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## Interview: Lennart Skov-Hansen

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# Sanctions must be lifted to stop further loss of life in Iraq

*Lennart Skov-Hansen is the deputy general secretary of Danchurchaid, the relief organization of the Danish State Church. He was interviewed in Copenhagen on May 17 by Poul Rasmussen.*

**EIR:** You were among the very first to arrive in Baghdad after the Gulf war. What did you see?

**Skov-Hansen:** I arrived in Baghdad on March 7 as a member of a delegation from the Middle East Church Council. The MECC has its office in Limasol, Cyprus, but throughout the period leading up to the Gulf war, we had a stock office in Amman, Jordan, to coordinate the relief work for the refugees from Kuwait and Iraq. It was from here that we brought in the first Western shipments of emergency relief, which arrived in Baghdad on March 7. Our group consisted of a representative from Danchurchaid—myself—a representative from the Norwegian Church Relief Organization, and a couple of people from the British Christian Council in Amman.

As I said before, it was a very strange feeling to arrive in Baghdad. We drove from the Jordanian border through Iraq during the night and arrived in Baghdad at dawn. We went through the suburbs and got to the center of the city very early in the morning. It was more or less like a ghost town. Perhaps, we had expected to find much more material damage, since we had followed the bombings of Baghdad night after night; but to our surprise, the destruction was very limited, at least at first impression—a few buildings here and there, and most of the bridges across the Tigris River. It was not until later in the day that we realized what kind of buildings had been totally destroyed. They were very strategic sites: ministries, TV, communications, pumping stations, the water supplies, the electricity supplies, and those kinds of things. And it was not just one attack and one round of bombings, but countless bombings during the short time of the war. The same strategic buildings had been hit again and again, and then, of course, the bombs that had missed their target, and hit the residential areas in the suburbs and in Baghdad.

All of this might be very difficult to comprehend, but Iraq is not a traditional Third World country. Baghdad is a very large and modern city of 4-5 million people. Therefore, it

takes a lot of those missiles to destroy concrete buildings, and that was what they had done very thoroughly and effectively. They had cut the nervous system of the city, and paralyzed it in a way that affected people living a big city much harder than if they were living in the countryside or in a Third World country. If you are already dependent upon modern facilities, on drinking water coming from a faucet, and on a toilet that can be flushed, then you are in deep trouble the day these things are cut. We were quite shocked, when we realized how effectively these things had been destroyed.

**EIR:** There has been a great deal of discussion about whether or not legitimate military targets were bombed.

**Skov-Hansen:** From our standpoint, these were not military targets. First of all, Baghdad was not a war zone as such. It was Kuwait they were supposed to liberate. In our opinion, Baghdad was not a war zone, and post offices, central telephone exchanges, and things like that are not obvious military targets, neither are ministries. I do not know how military targets are defined. If it is installations of weapons and the production of weapons, yes, but that is not what we are talking about. They were clearly civilian targets, if one does not limit civilian targets only to residential areas. I am not an expert in those things, so I don't really know, but for us, they were civilian targets, as if you bombed the central post office in Copenhagen.

**EIR:** Ramsey Clark and others have clearly said that these were not military targets and therefore, the U.S. government should be held responsible for what it did (see interview with Prof. Francis Boyler, *EIR*, May 24, p. 66).

**Skov-Hansen:** It is a matter of definition. I think that this war was a totally new type of war. It was not a conventional war in the sense that it was a totally different way of conducting a war, with completely new types of weapons. And that is a very effective way to paralyze a society. Therefore, if they consider them military targets, it is because civilian targets also become military targets when you want to paralyze the society.

**EIR:** Danish Radio reported recently about an article in the *New York Times* by a journalist Paul Lewis, who said that

the initial reports about the damage in Baghdad might have been all true, but that now everything is functioning normally, and that water and electricity have been restored. He said that the Iraqis were much better organized than anybody had expected and therefore the sanctions should continue, because otherwise Iraq would become a military threat again.

**Skov-Hansen:** I was at a U.N. meeting in Geneva on May 15. There, Prince Aga Khan [U.N. Executive Delegate for the Humanitarian Program in Iraq] gave a report on his last visit to Iraq, including Baghdad. The issue was the Kurdish and the Shiite uprising. He had been in Baghdad to make an agreement with the authorities about a comprehensive relief effort everywhere, both in the Kurdish area and in the south-eastern area around Basra. He reported that things now function much better in Baghdad, but not in any satisfactory way yet. Maybe the center of the city is being restored, but in the outer areas the supplies of drinking water, etc., have not at all been reestablished.

