the issues involved in the Simplex development and the Tent City encampment. But when specifically questioned if he had talked to the Tent City residents, Suduiko said, "No, we have not." "We're willing to deal with these issues," Suduiko said. Despite the protesters' chants of "when?" and almost 15 separate requests for a specific meeting time, Suduiko said, "I can't give you a date right now." Protesters encouraged Suduiko to "commit [himself] to something."

One student was restrained by the MIT police as he tried to follow Suduiko down the hall. He was held back by a patrol officer and then by William Cavellini, spokesman for the Simplex Steering Committee — a group that wants MIT to build more housing at Simplex than currently proposed. Cavellini feared a fight might break out. "No more arrests," he said.

"We will be leaving here today without a meeting," Cavellini said. He accused Suduiko of insincerity with regard to setting up an appointment. Cavellini said MIT had a long history of failing to follow through with promised meetings. Suduiko rebutted the charge, and a short shouting match between him and Cavellini ensued.

"It's insulting that you can't set up a meeting today" one protester told Suduiko.



Photo courtesy Phil Barber

Charlene Gilbert, a member of the Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless, was arrested by the MIT Campus Police early Friday morning.