Two Charged in Theft

Seniors Suzanne M. Pomey ’02 and Randy J. Gomes ’02 allegedly stole about $90,000 from the Hasty Pudding Theatricals. They were due to be arraigned February 5 in Middlesex Superior Court. Pomey produced the 2001 show, Fags for the Memories, and was business manager of the 2000 production, The Jewel of Denial. Gomes helped organize the 2001 man- and woman-of-the-year awards. Both live in Winthrop House.

Living Wage: Next Stage

On the last day of January, President Lawrence H. Summers announced that the University would adopt the “living wage” recommendations of the Harvard Committee on Employment and Contracting Policies. (The text of the president’s statement is available at www.news.harvard.edu/gazette/2002/0131/01-katz.html). HCECP delivered its final report in mid December; the document (available at www.hcecp.harvard.edu) climaxedit a month-long “comment period” that subsumed the Christmas vacation. Summers was expected to announce his decision on the report’s recommendations on January 18. Instead, he waited almost two more weeks to “distill what he has heard from a wide variety of people inside and outside the University,” according to Harvard spokesman Joseph Wrinn. In the meantime, activists kept up their pressure for low-paid workers by renegotiating wages covered in existing collective bargaining agreements—specifically, lifting hourly wages to a minimum range of $10.83 to $11.30; second, that Harvard enact a wage-and-benefits policy that ensures parity between the University’s in-house pay scales and rates paid to those working in comparable jobs at Harvard under the aegis of outside contractors.

The committee rejected the demand put forward by the Progressive Student Labor Movement (PSLM), the group that spearheaded the Massachusetts Hall occupation, that Harvard ban all outsourcing of labor. Instead, the report says that “the University must ensure that outsourcing is used to increase quality and spark innovation, not to depress the wages of Harvard’s own service employees.” This statement goes to the core of the committee’s analysis. Outsourcing has
A New Model

For a University committee, HCECP—which included faculty members, administrators, unionized workers, and both undergraduates and graduate students—was unprecedented in its composition. Given this, perhaps its most remarkable accomplishment is the degree of consensus it reached on a controversial issue. “It was clearly a broad committee, both in terms of breadth of knowledge and different perspectives,” says professor of economics Lawrence F. Katz, who served as chairman. In the course of its work, HCECP collected responses from more than a thousand members of the Harvard community, including many postings garnered from the committee’s website. “People [on the committee] took the issues very seriously and put real effort into gathering the facts, both quantitative data and qualitative information,” adds Katz, who was officially on leave yet worked at least full-time on the task for much of the fall term. “This created a common pool of information that was quite rigorous and was extremely important to have before debating the analysis and the issues. If at the outset we had started debating whether there should be a living wage, we couldn’t have resolved differences and come to an agreement.”

“...—such as grade inflation and the status of ROTC, both issues that interest President Lawrence H. Summers.” The key lesson here,” Katz concludes, “is not necessarily about student activism, but that thoughtful deliberation and getting all points of view is extremely valuable.”

been the central mechanism that has driven down mean real hourly wages for Harvard’s in-house service workers by 7.5 percent between 1994 and 2001 (from $12.47 to $11.54 per hour as of last September). Meanwhile, the demographic characteristics of these workers have shifted: immigrants, Hispanics, and those lacking a high-school diploma now constitute a much larger fraction of Harvard’s service workers. (As of last September, 76 percent of the lowest-paid workers were nonwhite and 43 percent had not completed high school.) As the University moved toward hiring outside contractors to provide services formerly performed by Harvard staff (markedly so in custodial and uniformed-guard services), “outsourcing competition put pressure on Harvard’s unions to bring wages down to the rates paid by outside contractors in several service sectors,” says the HCECP report.

In the case of custodians, for example, Harvard staff and contract workers were represented by the same labor union, Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 254. In 1996, that union and Harvard agreed to lower the pay of nearly all Harvard’s in-house custodians to levels specified in SEIU’s area-wide master agreement. “[T]he committee is troubled by allegations that the previous leadership of SEIU Local 254 failed to adequately represent the interests and preferences of its members both within and outside of Harvard,” says the report. Overall, HCECP concluded that the decline in real wages for low-paid Harvard service workers during the past decade “to a large extent represents the effects of wage pressure created by outside contracting in combination with weakness on the part of at least one critical local union (SEIU Local 254).” The University has reopened negotiations with the union and expects to address the wage portions of other contracts after the SEIU talks conclude. The plan is to have all such bargaining finished or in progress by May 2002.

HCECP rejected the idea of adjusting wages annually to reflect the Boston-area cost of living, a policy that PSLM advocated. Furthermore, the report intentionally avoided fixing any permanent, specific minimum wage for Harvard. (But the committee acknowledged that “we are sympathetic to the intended goals of such a policy.”) Many HCECP members felt that to define a wage floor would address the symptoms, but not the causes, of declining pay. And if unions tried to push pay above the specified minimum, “contractors could still undercut them by paying the minimum Harvard wage,” the report asserts. “Thus the wage floor could also become a kind of wage ceiling.” According to the report, the proposed parity-wage-and-benefit scheme would avoid this problem. “The parity-wage system has advantages,” says Katz. “It uses collective bargaining—the most effective mechanism in the United States for improving the living conditions of workers. Historically, it has led to higher wages.” Harvard plans to draw up a parity-wage-and-benefits policy by the end of March.

HCECP’s rough estimate of the annual cost to Harvard and its contractors of paying those higher wages is $2.4 million to $3.7 million. Assuming that security workers’ pay would rise in any case, especially given the fallout from September 11, the adjusted overall cost of the committee’s proposals would fall in the $1.9 million to $2.9 million range, according to the report.