And the food situation is a catastrophe. Iraq is totally dependent upon imports of food. The production has stopped and they do not have the foreign currency to import food. That is why there is a catastrophic shortage of food. The water supplies still do not function. The pumping stations are down. There are massive problems with garbage collection. The sewer systems are only functioning in limited ways. Still, Baghdad is slowly returning to normal life.

But the situation is much worse in the countryside and around Basra. That is the area that was hit hard by the Gulf war and the uprising afterwards. Here, there used to be very effective modern agriculture. This has been smashed too. There are no power plants, and the irrigation systems do not function. Therefore, they fear a mass migration into Iran, because the entire area is threatened by starvation. Again this goes to show that Iraq is not an underdeveloped country. One could imagine if our own big cities and our own agriculture were destroyed.

**EIR:** Did you discuss the sanctions issue at that meeting?

**Skov-Hansen:** Yes, indirectly, by way of concluding that unless the sanctions are lifted and trade is resumed, the Iraqi people will become totally dependent upon humanitarian aid, which is totally insufficient. In a way, this was an indirect message, saying that trade has to be reestablished, so people can get the necessary food, and so that self-sufficient agriculture can become reestablished in order to stabilize the situation and prevent the loss of lives.

**EIR:** And that is what you suggest?

**Skov-Hansen:** Yes, and that was also our most important recommendation after our first visit right after the war. That is—sure we can accomplish something in a relatively short period of time through emergency relief and humanitarian aid, but you cannot continue that for half a year or one year. Therefore, the only effective way to help the civilian popula-

tion is to lift the sanctions. But then there is the double effect, that is, they fear that this could be used for other things, and that is why the allies maintain the sanctions.

**EIR:** But aren't there some very unpleasant consequences if the sanctions continue?

**Skov-Hansen:** That is clear.

**EIR:** Then what are we going to do?

**Skov-Hansen:** You have the humanitarian goals and consequences and the political ones. They are not always compatible.

**EIR:** But, how can we have a political policy that is contrary to a humanitarian attitude?

**Skov-Hansen:** Very easily, because isn't that what they are trying to do to Iraq? We have the sanctions, and then the population is suffering. That is supposed to be the motivation for them to overthrow the regime, or to get them on their knees and accept the conditions. That is why the sanctions are there.

**EIR:** As a human being, one has to react to that kind of thinking. What needs to be done now? What are the plans of the various relief organizations for Iraq?

**Skov-Hansen:** Right now we are very busy trying to help in northern Iraq. That is, help the returning Kurds, and it is a massive job to resettle almost 2 million people. Then there is the Baghdad area. But there are areas which were hit even worse, especially from Baghdad down to Basra, which certainly got its share both during the war and the civil war after that. That is the area which we are now trying to reach. We have an airplane leaving tonight directly from Luxembourg to Baghdad. That is the latest of a number of airplanes bringing 50 tons of food and medicine. It is the first time we are flying directly to Baghdad. Part of the supplies will go up north to the Kurdish area, and part of it we will try to get down to the civilian population in the southeastern areas. We have been as far as Kirkala, 100-150 kilometers south of Baghdad, but we will now try to get even further south.

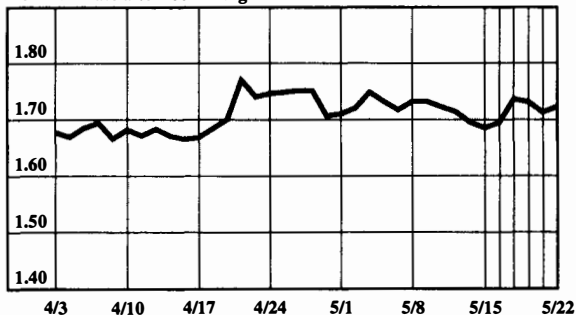
When I say "we," I mean Danchurchaid in collaboration with MECC, which includes all the small Middle Eastern churches. Some of these are very old churches like the Orthodox Syrian Church, the Assyrian Church, the Armenian Church, etc. There are 12 of these represented in Baghdad. They have negotiated with the authorities and the Red Crescent organization and have been met with great cooperation. It is only a question of solving the practical problems, like availability of diesel fuel and gasoline in order to get the shipments organized for such large quantities of supplies. But we know where the hospitals are, where the institutions are that can receive and distribute the supplies, so it is only a question of getting out there.

