Episode Book

EPISODE #6065

Israel Votes, Part 3: A Renter's Voting Recommendation

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SYNOPSIS

Daniel is a renter in Jerusalem who calls the rental market an unregulated swamp, and he asked us to score Israel's parties against his own priorities and give him a voting recommendation. So we did — against his views, not ours. From a Fair Rental Law stripped of its rent cap to a state rental program that just closed to non-reservists for two years, we walk through what each list actually offers on rent, cost of living, and the democratic questions he cares about. The result is a scorecard that says less about who's winning and more about what no party is willing to promise.

TRANSCRIPT



Corn

A renter in Jerusalem gets a message from the landlord a month before the lease is up. The rent is going up, here's the new number, you can take it or you can leave.



Herman

And there is nothing in Israeli law that says what that number can be.



Corn

That's the scene Daniel is living in, more or less, and it's what he's asked us to finish this series with. Two episodes on who's running and what they say they stand for. Now he wants us to take what he's told us over a lot of prompts about rent, about the cost of living, about how life actually feels here, and score the parties against it. And then, his words, give him a voting recommendation. Which party is most aligned with him.



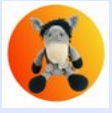
Herman

And we're going to. With one thing said once and then left alone. Corn and I lean right, Daniel knows that, and this is not our ballot. It's his. So we're scoring against his views, not ours.



Corn

Agreed. Start with what we actually know about him, because I don't want to build this on a caricature.



Herman

The clearest thing, by a distance, is renting. He's called the rental market here a jungle. An unregulated swamp. He's pointed out that Israel effectively has tenancy at will, and that the one serious attempt at reform failed. He's said that even if he owned a home tomorrow he'd still see this as an urgent civil issue, and that the people writing housing policy have mostly never been tenants.



Corn

He's also gone after brokers. A month's rent plus VAT, paid by the tenant, to someone the landlord hired.



Herman

The money-go-round for everybody except the renter. That's his phrase. Then cost of living more broadly. He's said Israel kept the market distortions of an old socialist system and dismantled the social protections. He points at a few families controlling the economy, import bottlenecks, the standards institute. He wants Scandinavian-style public services and real competition.



Corn

Which is an unusual combination. Anti-cartel and pro-welfare state. That's not a party, that's a Danish person.



Herman

It's a coherent position, though. He doesn't want tax cuts, he's said the tax burden here isn't actually that high. His complaint is what you get back for it.



Corn

Beyond economics?



Herman

Secular, and feels it in Jerusalem. He thinks the law effectively legalising Haredi draft evasion was shameful. He's worried about the democratic architecture under this government, and he's openly critical of the far right and of settler violence. On security he's not a dove. He supported the war's aim of removing the Iranian threat. His anger is about how the state treated its own people on the home front.



Corn

There's the part that stops this from being simple. He's not a straightforward anti-Netanyahu voter.



Herman

No. He's called the minute-by-minute scrutiny of Netanyahu's October seventh timeline a frenzied witch hunt, and warned against discarding a statesman who's done enormous good. He's said he feels alienated from the protest movement. And the thing he says most consistently about Israeli politics is that it's all meta-issues. Security, identity. On both sides. Nothing that improves people's daily lives.



Corn

The test he's set us, then, is the test he'd set the parties. Ignore the branding. What will you do about rent?



Herman

That's the test. And the first finding is grim. There is no rent control bill alive anywhere in the system. When the Knesset dissolved in July every pending private bill lapsed, and nobody had put forward a cap on rent rises this term anyway. The Knesset's own research office put it in one line. Israel has no rent control on the free market.



Corn

What does the Fair Rental Law actually do, then? It's been on the books since twenty seventeen.



Herman

Minimum standards for habitability, a written contract, a limit on how big a guarantee can be, deposits back within sixty days. What it doesn't do is the two things that were in the original draft. A cap on rent increases, and a requirement to offer long leases. Both were stripped out before it passed.



Corn

A fair rental law with the fair taken out.



