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## Judge vents, but Torres mystery goes unsolved

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The tension was so thick in federal court Tuesday afternoon, you could cut it with a knife. There was Angelo Torres of Hired Truck fame flanked by his two defense attorneys, **Marc Martin** and Ted Poulos. There was the prosecution represented by Assistant U.S. Attorney Barry Miller. And there was U.S. District Court Judge James Holderman who was practically breathing fire from the bench. He was positively seething. Torres is the 38-year-old former head of the city's scandal scarred Hired Truck Program. In many ways, he is the unwitting poster boy, the symbol of a corruption-plagued, patronage-ridden political system that threatens to undo every positive accomplishment that Mayor Daley would like to lay claim to in his 16 years at the helm of Chicago government.

More than that, Torres is at the heart of a question that has dogged the Daley administration for the last 18 months, one the mayor and his corporation counsel Mara Georges have refused to answer: Who hired Angelo Torres and put him in charge of hired trucks?

When Sun-Times reporters Tim Novak and Steve Warmbir broke the first Hired Truck story on Jan. 23, 2004, it was with Torres' picture on the front page of the newspaper. The unlikely, largely unqualified head of the city's \$40 million Hired Truck Program, Torres was arrested by the FBI four days later and became the first of many dominoes to fall in a federal investigation that is anything but over.

As investigations go, it has everything: mobsters, bribes, phony minority and women owned businesses, extorted campaign contributions and the political rigging of city hall hiring.

Torres stood before Judge Holderman as a man ready to take his medicine. Though he had declined to cooperate with the ongoing federal probe, he had admitted his own corruption and pled guilty.

Holderman's fury, however, was not directed at Torres. Quite the opposite. It was the federal prosecutor against whom he raged.

To be fair, Holderman has not exactly been what you'd call a fan of the U.S. attorney's office either before or since Patrick Fitzgerald headed it. Still, what happened in his courtroom is instructive on a lot of levels.

No one disagrees that Torres took bribe money and betrayed the public trust. But what Holderman zeroed in on was that, in his view, the

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government was over the top in trying to cast Torres, a street mope, as Public Enemy No. 1 in its ongoing quest to extract more incriminating information from him on as yet unnamed or unindicted co-conspirators. And since the government could not assign a dollar value to the amount of taxpayer money lost to the Hired Truck corruption, well, it was hard to determine the damage done. And since even the government agrees that Torres did not even know John "Quarters" Boyle, one of two "co-schemers" in the Hired Truck bribery scams, Holderman refused to tag Torres with responsibility for some of the other corruption going on around him.

Holderman accused federal prosecutors of "seeking further retribution" from Torres because he was refusing to cooperate. Assistant U.S. Attorney Miller, who looked like he would just as soon spent the day with his oral surgeon, insisted that was not the case.

In the end, Torres is still going to prison but for less time than federal prosecutors would like. Holderman sentenced him to two years rather than 6 1/2.

I can't say as I blame federal prosecutors for trying to get Torres to say more than he has already. They believe they know who was responsible for putting him in charge of a program that in truth he didn't really run. But they could use his help in proving it. Then again, I agree with Holderman as well in recognizing that Torres is really just a mope in this, a cog, not a wheel, not someone who really runs things.

Tuesday, in yet another federal court room, U.S. District Court Judge Wayne Andersen expressed his own exasperation. His target was the city and its willful violation of the Shakman decree against political hiring. He appointed a federal monitor to take over where the city left off.

What happened in these two federal courtrooms all but eclipsed the message Mayor Daley tried desperately to send Tuesday. Flanked by five new cabinet-level hires, the mayor said, "Life goes on, you better believe it. The city moves forward."

Yes, it does. And it must. But not until we all get the whole story. And that includes getting a simple answer to a simple question: Who hired and promoted Angelo Torres?

Carol Marin's column appears Wednesday and Sunday.  
Color Photo: Scott Stewart/Sun-Times / Angelo Torres (right), former head of the Hired Truck Program, leaves court Tuesday after his sentencing for taking bribes accompanied by his attorney **Marc Martin**;

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