

Freedom for East Timor

In March 1997, Dal-Tech (then TUNS) awarded an honorary degree to Indonesia's minister of industry and trade, Tunka Ariwobowo. In an April 2nd, 1997 column in the *Daily News*, Parker Barss Donham criticized the ceremony, which both TUNS and Ariwobowo had hoped to keep secret.

In the same column, Dalhousie president Tom Traves defended our six research projects in Indonesia as an issue of "free speech and research freedom." Both the University of Guelph and the University of Toronto have renounced projects in Indonesia — why not Dal?

The "Peace Action Group," a working group of NSPIRG, will be holding a teach-in on Thursday, September 15 at noon, which will consider media coverage of East Timor and examine Dalhousie's ongoing involvement with the Indonesian government.

East Timor has been getting lots of news coverage in the past three weeks — most of which doesn't give us enough background to understand what is going on. Here's what the East Timor Alert Network (ETAN/Canada) offers as an introduction:

East Timor, an island country about 450 kilometres northwest of

Australia, has been illegally occupied by Indonesia since 1975. So far

over one third of the Timorese population has perished in the worst genocide, per capita, since the Holocaust.

The tragedy of East Timor is one of the world's best kept secrets. For years Indonesia has been a favoured trading partner of Western countries because of its cheap labour and resources. That's why so many governments, including Canada's, have helped keep East Timor's genocide a secret.

Tens of thousands of Indonesian troops and secret police remain in

East Timor. Access to the territory is severely restricted — journalists and international observers are only occasionally able to get in.

Resistance is rewarded with disappearance, rape, torture, arrest or murder.

For example, on November 12, 1991, in what is known as the Dili Massacre, hundreds of unarmed women, men and children were killed for demonstrating for self-determination. Despite these risks, the East Timorese believe that to resist is to win, and defiantly continue their struggle.

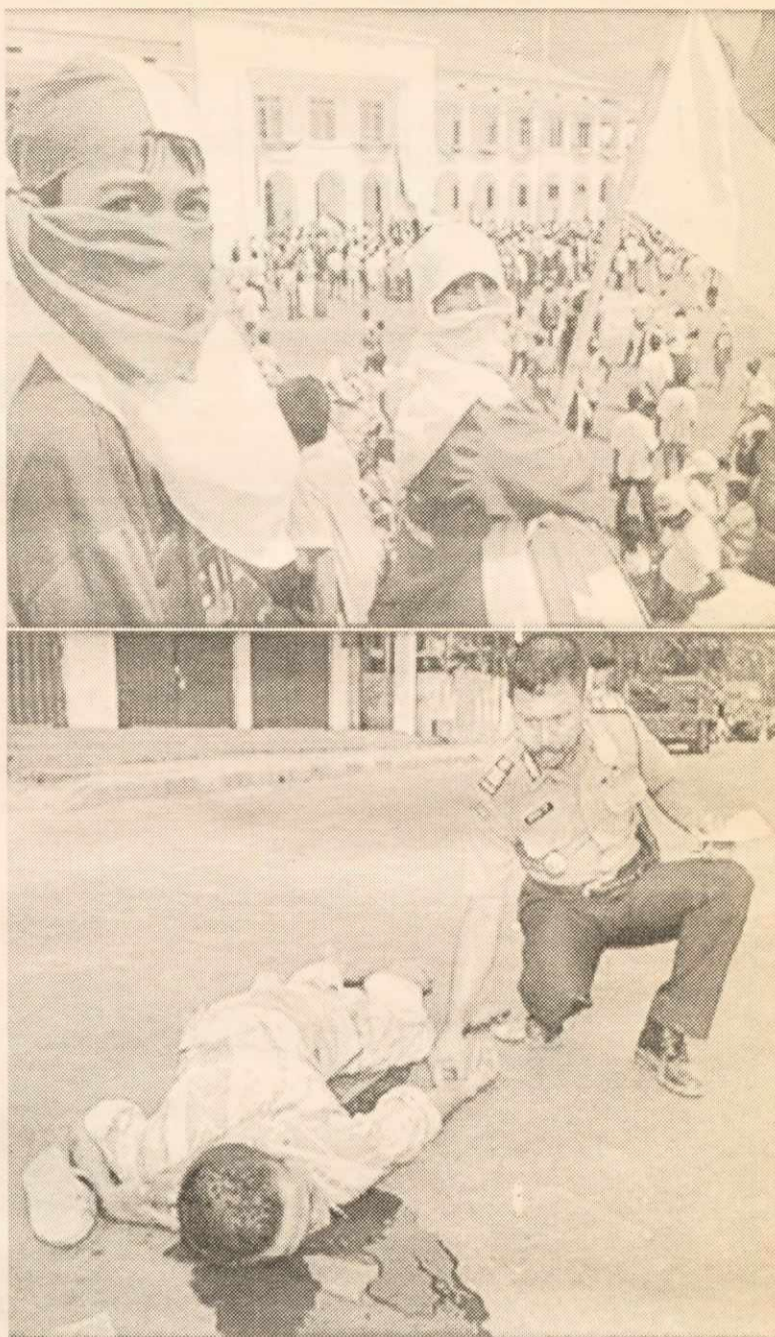
The resignation of former Indonesian president Suharto in May 1998 has brought new hope and energy to the push for a

referendum on self-determination in East Timor and democracy in Indonesia. Pressure to end the occupation is increasing, both inside Indonesia and in the West. Many Indonesian pro-democracy movement leaders have publicly supported East Timor's struggle.

In Canada, ETAN is working to end Canadian military sales to Indonesia and for the Canadian government to publicly support the East Timorese people's right to self-determination.

The current campaign of terror in East Timor started months before the referendum. It was led by militia's, backed by the Indonesian military, who wanted the public to vote for integration into Indonesia over independence. Organized under UN auspices, it was the first time since the Indonesian military invaded in 1975 that the Timorese were allowed to democratically determine their future.

Despite all the intimidation, almost 99 per cent of the population voted on August 30, 1999, with over 78 per cent supporting independence. Less than 24 hours after the results were announced on September 2, reports of violence, killings, and even massacres were heard from all over the country. Since reporters, international observers and UN workers have been forced to retreat by militia intimidation, reports are unavailable for much



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