Herman

It's the bit about the paperwork. And the numbers since then go the way you'd expect. The average rent in the city of Jerusalem was about five thousand two hundred and eighty shekels a month in the first quarter. Up three point three percent on the year. Which, against inflation running at one point six, is real money.



Corn

What about the renewal moment, specifically? Because that's the scene we opened on.



Herman

There's a split in the national index that's revealing. In July, tenants renewing paid two point six percent more. New tenants paid four point seven. So moving costs you more than staying, which is exactly the leverage a landlord has at renewal.

L

Larry

This is a public service announcement. Every year, thousands of renters face the silent danger of the lease. Many do not survive renewal. Know the warning signs. A landlord who says the word market. A broker who appears without being summoned. A contract longer than your arm. The Ministry of Concern urges every family to prepare. Protect your household with a Lease Shield, a laminated sleeve that keeps your rental contract dry. Rent control, now in clear plastic.



Herman

A laminated sleeve isn't rent control. Rent control is a statutory limit on the rent, and Israel hasn't got one.



Corn

Let it go, Herman.



Herman

It's still not rent control.



Corn

Party by party, then. Who even talks about renters?



Herman

Very few, and I'll go from least to most. Otzma, nothing found. Smotrich's list, a platform page of document titles, and a campaign about settling a million people in the Negev and Galilee. Shas and UTJ, no platforms. Shas is running a cost-of-living campaign called Starving for Change, but it's sat in government, and both Haredi parties have made a yeshiva law their precondition. Given what Daniel's said about the draft, I think we can set all four of those aside without much argument.



Corn

No argument from me. Likud?



Herman

Likud is more interesting because it has a record, not a platform. Three things a renter should know. VAT went from seventeen to eighteen percent at the start of last year and stayed there in the budget. The import reform, what's good for Europe is good for Israel, passed, and that's real credit. And then the dairy reform got pulled from the budget after two Likud ministers opposed it.



Corn

They opened the door to European yogurt standards and then guarded the cows.



Herman

Then the housing record. In April the Israel Land Council approved a plan called From Reserve Duty to a Key. At least half of the discounted-purchase lottery flats go to reservists. And until the end of twenty twenty-eight, all of the state's long-term rental flats, the ones twenty percent below market, go to reservists and IDF widows.



Corn

All of them.



Herman

All of them.



Corn

I'm not going to argue with prioritising reservists. But for a renter who isn't one, the state rental programme just closed for two years.



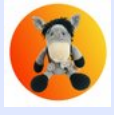
Herman

That's the effect. And it was approved six months before an election. So, on Daniel's test, Likud scores low. Not because it's hostile to renters. Because it hasn't thought about them as a category.



Corn

The Democrats? I'd have guessed they'd be the obvious home for a Scandinavian.



Herman

You'd think so, and on economic philosophy they are. Bigger state, public housing, public childcare, shorter work week, eighty percent of the transport budget into public transit. Naama Lazimi is the MK who commissioned the Knesset research on young renters. But the housing platform itself is headline level. Tackle the housing crisis at its root. I couldn't find a rent mechanism in it.



Corn

Tackle it at its root is what you write when you haven't found the root.



Herman

That's unkind and probably accurate. And there's a second problem on Daniel's own terms. Golan called the killing of Khamenei a strategic mistake. Daniel backed the war's aims on Iran. That's not a small gap.



Corn

Liberman?



Herman

Liberman actually has a housing plan. Twenty thousand rental units a year. Rent-to-buy for young couples, with up to thirty percent of your rent counting towards equity. Land tenders judged on build quality and final price, not on what the state gets for the land. Plus food concentration reforms, Shabbat transport, civil marriage. And he's the only list with a Jerusalem-specific pledge. Moving government institutions to the city.



Corn

Which, for someone who wants Jerusalem to have an economy, is not nothing.



Herman

It isn't. The catch is the conditions. Housing benefits tied to military or national service. Daycare subsidy only where both parents work a combined hundred and twenty-five percent of a full-time job. It's welfare with a time sheet attached. Would you take that deal, Corn, if you were him?



Corn

I'd sign half of it and argue with the other half. I think Daniel would too. The building plan, yes. The time sheet, he'd want to know who's checking it.



