

## **A Dark Independence Day for Israel, Denying Leftist Mathematician Top Honor**

Nothing better illustrates Israel's situation on the eve of its 73rd Independence Day than the decision to withhold the Israel Prize for mathematics and computer science from Prof. Oded Goldreich until the state has examined his political opinions and determined to what extent he is really a leftist. Israel boasts of being a high-tech power, of being an international leader in vaccinating its people against the coronavirus and of continuing the Zionist ethos of making the desert bloom. But Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and the ministers of his court are leading Israel, in the same breath, toward an authoritarian regime of silencing dissent and persecuting anyone suspected of disloyalty to the government. And that's even before the establishment of his dream-team government – a “totally right-wing” coalition that includes racists, Kahanists, homophobes and Islamists whose dream is to return to the Middle Ages and completely eliminate freedom of expression.

[Goldreich](#)'s scientific excellence, which won the esteem of the Israel Prize jury, is of no interest to our right-wing government. As far as it's concerned, his research accomplishments can be thrown in the trash because he dared to protest against the occupation and one of its symbols, [Ariel University](#). The message to Israel's scientific community is clear – become collaborators or be humiliated. At least scientists have so far been spared the violence of Public Security Minister Amir Ohana's police. But this violence has been turned against anti-government protesters in the streets, like MK [Ofer Cassif](#) of the Joint List, who was beaten by police officers at a demonstration in Jerusalem Friday.

Netanyahu and his collaborator, Education Minister Yoav Gallant, didn't invent anything in the [Goldreich affair](#). They are marching down the crooked path of other powers that have subordinated science and culture to the interests of the regime. But of course, it's forbidden to make comparisons to Nazi Germany, which drove Albert Einstein into exile because of his Judaism. Or to the Soviet Union under Stalin. Or to America during the McCarthy era, with its blacklists. Or to Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban, who are destroying academic freedom in their own countries today. Like those regimes, the Israeli right also wants a chorus of support for the occupation and the settlements, not scientists and cultural figures who will dare to protest against moral crimes and violations of international law. It's disappointing that the attorney general backed Gallant, and that the High Court of Justice quickly acceded to the state's position by barring Goldreich from being awarded the prize at the state Independence Day ceremony Wednesday evening.

Goldreich's colleagues at the Weizmann Institute of Science sided with him. Former Israel Prize laureates and the heads of all the universities (apart from that bastion of the religious right, Bar-Ilan University) also protested the decision to deny him the prize. And all of them deserve praise for standing up to Gallant and those behind him. Like Goldreich, who hasn't recanted his views and dreams aloud about the day when the left becomes the majority, they are providing a ray of hope to the Israeli spirit amid the heavy clouds gathering over our 73rd Independence Day.

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