

Politics, different culture impress Canadian student visitor

By CATHY McDONALD

William Sovie chats eagerly about Indonesia.

A first year student at Mount Saint Vincent University, Sovie returned last March from three months living in a small Indonesian village, where he helped fix fences, install a clean water system, teach English, and in the process made a few Indonesian friends.

Sovie was a participant in Canada World Youth, an exchange program with Third World countries. He learned about a culture very different from his own.

"It's a much slower pace than Canada. You can live just as fulfilling or a more fulfilling way of life because your life is more simple."

"It's an Asian society, with a completely different way of thinking. You can't judge it with Western morals. That would be completely wrong," Sovie said.

Sovie said he noticed that distributors of foreign magazines in Indonesia voluntarily inked out what might be unflattering to the government. This included a movie review and an accompanying photograph in the international magazine *Asia Week*. The movie was *The Year of Living Dangerously*, a popular 1982 American film depicting Indonesia during the 1965 abortive coup.

In memory of that coup, which marked the beginning of the present regime, Sovie said a great monument was erected in the capital city Jakarta, of the seven murdered generals. Its inscription reads "Let it never happen again."

As shown in *The Year of Living Dangerously*, the attempted communist coup was quickly crushed

by the military's right-wing. In the resulting anti-communist purge, half a million people were killed, according to Amnesty International, and more than three-quarters of a million people were arrested and detained.

Sovie appreciated the dilemmas for Western agencies and countries who wish to provide aid to Indonesia.

Canada World Youth has had a ten-year relationship with Indonesia, but as Sovie explained, that relationship has not always been easy.

Canadian participants must learn to be "culturally sensitive," which includes avoiding certain political

subjects. Ill-considered remarks in a country where political expression is controlled in an iron grip, could jeopardize the Canada World Youth program, if higher authorities got word of it, Sovie said.

The Canadians couldn't ask direct political questions. Sovie said if someone mentioned the word *Fretelin*—the guerrilla resistance movement in Indonesia-occupied East Timor—all the Indonesians would clam up, and conversation would stop.

"But we still had lots to talk about," he said. And if enough trust was built up between friends, an Indonesian might open up on more controversial issues.

Canada and Indonesia

Canada's policy towards President Suharto's regime in Indonesia has been friendly, interested in promoting trade, but apparently not concerned with the human rights situation there.

Martin Rudner, a writer for *Canadian Business Review*, said the abortive coup of 1965 and subsequent change in government resulted in a more favourable Canada-Indonesia relationship.

"Although Canada's ties with Indonesia had been minimal, the change of direction since 1965 has prompted increasing Canadian involvement as a friend and supporter of the (new government)," Rudner said last spring, in an article entitled "The Advantages of Trading with Indonesia."

Canada enjoys a balance of trade surplus with Indonesia which totalled \$167 million in 1982, according to the Canadian International Development Agency. Bilateral aid to Indonesia has also increased, to \$18.15 million in 1980-81. Indonesia is now the third largest recipient of Canadian aid, 80 per cent of which must be spent on Canadian goods and services.

Former Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau made a clear statement on Canada's human rights policy when he visited Indonesia and other Southeast Asia countries in January, 1983. He told reporters he had no intention of "trying to right any wrongs that may be taking place in these countries."

Indonesian lawyers study at Dalhousie

By CATHY McDONALD

The five Indonesian lawyers look a bit uncomfortable at being interviewed. Struggling with their newly-learned English, the four men and one woman describe their enthusiasm at coming to study environmental law at Dalhousie.

"The library is very complete, maybe there's too many books," said one student, while the others laughed.

"This is a new subject in our country. Canadian law has been developed well, so we can take that experience, even though the system is different."

The five Indonesians are the first exchange students to come to Canada as part of Dalhousie's Environmental Manpower Development in Indonesia (EMDI) project. They are studying at the Weldon Law School and will return after three years to teach at Indonesian universities.