Herman

Then the two big ones. Bennett and Lapid, Beyachad, have the most developed supply plan of anyone. A hundred thousand long-term rental flats in a decade, forty percent of them at thirty percent below market. Tax breaks for landlords who sign leases of five years or more. Binding deadlines on planning and permits. And on cost of living, a pledge to cut food prices by thirty percent in three years and force Shufersal to sell some stores.



Corn

Thirty percent in three years is a bold number for a country where cottage cheese started a protest movement.



Herman

It's very bold. Probably too bold. But it's a number, which is more than most of them have. Plus daycare from birth, and Shabbat transport by local choice. What it doesn't have is anything on rent rises, deposits, or brokers. It's all supply.



Corn

Eisenkot?



Herman

Yashar is the only list that has put anything on the table about rent itself. Walla reported its housing plan in September. Publish real rent and purchase prices by region. Expand long-term rental. Tax incentives for long leases. Rules limiting how fast rent can rise during a lease. And whoever hires the broker pays the broker.



Corn

That's Daniel's broker complaint, almost word for word.



Herman

Almost word for word. And Roy Folkman is on their list, one of the people behind the original Fair Rental Law. Now, the caveat. When TheMarker ran it as rent control, Yashar denied it. They say they won't impose rent control on the free market, and Shaul Meridor talks instead about incentives for developers and institutional investors to build rental projects.



Corn

So the one party that said the words then said they hadn't.



Herman

They said a narrower thing. Limits on increases during a lease, and the broker rule. Both of which are real tenant protections in the Israeli context.



Corn

Before you score the big two, what about the rest of it? He didn't only ask about rent. Prices, and how life actually feels here.



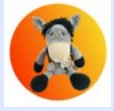
Herman

On prices the picture is bad and the pledges are thin. The Aaron Institute put food here about twenty-seven percent above the richest European countries. Lobby Ninety-Nine found the big suppliers raised prices by around ten percent since October twenty twenty-three, during the war.



Corn

A wartime windfall in cottage cheese. That's the bit Daniel would find hardest to forgive.



Herman

He's said as much, more or less. Nobody has an electricity pledge. Only Beyachad, Liberman and Zelekha go after the food cartels with any specifics. On daily life, Jerusalem's Green Line light rail opened its first section in August, but the bill that would



Herman (continued)

have created metropolitan transport authorities, Jerusalem included, was pulled before dissolution. Yashar and the Democrats both say they'd pass it immediately.



Corn

And the thing he cares about that nobody's offering?



Herman

Electoral reform. He wants constituencies, representatives you can actually find, the Irish or German model. Not one list offers it. The nearest is term limits on the prime minister, which is a different problem.



Corn

Daycare?



Herman

Daycare is where the draft and the cost of living meet. The UTJ bill to restore daycare subsidies for families of draft evaders passed a preliminary reading in May, the coalition lost its majority for it, and it almost certainly lapsed with the Knesset. Beyachad promises supervised daycare from birth. Yashar puts reservists and working families first.



Corn

Herman, I'm going to make you commit. If it's just rent and cost of living, nothing else, who wins?



Herman

Yashar on rent, Beyachad on cost of living. What would you weight more?



Corn

Rent. He's angry about cost of living. He's angry and specific about rent. It's the issue he says he'd still care about if it stopped affecting him.



Herman

Then it's Yashar, and I don't disagree. Now add the rest. On the draft, Yashar's plan bites through benefits, which is the only enforcement anyone believes. On religion and state, civil marriage and local Shabbat transport, at least in the press reporting. On democracy, an independent judiciary, term limits, a Basic Law on legislation. On security, a hawk on Iran, which fits him. Eisenkot even calls the two-state solution a grave mistake, which isn't Daniel's stated view but isn't against it either.



Corn

What doesn't fit?



Hilbert

Control. You've both been saying rent control all afternoon. It isn't control. It's a speed limit.



Herman

That's fair, it's a limit on increases within a lease.



