

The Welfare State
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The tiny Sultanate of Brunei, adjoining Sarawak on the northwest coast of Borneo, was once a great, warlike nation. In the 16th century its navies spread terror through the Java and Malacca Seas. But Brunei, like many of its neighbors in Malaysia, fell upon hard times. Its fleets rotted away; fierce Sulu pirates came to take its strongest people captive and sell them in the slave markets. In the middle of the last century, Brunei was forced to seek protection from another island kingdom, Great Britain, whose fleets were in better shape. As recently as 25 years ago, once proud Brunei was an impoverished nation of backward tribesmen and headhunters whose annual income from foreign trade was a mere \$80,000.

The golden change that has come over Brunei since then can be summed up in one word: oil. Brunei's Seria oilfield (300 wells), from which some 100,000 barrels of petroleum bubble each day out of the jungle floor directly into holds of waiting tankers, is today the richest oilfield in the British Commonwealth. In 1950 it earned Brunei \$3,000,000. A year later the Sultanate's take jumped to almost \$25 million. The money piled up in the bank, for, try as they might, the Bruneians could think of no way to spend it fast enough.

Last week dapper, handsome young (36) Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddin, He Who Is Made Lord of all Brunei, announced a five-year plan to make Brunei Asia's first welfare state. Prepared to spend the equivalent of \$650 on each of his 50,000 subjects, the Sultan included in his program free medical services, the building of 30 new schools and new hospitals, an airport, a hotel, sanitation and power plants. There would be social security for widows, orphans, lepers, the blind and the aged. Promising youngsters would be sent abroad on scholarships.

The Sultan also promised free land for every family in Kampong Ayer, the sprawling village on the Brunei River, where 8,000 people live over the murky water in houses built on stilts. So far, none of the people have been wooed away from their ramshackle wooden houses, linked by rickety footways. The benevolent Sultan refuses to despair.

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