Already nearing the end of its first year, EMDI is coordinating student and professor exchanges between Canadian and Indonesian universities, to help train 300 environmental professionals. EMDI also acts as a consultant to the Ministry of Environment, aiding the implementation of its 1982 environmental management law.

The \$5 million, three-year pilot project was launched at an official signing ceremony last November, attended by Indonesia's Ambassador to Canada. EMDI is funded jointly by Indonesia and the Canadian International Development Agency.

The Weldon Law School, by

participating in EMDI, will increase its staff experience in environmental law and enrich the teaching environment at Dalhousie by holding special lecture series and conferences. Also, Weldon will gain international recognition in this field, to complement its high reputation in marine law, according to a brief outlining EMDI's attractions to Weldon's faculty council last April.

"Literally dozens" of people have expressed an interest in working with EMDI, said Arthur Hanson, director of Dalhousie's Institute for Resource and Environmental Studies (IRES). Hanson has himself worked in Indonesia in various ways for 12 years. He said what he gained personally from the experience was much more than what he put in.

Geoffrey Hainsworth, EMDI project manager and a recruit from the University of British Columbia, said Dalhousie is now the foremost expert on Indonesian environmental issues.

"(EMDI) puts IRES and Dalhousie on the map as a centre of excellence," he said. "It attracts students and faculty here."

Hainsworth said the strong link between Dalhousie and Indonesia will provide placement opportunities for graduate students to experience working in the international development field. He added that faculty members have made significant sacrifices, leaving behind families to participate in the project.

Hanson said universities have a tendency to be insular when they should be getting involved in a fast changing, interdependent world. He said EMDI is a chance for Dalhousie to get "windows on the world."

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especially Amnesty International's work, Indonesia announced the release of 10,000 prisoners in 1979 after 12 years' incarceration without trial. The action was welcomed by human rights organizations, however they are still concerned for the Indonesians who were not released, who have been re-arrested, or whose rights are still severely restricted.

Black said Dalhousie could send a powerful message of disapproval to Indonesia by refusing the project or by attaching a condition or statement expressing the university's concern.

"We opposed it not so much because the program was bad, but we said there's just as much good in sending a message to Jakarta (capital city) of disapproval," he said.

"There's no debating human rights conditions are very bad," Black continued. "It was a debate as to how much we can do to improve it."

Black is also wary of Indonesia's interest in EMDI. He said the project improves Indonesia's image as a country recognized and supported by a respectable Canadian institution. But from what he knew about the Indonesian government, he was skeptical the EMDI project could benefit the Indonesian people.

His cynicism stems in part from Indonesia's infamously high levels of corruption. Members of the military-backed government and its civil service are ensured large personal profits by controlling foreign access to the nation's natural resources. The *Washington Post* reported that past anti-corruption cam-

paigns have had little effect. Black finds it incongruous that the legal system Dalhousie hopes to aid is expected to enforce environmental guidelines on the same foreign companies that bribe members of the government.

Hanson acknowledged the problem of corruption. "It's an important concern that environmental legislation is not amenable to corruption and also that it doesn't hinder the pathway to development," he said.

Hanson stressed, however, that it's not Dalhousie's role to place value judgements on Indonesia's development strategy, but rather to provide resources and expertise to "help the Indonesians help themselves."

"If we don't do anything, there's certainly no hope for any improvement."

He said human rights abuses and other concerns must be appreciated in the context of Indonesia's history of political instability since gaining independence in 1949. He also noted that forces for change within the country can be reinforced by outside contact.

Above all, he said the contact between cultures through programs like EMDI, which gives Indonesians exposure to Western values, is the best opportunity for change.

"We have to try to develop understanding between citizens of nations. Ultimately it's the best we can hope for."

But David Fraser feels Dalhousie and the Weldon Law School have ignored their institutional goal to educate about human rights. "I don't think we've set a very good example in not upholding human rights in Indonesia."