Hilbert

During a lease. Not between them. I rang my cousin Ruthie while you were doing Liberman. She's been a broker in Rehavia for forty-one years. I rang her on the hall phone, the grey one on the shelf by the door, plugged into the wall socket next to the boiler switch, which is why I can only call people when the hot water's off. I held it away from my snout, she was loud. Ruthie says nobody raises the rent during a lease. Nobody's ever done it. They wait for the renewal, like the man in Corn's story at the top. A speed limit on a road nobody drives on.



Corn

So the protection is on the part of the year where nothing happens.



Hilbert

That's Ruthie's view. I wouldn't trust Ruthie with a spare key. She rents her own flat to her ex-husband, Moshe, Tuesdays to Thursdays, and to his brother the rest of the week, and charges both of them her own brokerage fee, a month plus VAT, every January. She says that's compliant. She has a letter from somebody. She says the broker rule, landlord pays, will be the end of the profession, and also that she'll simply charge the landlord twice, so it'll be fine. She asked me which one I was voting for and I said I'd tell her after, and she said in that case she'd vote for the opposite to be safe. She's done that every election since she got the vote. She says it's cancelled me out eleven times and she considers it a public service. She keeps a ledger. Moshe has to sign it.



Herman

She's not wrong on the mechanics, though. If the limit only covers increases mid-lease, the renewal is untouched. What would actually change things is a cap at renewal, or a right to renew.



Hilbert

Which none of them have. Ruthie says the last people to propose that were laughed out of a committee. She said it fondly. Ruthie has an unreasonable affection for committees. She did the signage for the old central bus station, years ago, before she went into flats, the arrows that went the wrong way. She was very proud of those arrows.



Corn

So Yashar's rent plan is weaker than it sounds, and still stronger than everyone else's.



Hilbert

It's people renting flats to people. Most of them are trying to be decent about it.



Herman

A speed limit during the lease, plus making landlords pay their own brokers, is real. But the renewal is where Daniel gets hurt, and on that nobody on this ballot has anything.



Corn

Then let's be clear about what the recommendation can and can't buy him.



Herman

Here's where I land. If I'm Daniel, I vote Yashar. It's the only list that has even acknowledged the renter as a person with a problem, it has a Fair Rental Law veteran on its slate, and the broker rule is a direct hit on one of his named grievances. Beyond housing, it lines up with him on the draft, on the courts, on religion and state, and on Iran. And it's polling first, which means a vote for it makes an Eisenkot-led government more likely, not less.



Corn

My one objection is that Eisenkot's whole pitch is that anyone in office on October seventh is unfit. That's the exact blame politics Daniel called a witch hunt.



Herman

That's the strongest case against, and it's real. If that line bothers him more than rent pleases him, the alternative is Beyachad. Better on cost of living, the biggest rental supply plan, daycare from birth. Bennett also wants the state commission, but he's campaigning more on prices than on blame.



Corn

The ones you'd steer him away from?



Herman

The Reservists and the Economic Party are tempting. Zelekha's anti-tariff instincts are close to Daniel's on imports. But they're polling right on the threshold, they won't say which bloc they'll back, and a vote that lands at three point one percent is a vote that disappears. Gantz is under the threshold in every poll. And the Democrats are closest to his economics but furthest from him on Iran, and their housing plan is a slogan.



Corn

So. Yashar first, Beyachad second, and don't throw it at the threshold.



Herman

That's my recommendation. With the footnote that neither of them will fix the renewal problem. That has to be fought for after the election.



Corn

The misconception I'd name is that somewhere on this ballot there's a party offering rent control.



Herman

There isn't. The most anyone offers is a limit on increases during a lease and making landlords pay their own brokers. The renewal, where the rent actually goes up, isn't on anybody's platform.



Corn

What I'll be watching after the twenty-seventh is whether anyone in the new Knesset puts the renewal itself on the table. A right to renew, or a cap on the rise at renewal. Because that's the moment that actually hurts.



Herman

It's also the one moment nobody's campaigning on.



Corn

Our thanks to Hilbert Flumingtop, our producer, for everything behind the desk on this series.



Herman

This has been My Weird Prompts. If this series helped you, a review on Spotify helps other people find it.



Corn

See you tomorrow.