

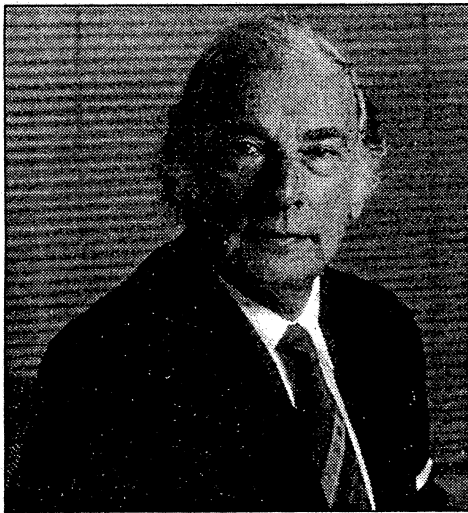
FOLLOW-UP

Bedouin Inquiry Makes Findings

The Israeli government official who heads the Authority for Bedouin Education should take an immediate leave from his position and publicly apologize for slurs he made against Bedouins in a July Jewish Week article.

Those are the recommendations of a government inquiry headed by Professor Doron Mor into statements made by Moshe Shochat, *The Jewish Week* has learned.

Mor stopped short of asking for Shochat's resignation, a move urged by Bedouin activists here and in Israel, and his recommendations did not rule out the possibility that Shochat could re-apply for his position. The report did



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urge that the Education Ministry begin a search for a new director of the Bedouin Education Authority; which has never been headed by a Bedouin.

The inquiry was established after *The Jewish Week* quoted Shochat as saying the Bedouins are "bloodthirsty" and that they "commit polygamy and continue to expand their illegal settlements, taking over state land." Shochat went on to question the need to provide indoor plumbing in Bedouin schools because "in their culture they take care of their needs outdoors. They don't even know how to flush a toilet."

After initially denying Shochat had made the statements, the Education Ministry explained that the statements were aimed not at all Bedouins but at certain Bedouin activists. Shochat apologized for his comments in testimony before the investigating committee.

Ronit Tirosh, general director of the Education Ministry, is reportedly sympathetic to keeping Shochat in his position and decided not to make public Mor's recommendations.

Government sources say that since the Education Ministry has decided to re-examine the legal status of the Authority for Bedouin Education, with the possibility of closing it, the ministry is not forcing Shochat to take a leave of absence.

The submission of the report came on the heels of a week-old strike of 42,000 Bedouin students who refused to attend school until Shochat was fired.

"The Ministry of Education has yet to officially accept the findings of the Mor Commission, and if they don't we are planning a new strike for Nov. 1," said Alex Biletzki, lawyer and consultant for the Bedouin Campaign. Hundreds of Bedouins have protested recently outside Shochat's offices in Beersheva demanding his resignation.

"It would be amazing if the ministry were to reappoint Shochat," said Biletzki, "because now that the position is open to the public he has to compete against other candidates and he has no degree in education whatsoever."

Shochat, who has headed the Authority for Bedouin Education for the past 15 years, refused to comment on the recommendations.

"If the government accepts the inquiry's findings, then I'm satisfied," said Robert Arnow, a Jewish philanthropist who is a major funder of Bedouin causes. "But I find it a little disturbing that the position will be open to Jews. I understand that they want a qualified candidate to replace Shochat, but they should be able to find a qualified Bedouin to fill that position. Who better than a Bedouin would understand the Bedouins' needs?"

Sheik Agal Al-Atrash, director of the group Peaceful Coexistence Between Jews and Bedouins, disagreed.

"Shochat has apologized for what he has said and his words, although hurtful, don't negate all the good work he has done for us over the past 15 years," he said. "There are two types of Bedouins: the authentic ones that live in the hills and those that live in the cities. If the ministry is going to appoint a Bedouin from the city, we would rather have a Jew like Shochat building our school system."

Robby Berman