The HCECP recommendations addressed the quality of work life as well as compensation, and Summers also endorsed the suggestions in this area. “The University is in the process of developing a statement of workplace values and norms that will include a commitment to dignity and respect for on-campus workers at all levels and a statement of rights and responsibilities in University employment,” his statement declared. Harvard will take several steps to improve the work environment, including a training program for those who manage service workers and enriched education and training opportunities.

Although the entire committee backed the recommendations presented, the report did include three “concurring statements” signed by a total of eight committee members who wished to voice views that diverged from the consensus document. The lengthiest of these by far was a seven-page addendum signed by three students and two union workers, who advocated, among other things, a total ban on outsourcing, an explicit wage floor, and protection of workers’ capacity...
to organize labor unions. (A twentieth member, professor of economics Caroline Hoxby, resigned from the committee in October, claiming that its data-gathering process was biased in favor of the living-wage position.)

PSLM activists have consistently emphasized the moral aspect of the issue, contrasting the size of the University's $18-billion endowment with the penury of its service workers, some of whom, the PSLM claims, qualify for food stamps. For its part, HCECP “considered moral and ethical issues as well as economic issues,” says Katz. The report itself, however, generally couched such concerns in more neutral language, such as: “Harvard has an obligation to be a good employer to fulfill its teaching and research missions. A good employer provides the wages, benefits, and other conditions of employment necessary to attract, retain, and motivate employees.”

Not all members of the University community endorsed even this analysis. In a Crimson column, Jason L. Steorts ’01 wrote that “HCECP essentially wants you to believe that Harvard’s academic aims are compromised because cashiers at the Greenhouse [the Science Center cafeteria] make less than $10.83 per hour. Please. I suppose, then, that once Harvard’s least skilled and (forgive my frankness) most replaceable workers get raises, we’ll see Nobel Prizes and research grants rain down like manna from heaven... HCECP doesn’t offer one shred of evidence demonstrating a relationship between the wages of Harvard’s lowest earners and the University’s academic output...”

On occasion, HCECP’s reasoning leaned toward a more explicitly ethical grounding. The report argued, for example, in favor of “compensation levels that significantly contribute to ensuring that Harvard's workers and their families enjoy at least a minimally decent standard of living... A good employer should work to ensure that its lowest-paid and most vulnerable workers share in economic prosperity and do not disproportionately and inappropriately bear the brunt of adjustments to economic and financial hardship.”

**War of Words**

**Any new Harvard president was bound to establish new priorities, altering the expectations built up during the prior decade and forging new relationships with faculty members. Compared to the situation facing Neil L. Rudenstine in 1991—the University, in tight financial straits, was gearing up for a huge fundraising effort—the new millennium afforded opportunities to take stock of what use was being made of the wealth that had been accumulated in the prior decade.**

Indeed, since assuming office last July, Lawrence H. Summers has articulated new goals such as enhanced undergraduate education (and restraints on grade inflation), faculty growth, and investments in science. Along with those broad institutional aims, he has begun to retire Harvard’s academic culture. Summers emphasized “hard-won comprehension” over “soft understanding” in his October 12 installation address, for example, and has repeatedly stressed the primacy of teaching and scholarship over diverse outside engagements or programs not clearly rooted in the core faculties. Summarizing his remarks at a January 25 annual meeting of the Harvard Club of New York, he said in a subsequent interview, “There is no more important responsibility in academic leadership—whether by department chairmen, deans, or presidents—than setting high standards, insisting that high standards be met, and calling for excellence in serious scholarship and in commitment to teaching.”

Those public pronouncements have been accompanied by private reviews of programs and by the active questioning of every aspect of University operations. Some of those questions have had a bearing on public policy, as in his thoughts on the academy’s attitude toward military service and queries about Harvard’s off-the-books financing of ROTC.

Such changes in priorities and personnel, accompanied by seemingly broad skepticism concerning Harvard’s contemporary position, were likely to engender some friction. But who would have forecast a firestorm?

At the close of business on December 21, Harvard settled itself for a long winter’s nap. The holiday lull was broken the next morning by a front-page Boston Globe story headlined, “Harvard ‘Dream Team’ roiled.” Three members of the Afro-American studies department, it said, might decamp for Princeton. (Those named were chairman Henry Louis Gates Jr., DuBois professor of the humanities; Cornel West, Fletcher University Professor; and K. Anthony Appiah, Carswell professor of Afro-American studies and of philosophy.)

Their reasons were reported, without attribution, as ranging from a meeting at which President Summers was said to have “rebuked” West for his scholarly performance, to the president’s perceived serve on affirmative action and his style generally. The subject was particularly heated, perhaps, because Rudenstine had ranked Afro-American studies at the top of his priorities, recruiting scholars and securing substantial resources for the department, and commenting extensively on diversity throughout his presidency. The article quoted Summers as regretting any “very unfortunate misunderstanding” of his views, and a subsequent University statement affirmed his interest in retaining all of the faculty members at Harvard.

The ensuing clatter became deafening. The news office handled queries from some forty-five dozen media organizations. During a time of war and economic recession, the story made the New York Times seven times by January’s end—twice on page one and once indexed there. At mid month, a Washington Post columnist counted nearly 300 newspaper and magazine articles on the subject. If few of these accounts added to the store of facts, they at least proved the appetite for stories about matters of race, Harvard and its new president, and his interaction with “star” professors.

The intersection of president and professor—Summers and West met in October—apparently had all the ingredients for a perfect storm. A popular teacher, West is also widely known outside the academy for general-interest publications like Race Matters, as a lecturer, for a recent CD recording called Sketches of My Culture, and as campaigner for past and prospective