**EIR:** Can you give us any news concerning the situation of

# Currency Rates

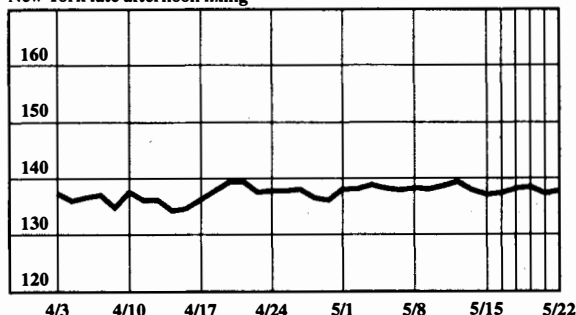
## The dollar in deutschemarks

New York late afternoon fixing



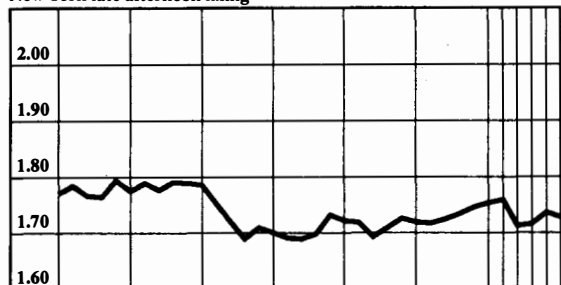
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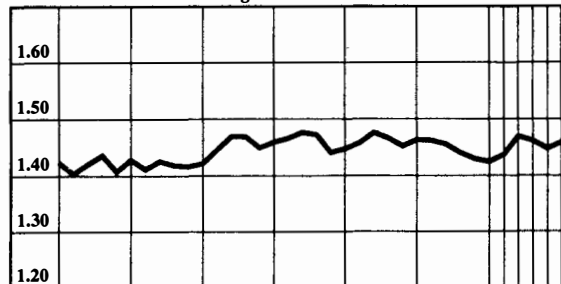
## The British pound in dollars

New York late afternoon fixing



## The dollar in Swiss francs

New York late afternoon fixing



the children in Iraq?

**Skov-Hansen:** Our very first contact in Baghdad was with the Saddam Children's Hospital, the main children's hospital in Iraq, where we spoke to the director and the chief surgeon. They were extremely good contacts, because they were very open and kind. In this way we also got a good sense of the situation in the country as a whole, because the children were referred to the hospital not only from Baghdad, but also from the rest of the country. When we were there the situation was chaotic. The hospital was overcrowded and there was no medicine. Later, we visited the hospital several times, when we had new shipments. Yes, now they have started to receive medicine and the things they need to help the children, but there are still a lot of reports of diarrhea and intestinal problems, mainly from the polluted drinking water. The situation in the hospital is better and some of the supplies can be further distributed, but the number of cases they receive show that the water supplies are far from being satisfactory.

**EIR:** Looking at the proportions of the problems in Iraq, Iran, and Kuwait, can this be handled by the private relief organizations alone, or do we have to involve the Western governments?

**Skov-Hansen:** There is no way that we can handle it on a private basis. We have never said that we could. We could never reach anything that resembles effective help for Iraq. Danchurchaid couldn't; 120 relief organizations couldn't, because we are talking about immense resources that are needed. What we have participated in—and I would say in an effective manner as a voluntary private organization—has been a limited first aid. But in the long run that is no help. What is needed is a totally different kind of effective help and reconstruction. Maybe we have saved some children, like at the Saddam Children's Hospital—which now functions and can take care of the patients, which it couldn't do when we arrived on March 7, thanks to the medicine and food which we and others have supplied. That is what we call first aid. But we have to reach the stage where all the health institutions and the hospitals, so to speak, make themselves superfluous. That is not happening. Of course, there will be children hospitalized even under normal circumstances. But the kind of diseases they are getting now, the cases of diarrhea and malnutrition, are due to an abnormal and very catastrophic situation.

These are clear signs that something else has to be rectified, and that is the food situation—the rebuilding of the domestic agriculture, and more than anything else, that means imports of pesticides, fertilizers, and seed grain. They do not even have that in the area to get the agriculture functioning again. In addition, they have to import food. Probably 40-60-70% of the food has to be imported.

**EIR:** And that means lifting the sanctions?

**Skov-Hansen:** Yes.