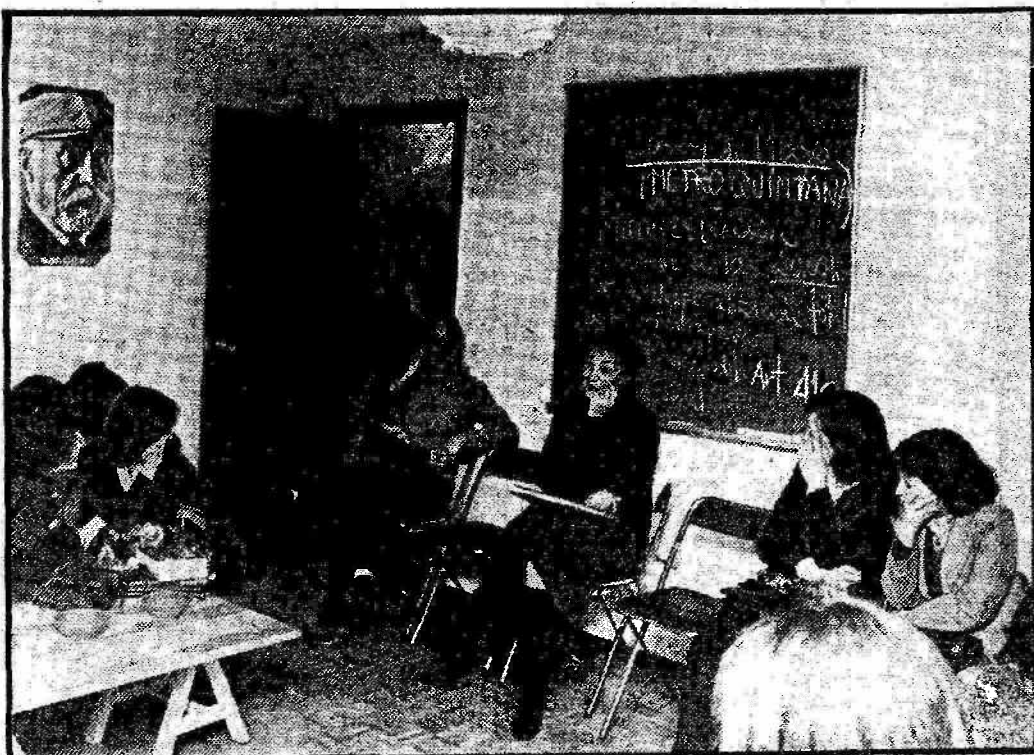


WITH THE drafting of the new Spanish constitution and the abolition of the law banning the supply of contraceptives and information on birth control, the family planning movement has been born in Spain. In spite of Franco's restrictive law, which operated till the end of last year, a handful of doctors and feminists had been independently providing family planning services since 1970 without any direct confrontation with the authorities. Now they are free to provide such services openly they are forming the nucleus for the evolving family planning association.

Some family planning clinics have already been set up. Contraceptive advice and supplies are given in some state hospital outpatients departments, and some neighbourhood associations and feminists groups are setting up centres and giving talks and information on birth control. The PSOE (the Socialist party of Spain) has financed the setting up of a clinic in Madrid and been active in Parliament in requesting that family planning becomes part of Spain's health service.

According to statistics quoted by Socialist deputies, 74 per cent of Spanish women are in favour of family planning and 71 per cent are in favour of state assistance in this. The PSOE argue that if family planning is to be a reality for most Spanish women, it is not enough simply to change the law — the services must be available, and this requires funding for the setting up of clinics and the training of personnel. Already some 40 per cent of oral contraceptive prescriptions are thought to be paid for by the state, for the treatment of menstrual irregularities.

It is feared that the new law will not be as liberal as was originally hoped; it may be considered to be abortifacient and therefore could be banned, and sterilisation is likely to remain illegal except in cases of medical necessity. Abortion will also remain illegal for some considerable time. The Government is clearly anxious to avoid being seen to promote family planning actively. It believes that the new Spanish constitution should continue to embrace Roman Catholic



New to Spain, a family planning clinic in Madrid.

## A change — but Spain

The Spanish Government no longer bans the supply change in the law cannot instantly alter traditional Jones reports on the struggle to

attitudes even to the extent that the 74 centres which the Health Ministry will create throughout Spain to give information on matters including birth control will be called family organisation centres.

Until a network of clinics becomes established, the position for many women is little changed in spite of the new law. Some women can get the pill from sympathetic doctors — it is thought that about half of married Spanish women are on the pill — but it may be much more difficult for an unmarried woman to find a doctor who will help her. Because other methods have not been available, contraception has often been simply the pill, with no choice of brand or of dosage and little supervision of possible side effects.

