

# To strike or not to strike

So 100,000 students are expected to take part in a nation-wide strike on January 25, huh? I wonder if anyone told students in Halifax about this.

"When is that strike?" I asked one of our reporters before sitting down to write a Social Security Review rant.

"Who's going on strike?" replied one of our editors.

I've got a funny feeling that about 9,975 Dalhousie students will be asking the exact same question come Wednesday, January 25.

The strike is the brainchild of the Canadian Federation of Students, an organization we will no longer belong to in a few months. Council decided not to support the strike because it may tarnish the reputa-

tion of the Dalhousie Student Union.

Personally I think the student union would rather walk through fire than endorse anything the CFS proposed, but that's just a theory.

You can see their point though. Who wants to put their name behind an event where the number of International Socialists will outnumber the rest of interested Dalhousie students by three to one?

Still, do you see anything else being done about Lloyd Axworthy's proposed cuts?

The answer of course is "No." Tuition hikes keep on happening while government aid keeps going down. For most students it has merely become a fact of life, just another small annoyance at the bottom of a

long list of worries, falling way behind "must finish assignment," "must pay rent" or "must graduate."

I've taken part in a few protests and except for seeing a photo in the papers or seeing a clip during the six

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politicians

o'clock news, nothing concrete had been achieved. I saw insults hurled at non-stick-teflon-coated politicians only to see them slide right off the intended victim or thrown back at the attackers. I've carried plac-

ards, yelled slogans and once wrote a very angry opinion piece condemning the entire student body for not joining me in a protest.

I've calmed down a bit since then but I still support the upcoming student strike. I don't think it's the most constructive method of dealing with the government, but it is the most accessible.

In her book, *Fire with Fire*, Naomi Wolfe suggested an alternate method of protesting tuition hikes. Instead of forking tuition fees over to the university, students could pool their money and have it held in trust as a bargaining tool to battle tuition hikes.

Can you imagine if everyone at Dalhousie got in on this? Two million dollars plus would make for a

very big bargaining chip. I think this would be a more effective way of protesting fee increases but it would take a lot of organizing and a lot of committed students. In the meantime, I'm not sure how this bargaining tool could be used as leverage with the government.

That leaves us with a strike and an accompanying protest. Yes, it's been done before, and yes, it's unlikely that Lloyd Axworthy's conscience will suddenly kick in and put a stop to all this cutting nonsense. But until we come up with a better way of being heard, striking is the least we can do.

Besides, it will probably be the best excuse you'll have all year for skipping class.

Judy Reid

# Dalhousie ignores East Timor horrors

When, in 1983, Dalhousie embarked upon a multi-million dollar development project with the mass murderer, torturers, and international gangsters who constitute Indonesia's military-dominated government, there were a few dissenting voices amidst the general chorus of enthusiasm.

Part of the EMDI project (Environmental Manpower Development in Indonesia) involved training Indonesian lawyers at the Dal law school where several professors protested forging a connection with a government with such an abominable human rights record and which was engaged in a genocidal campaign against the people of East Timor.

One of the more vocal opponents of the project — which was eventually endorsed by the law school and which after periodic renewals, is still being carried on today — was law professor David Fraser. Angered by the support EMDI received from the majority of his colleagues (excepting Bill Owen, Vaughn Black, Peter Stokoe, Philip Gerard, and others who also opposed it for human rights considerations) Fraser wrote in a notice circulated after the vote, "we would have admitted the German scientists who expressed a desire to reduce emissions from the smoke stacks of Belsen and Dachau."

Fraser's analogy should not be dismissed as mere rhetorical hyperbole. On the contrary, in many respects it is an appropriate and revealing one and should induce us to consider very seriously the moral implications of Dalhousie's involvement with Indonesia, an issue which has received far too little attention over the past few years.

First of all, consider the Indonesian government's record under its current president, General Suharto, genocidal psychopath extraordinaire. Suharto came to power in 1965 after a U.S. backed military coup, and proceeded to transform the country into a charnel house. In the so-called communist purge of 1965-1969, actually "one of the most extensive and brutal slaughters in human history" (Chomsky), Suharto and his loyal thugs directed the massacre of between 750,000 and more than a million people, mostly landless peasants,

and left countless thousands more to be starved or consumed by diseases in Indonesian prisons. This auspicious beginning was followed by two decades of unbelievable brutality including genocidal campaigns against the East Timorese (over 200,000 killed; starvation, torture, rape, mutilation, napalm, defoliants, concentration camps extensively employed) and against the West Papuans (over 100,000 killed), with the usual totalitarian measures for reducing the population at home to submission.

The worst massacres may be past, but little has changed in Suharto's Indonesia. East Timor is still illegally occupied. Papua still writhes under Indonesia's boot. Institutionalized death squads, torture, and disappearances still make free speech the exclusive prerogative of heroes and martyrs. In short, Indonesia (now — surprise! — a paradise for Western investors) remains one of the most vicious totalitarian states in the world. The percentage of East Timorese murdered under Indonesian occupation (a third of the population) in itself makes Fraser's reference to the Nazis singularly appropriate, irrespective of Suharto's other crimes, which are legion.

Presumably, simple humanity and concern for the victims of Indonesian oppression would dictate that the most conscientious position to adopt toward such a regime is one of concerted opposition, demonstrated by encouraging and contributing to international pressure on Indonesia to come into minimal conformity with international law: to withdraw from East Timor; to abolish death squads, refrain from torture, and so on.

