



Professor Michael Lewis

Photo: Tommy Harpaz

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Interview "Calcalist" - Prof. Michael Lewis: "adopt American social model? God forbid, do not do it"

Professor Lewis from Hunter College, a world expert in the island - equality, deals with the problem occurs even among citizens of Israel: on the one hand want to pay less taxes, and they do not want to cut government services provides a mechanism

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Something is changing in the United States in recent years and this change directly affects Prof. Michael Lewis from Hunter College in New York. Lewis explores the themes of non-equality, poverty and welfare policies, issues often forgotten in the U.S., which enshrines the value apostrophe. But since the economic crisis in 2008, which hit hard the strongest force in the world, and especially since the outbreak of social protest last September, took Areas Lewis's research center of public debate.

Lewis is considered one of the biggest names in American academia in research, social work in the economy. Not in terms of academic, he deals mainly with the question: how to improve the situation of the poor living in the U.S. often appalling conditions. Meanwhile, Lewis has an impact on social welfare policy and dealing with poverty in New York.



Professor Michael Lewis from Hunter College, a world expert on the island - equality Photo: Tommy Harpaz

During his visit to Israel this month, Lewis lectured at the conference organized by the College of Economy Tel poverty - living, college social - economic and protest encampment in Kiryat Shmona and met with academics and government in dealing with the Israeli welfare policy. When asked in an interview with Louis Layoffs "whether he thought Israel should approach the American welfare model, it gives clear and concise answer:" No, God forbid. Do not do it ".

"Capitalism is also dangerous for the rich"

Relative to other Western countries, the U.S. welfare policy known extremely limited. The same principles that guide the American policy, as was most concerned about the employees and citizens all citizens, captured in recent years the Israeli decision makers, even if not yet widely implemented. Thus, For example, in the days of Benjamin Netanyahu as finance minister toughened criteria for income support and unemployment benefits and was introduced into Wisconsin, conditioned the provision of active job search allowances or receiving any professional training.

What problems with the current welfare policy in the U.S.?

"The main problem is that America has no idea of ensuring a minimum income. Capitalism is a system for the rich, too dangerous, because you always have some risk can not work for some reason. I think government's role is to ensure minimum income for those who do not work. America is indeed the order of the unemployment benefit and there is a federal program in temporary needy families (TANF) - Program Department \$ 500 a month for a family who, along with food stamps and health insurance. But it often happens that a man loses his job and exhaust the entitlement to unemployment benefits and program assistance . Besides, with the time going and stiffen the criteria for entrance to the federal aid program. "

Want government services, do not want to pay taxes

Occupy mass protest movement in Wall Street, that arose in recent months, is one of the most fascinating phenomena of recent years in the United States. The movement has focused public attention in his field, Lewis: growing gap between income decile and the top echelons of the business and other income U.S. citizens. Congressional study, published last week, found that in the decade between 1996 and 2006, increased

salaries of the upper echelons of the business and the top percentile in the U.S. by 74% and 96% respectively, while the reward for the middle classes increased by 10%. Data others suggest that one percent of the population controls 23.5% of revenues and 40% of the assets in the United States.

Alongside growing income gap, Lewis points out the American government's response to the economic crisis in 2008 as a protest movement that produced the U.S.: "A lot of the American public realized the federal government as moving money to banks instead of people," explains Lewis, "and the public felt it was unfair that those who carried out the manipulations finance that led to the crisis are paid. Protesters Wall - Street are mostly students who felt they had a lot to expect from the labor market after taxes his studies. They see their parents get into trouble, while the bankers get government support and of course feel that the island - justice and lack of fairness".

"I think we have a serious political problem. It may sound irrational, but many U.S. voters have high expectations on the one hand from the government, and on the other side are not summarized it. Many believe the U.S. government apparatus is too large and want to pay less taxes, but do not want to cut government services provides a mechanism," explains Lewis cultural phenomenon, which apparently also attacked Israeli citizens.



Protest at the Wall Street branch of Bank of America in New York Photo: Bloomberg

How to cope with 45 million poor people?

In most European policy differences between deciles remained relatively limited past three decades, due to the relatively broad social policy which depended on cultural norms of cooperation and mutual assistance. Thus, for example, the share of income of the top percentile in Europe by 5% 10% during that period. In contrast, the basic policy of low taxes in the U.S. and minimal government intervention, causing the expansion gaps.

Growth gaps is the result of lowering taxes on the rich since the '80s?

"The gaps began to grow in the 80s and continue to grow until today, but not only as a result of lowering taxes on the rich. Presidents Ronald Reagan and George Bush Sr. and son tried to stimulate the ailing economy by cutting taxes for the rich, because they believed that if the rich have more money, They spend more and the money will seep to the

poor. but at the same time, many studies have shown that the education system the U.S. has deteriorated and gaps in skills between rich and poor grew. In addition, Reagan began an assault on unions in the private sector and is now less than 9% from the private sector is bound to. The combination of three elements These led to an increase of social inequalities and poverty in the United States ".

Is the U.S. can get close to Europe and reduce the non-equality?

"I'm for it but I can not see it happening. The protest movement is only slightly increased the chance of such a change, it puts the problem of non-equality and poverty at center stage. But it's hard to imagine the United States change the direction of France. I know it's hard goods for sale in the U.S.. "

The number of poor in the United States now stands at about 45 million people. This figure did not change anything in the public mind?

"Once the American public thought my watch is laziness or making bad choices and poor fault condition. But today it is clear that this is not the case, even the people who worked hard to drop below the poverty line. Can be a reality will help to arouse sympathy for broader social policy in the United States".

How to reduce the number of poor people?

"There must be a minimum income support for unemployed, that would allow them life but then again not too high so

Create a disincentive to the island - work. Besides, the U.S. has a

notion that in order to reduce poverty, people need to go to work. It's not necessarily true. If I could turn to President Obama, I would tell him not to focus sanctions on those who did not work but just take care of poverty ".

Professor Michael A.. Lewis

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