

Editorial |

# Israel's Education Ministry Has Lost a Battle

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Prof. Oded Goldreich will receive the Israel Prize for mathematics and computer science at a ceremony at the Education Ministry on Monday, in recognition of his scientific achievements. Goldreich will receive the prize even though the education ministers in two successive governments – Yoav Gallant and Yifat Shasha-Biton – were politically opposed to giving it to him. Their opposition stemmed from the fact that he signed a petition urging the European Union not to cooperate with Ariel University, which is located in the West Bank.

Goldreich will receive the prize thanks to a High Court of Justice ruling two weeks ago. Justice Isaac Amit's ruling discussed the dangers of [denying someone the prize for political reasons](#). "Stripping a noted academic of the Israel Prize because of sporadic statements of any kind is an invitation to monitoring, surveilling and persecuting Israeli academics," he wrote. The court did well to rule that the minister exceeded her authority and made it clear to her that the Israel Prize isn't a carrot the state gives its supporters in the scientific world.

Anyone who hoped the minister would accept the decision graciously, back herself out of her political corner and give Goldreich the prize in a way that respects him, the prize, the ministry and the State of Israel was delusional. "Someone who calls for boycotting an Israeli academic institution doesn't deserve the prize," [declared Shasha-Biton](#), the opponent of boycotts. She then decided to boycott the ceremony, as if she were a student activist in the Im Tirtzu organization rather than the education minister in a so-called "government of change." In her stead, the prize will be awarded by the ministry official in charge of the Israel Prize, David Pulver.

Shasha-Biton's behavior in this affair is shameful. The "government of change" portrayed itself as a government whose goal was to fix the unacceptable norms that took root under former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's divisive government. The hope was that once this government was formed, the persecution of the left and the gradual process of making the battle against the occupation illegal would come to an end. There was an expectation that Shasha-Biton would overturn her predecessor's [McCarthyist decision](#) and announce that Goldreich's political positions are irrelevant to the Israel Prize, because the prize is awarded for scientific excellence, not loyalty to the government. Shasha-Biton had a golden opportunity to correct an injustice, but she chose instead to entrench the culture of gagging the left.

This won't help Shasha-Biton, Gallant or any of their fellow deniers of the occupation. It's impossible to make the truth illegal. Establishing a university in occupied territory is a criminal act, and this fact won't change even if everyone who believes it is silenced. Goldreich's protest wasn't just legitimate, it was justified. And his battle to end the occupation is far more patriotic than the battle being waged by those trying to silence him. Anyone who doesn't understand that would do better to stay home.