However, as I discussed in a previous article, not only has no such opposition been forthcoming from Western governments, ours included, but instead they have been engaged in actively supporting and profiting from Indonesia's policies. The U.S. instigated the 1965 massacre and after winking at the invasion of East Timor, provided 90% of the weapons used to slaughter its people. Meanwhile the U.S., Canada, Britain, France and others — all with investments and markets in Indonesia — sabotaged U.N. initiatives to terminate the atrocities. Truly an "obscene abandonment of world moral order" as Chomsky called it.

Now David Fraser considered, not

implausibly, that EMDI was an extension of this disgraceful profit driven abdication of basic humanitarian and legal commitments since it not only tacitly legitimized Suharto's government but deliberately, as a matter of policy, avoided any meaningful reference to what ought to have been its primary focus: the terrible human rights violations in Indonesia.

The project's proponents — of course completely uninfluenced by the millions of dollars coming to Dal from CIDA and Indonesia — see the matter in a quite different light. EMDI architect and ex-director of Dalhousie's Institute for Resource and Environmental Studies, Arthur Hanson, contemptuously dismissed the principled stance of EMDI's opponents as driven by "armchair political motivations," claiming that the benefits which would accrue to the people of Indonesia suffering from the results of environmental degradation and mismanagement should be the primary focus.

several professors  
protested

"Each year more than 300,000 Indonesian children under five years die of environmentally related diseases," he wrote in defence of EMDI in 1984. Hanson also maintained that we should not try to impose our conception of human rights upon other countries.

"Most other countries in the world do not have these standards," he remarked.

Regarding this last argument, Hanson seems to be implying that the desire to be free from torture, death squads, forced resettlement, and mass murder is one peculiar to the people of our advanced Western nations (i.e. the very ones which have ensured that these practices can be effectively carried on) and is not shared by the benighted Indonesians, Timorese, and Papuans who no doubt live under these pleasant institutions — so reflective of their own "standards" — by choice.

A curious notion, but then, as Guelph professor John McMurty noted: "Multi-million dollar contracts generate their own logic."

With respect to Hanson's more serious argument — that the potential benefits of the project for the

people of Indonesia are significant and outweigh its drawbacks — this is highly doubtful. To begin with, the real causes of the very serious environmental problems in Indonesia have far less to do with mismanagement or technical ineptitude than with widespread political corruption. Western countries like the U.S. and Canada have supported Suharto precisely because he has been so willing to open Indonesia to wholesale exploitation by multi-national corporations, while gratifying his own boundless rapacity and that of his entourage of generals and disregarding the welfare of the masses of Indonesians and the environmental integrity of the country.

It is this and not a lack of properly trained lawyers or extensive knowledge of the importance of biodiversity, rainforests, and sustainable development that has created the abominable poverty and environmental degradation that threaten the lives of those children for whom Hanson, in his very selective humanitarian zeal, professed himself so concerned.

EMDI may indeed effect some positive changes in how the environment in Indonesia is managed, but as long as the political situation remains what it is, these changes really are comparable to "reducing emissions from the smokestacks of Belsen and Dachau." Not only will EMDI fail to have any but the most marginal impact on the worst problems under which Indonesians are suffering, which are obviously institutional, but as it involves working hand and glove with the government and refuses to criticize its activities as a matter of policy or to make a stand of any kind for the victims of its atrocities, it lends the regime an appearance of respectability behind which it can maintain its oppression all the more effectively.

Seen from this perspective, projects like EMDI appear to contribute to rather than counterbalance the responsible abdication of Western responsibility that has made the terrible death and destruction in Indonesia, East Timor, and West Papua possible in the first place and has allowed it to continue for the past thirty years. The project may be consistent with the Canadian government's business-driven pro-Indonesian policies; but it can scarcely be reconciled with the civilized principles and the ethical and academic

standards it is the obligation of a Canadian university to uphold and advance.

A final word: A long and at times heated debate was carried on at Guelph University over its involvement in the similar enterprise in Indonesia, the Sulawesi Regional Development Project, resulting in the Senate Committee on International Development Affairs ordering an external review of the project.

In this review, authors Clovis Demurs and Meyer Brownstone (former head of OXFAM Canada) weighed the arguments of both sides carefully and concluded that the current nature and scope of human rights abuses by the government of Indonesia and the legitimization conferred upon it by the close bilateral relations involved in SRDP, made it inconsistent with Guelph's own written policy on international activities, commenting, "the university does legitimize the Indonesian government in the eyes of the members of its community by being intimately associated with an oppression such as that of Indonesia, in clear contradiction of the ethics of the university and its traditional aspirations." The Indonesian government, always so receptive to criticism, responded by summarily terminating the project, thoughtfully sparing the Guelph community any further deliberations.

Now it cannot be said of EMDI that it is inconsistent with Dalhousie's own policy on international activity since, conveniently, no such policy exists. However, technicalities aside, EMDI is clearly susceptible to the same criticisms Demurs and Brownstone brought against the Sulawesi project which are basically the same ones put forth by the Dal professors who opposed the project at its inception.

Nevertheless it is unlikely that Dalhousie will be swayed by such considerations or induced to commission an external review of its own unless it is pressured to do so by students, faculty and staff who engage in the kind of debate that compelled Guelph to move on the issue, i.e. by those concerned that as citizens of a democracy, their acquiescence in university/government policies on Indonesia and East Timor may implicate them in a major modern tragedy.

And this presumably includes us all.  
Brooks Kind