

## Hard Choices

By CATHY McDONALD



Dalhousie weighs human rights, environmental problems in Indonesia

**C**ivil rights in Indonesia are having an impact on Dalhousie.

Thousands of political prisoners in Indonesia and its mysterious "anti-crime" death squads tugged at the consciences of Weldon Law School faculty last spring. The bleak human rights scene sparked a heated debate over joining Dalhousie's \$5 million environmental aid project there.

The project, called Environmental Manpower Development in Indonesia (EMDI), has attracted a lot of enthusiasm on campus since it was launched Nov. 25, with funding from the Canadian International Development Agency and the Republic of Indonesia.

But when EMDI asked the law school to train environmental lawyers last March, it hit a temporary stumbling block.

The law faculty weighed the human rights issues against the pressing environmental problems EMDI could help solve. After an extensive debate, they endorsed the project in a decisive 23 to 7 vote, April 14.

But one law professor who opposed the project said he isn't going to let the issue die. David Fraser said the project had so much momentum behind it, it was too hard to stop at the last minute.

"They're hypocrites," Fraser said, referring to his colleagues. "They knew about the death squads, about (the invasion of) East Timor, the imprisonment of political prisoners. They still went along with this."

Fuelling Fraser's anger is information published by international human rights organizations, describing the regime's violent actions.

Amnesty International said in 1979, "With regard to the numbers, time-scale, methods used by the government and the history of mass killings and massive arrests, political imprisonment in Indonesia is without parallel today."

Vaughan Black, another professor who opposed the project, is concerned about a little-known war taking place in East Timor. Indonesia invaded the neighbouring island in 1975 and continues to fight the resistance movement there. This has resulted in an estimated 200,000 deaths, according to a former Australian consul to the land.

Another disturbing phenomenon, Fraser said, is a recent "anti-crime" campaign. The *New York Times* reported in August that 4,000 "mystery killings" occurred last year in what is speculated to be a police-coordinated campaign against crime.

Fraser compared the EMDI project to aiding Nazi Germany. "We would have admitted German scientists who expressed a desire to reduce emissions from the smoke stacks of Belsen and Dachau," he charged in a notice circulated after the vote.

The debate inevitably centres on Dr. Arthur Hanson, director of Dalhousie's Institute for Resource and Environmental Studies, and the main influence in creating EMDI.

Sitting in the Institute's meeting room, Hanson holds his head in his hands for a moment, to concentrate on his answer. Behind him stands a carved wooden chest from Indonesia, displaying plaques and picture from seven years of visits and five years living there.

"It's a shame that armchair political motivations interfere with the much more fundamental concerns of developing countries," Hanson said of EMDI's critics.

Hanson said the human rights abuses sadden him, but they should not be allowed to interfere with a much-needed program.

A brief, co-written by Hanson and other EMDI supporters, described the link in Indonesia between the environment, poverty and death. "Each year more than 300,000 Indonesian children under five years die of environmentally-related diseases, primarily related to poor sanitation and sewage-contaminated water," it reads.

Hanson said it's worthwhile drawing attention to human rights abuses, but warned it's too easy to have an oversimplified view from the vantage point of Western comfort and privilege.

"We've become very refined in our concern for human values as we define them. Most other countries in the world do not have these standards."

Hanson said it's important to know the people and the section of government involved in any project Dalhousie might consider. He drew a distinction between giving military aid to Indonesia, and working with its Ministry for Population and Environment, with which EMDI is involved.

"We can be appalled," Hanson said, but "I sit very easy dealing with people who are dealing with much more complex problems than we have to face."

For example, Hanson pointed to an urgent concern in Indonesia today—overpopulation on the island of Java. It's the most densely populated land in the world, with more than a hundred times the population of Nova Scotia in an area only twice the size.

The government succeeded in moving 2.5 million people to other islands in the last five years, through its controversial transmigration project. It hopes to triple the number of people moved in the next five years, despite the project's at times disastrous social and environmental impacts. For this reason, transmigration is a major concern to environmentalists, Hanson said.

Vaughan Black agreed the issues were complicated and difficult to weigh. He said he appreciated the severity of the environmental problems the project aims to alleviate.

"On the one hand, there are the numbers of people who will die because of the environment," said Black. "But on the other hand, look what the government is doing in East Timor."

Black knows the Indonesian government is very conscious of international opinion. Because of criticism from governments, and

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