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THE SOVIET GENDER GAP

President Reagan's last televised news conference was quite a show in more ways than one. He displayed not only his mastery of the TV medium, but also his uncommon patience and courtesy when crowded by hostile, aggressive women.

The female reporters assigned to the White House press corps gave the appearance of having caucused ahead of time and ganged up to ask the President the same question over and over again until he gave the answer they wanted. They tried a dozen different ways to try to force him to say he would welcome a meeting with Soviet boss Konstantin Chernenko.

This is the same breed of reporters who continue to report non-news about the so-called "gender gap," about a "woman vice president," and about how Reagan Administration policies "hurt women." Funny thing, in their eagerness to criticize Reagan about his treatment of women in this country, and to force him to be conciliatory to the Kremlin dictators, they don't seem to be at all interested in the pathetic plight of women in the Soviet Union.

The same week that the female reporters orchestrated their public demand that President Reagan be hospitable to Chernenko, the back pages of the New York Times carried an article by by-line reporter Judy Klemesrud about women in the Soviet Union. The article was based on an interview with a Russian woman, Tatyana Mamonova, who was expelled from Russia in 1980 for publishing an underground feminist journal.

Miss Klemesrud asked her in detail about the Western notion that the women have equality with men in the Soviet Union, with full access to non-traditional jobs such as medicine. Miss Mamonova made it clear that the reality in Russia is not something that American women would like, regardless of whether they are feminist or traditional women.

Let's look at the status of women in the U.S.S.R. as it relates to what U.S. feminists want. Take abortion, for example, which tops the feminist agenda in the United States. Ronald Reagan's pro-life stance is what has earned him the enmity of U.S. feminist leaders.

In Russia, Miss Mamonova says, abortion is the primary method of birth control, and she knows some women who have had as many as 15 abortions. She said that they are usually performed in clinics by unsympathetic doctors who do abortions on several women simultaneously and without the use of anesthetics.

What about free medical care? It's free, all right; but she said that, when she gave birth to her son in a Leningrad hospital, the doctor refused to give her an anesthetic during her protracted labor on the ground that it would be a "luxury." During the ten days she was in the hospital, she was not allowed to take a shower, see her husband (no visitors allowed because of fear of infection), or even telephone him. It was a "nightmare," she said.

What about free day-care for children, another item high on the agenda of feminists in the United States? Miss Mamonova said that the women who take care of the children in these Soviet centers are each responsible for 30 to 40 children, are overworked and underpaid, and often take out their frustrations on the children. Besides, day-care is available only to working couples, and there is a long waiting list.

What about lesbian rights, another favorite U.S. feminist goal? When lesbians are discovered in Russia, she says, they can be fired from their jobs, put in mental hospitals, and designated as unfit mothers.

What about the U.S. feminist objective of moving all women into the labor force? In the Soviet Union, the social pressure on women to be in the labor force is equalled by the social pressure to induce women to marry. Unmarried women and single mothers are looked down on. Yet, married women face tremendous problems of male alcoholism and domestic violence; Miss Mamonova referred to a kind of "male terrorism."

The great Communist system proclaiming equality for all is now 67 years old. And what has it done for women? "Women face the double burden of work and having all the responsibilities in the home," Miss Mamonova complained.

Yes, it is mighty strange the way feminist White House reporters badgered President Reagan to induce him to say that he will welcome a meeting with the Soviet dictators who preside over a society where the treatment of women is no better than under the regime of the Ayatollah Khomeini. Why don't the White House reporters report on the "gender gap" in Russia and suggest that it be on the agenda of the next summit conference?