

OTHER NATIONS

In parliamentary elections in June 1976, the Communists, still cultivating their "establishment" image, put up many female candidates, but almost none were radical feminists. The strategy worked. The Communists carried an unprecedented 34 percent of the votes; the Christian Democrats got 38 percent. For the feminists, it was a serious blow. Their shrinking movement turned from politics to concentrate on "women and the visual arts" and similar cultural matters.

*Black Africa's
Elusive Riches*

"The Resources of Tropical Africa" by Andrew M. Kamarck, in *Daedalus* (Spring 1982), 1172 Commonwealth Avenue, Boston, Mass. 02134.

Explorers, imperialists, and, more recently, black nationalists have all entertained hopes of finding untold wealth in sub-Saharan Africa. Kamarck, associate Fellow at Harvard's Institute for International Development, writes that very little is actually known about the region's resources. Enormous barriers—geographic, climatic, technical, political—still stand in the way of exploration and exploitation.

Africa possesses only a small portion of the world's *proven* mineral reserves. Most of its output—gold in South Africa and Ghana, diamonds in South Africa and Zaire, cobalt and copper in Zaire and Zambia, iron ore in Liberia and Mauritania, manganese in Ghana and Zaire—comes from the temperate southern part of the continent or from areas where minerals are exceptionally easy to mine and transport. Elsewhere, the lack of transportation and of technology adapted to tropical conditions discourages exploitation. Gabon, for example, has a deposit of nearly one billion tons of rich iron ore located only 400 miles from its coast. A railroad through the intervening swamps is being built, but it will cost billions of dollars if and when it is completed.

Since 1960, African political instability has been the key problem confronting developers. Mineral exploration in Africa has declined drastically, with Canadian and American companies now spending about 80 percent of their exploration budgets in North America and Australia. Thus, while Guinea, Ghana, and Cameroun contain the world's largest reserves of bauxite, an essential ingredient in aluminum, developers have turned to Australia, where production since 1960 has grown from 70,000 to 28 million tons.

Only in oil production has there been much progress since the 1960s. The reason: Oil company receipts are so huge that losses due to political instability are more easily absorbed. Nigeria is black Africa's major producer (exports amounted to some \$30 billion in 1980), followed by Gabon, Angola, the Congo Republic, and Cameroun. Yet fewer than 100 new wells are drilled each year in Africa, compared with nearly 30,000 in the United States.

Exaggerating the continent's potential or blaming its poverty on Western exploitation, Kamarck concludes, merely diverts attention from basic problems that must be confronted if Africa is to prosper.