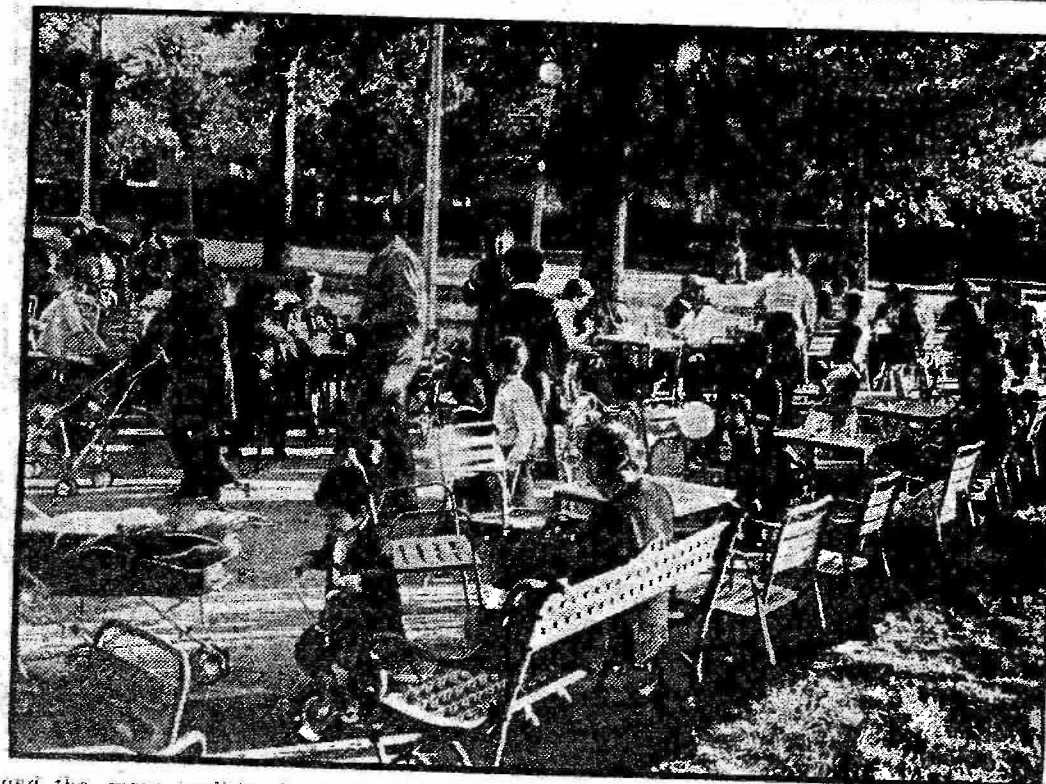
With recent reports in England and America highlighting the long term risks of the pill, particularly for older women, this is clearly far from desirable. IUDs, caps and spermicides are not manufactured or sold in Spain and supplies for the clinics come from doctors or volunteers after visits abroad — clinics such as the Marie Stopes and the Margaret Pyke Centre in London are well used to Spanish women coming to buy IUDs and caps to be fitted by their doctor back in Spain.

The family planning centres which do exist face tremendous problems both of finance and in trying to meet the overwhelming demand.

There are two clinics in Madrid which deal not only with women in the city but

those who come from considerable distances. One is the clinic funded by the PSOE, in a modern apartment block in a recently developed suburban area of the city. The clinic is open daily, from 9 am to 1 pm for appointments and from 4.30 onwards for consultation — often these sessions are hopelessly overcrowded and frequently the doctors, who work on a volunteer basis, do not finish until midnight. Volunteers give lectures to the waiting group, showing charts and diagrams, and for a large number of women this is the first opportunity they have had to receive accurate information and to discuss birth control and sexuality so openly — it is all.

Demand is even greater at the second centre which is run by feminists, as it has



and the more traditional scene in a Cordoba park

## stays mostly the same

of contraceptives or information on birth control but a attitudes or produce trained staff and facilities. Maggie establish family planning services

been longer established and is more central. There are only two days a week when a doctor is available and appointments for a whole month are filled on one day; others have to wait. For many of the women it is too late for contraception and they come to the centre seeking advice on how to get an abortion, and the clinic refers many of those who can afford it to clinics in London for termination. Illegal abortion is a terrible problem in Spain, with 400,000 abortions estimated to take place yearly — this figure is in part drawn from the very high rate of complications from illegal abortion seen by doctors and in hospitals.

One of the problems in organising birth control services has been the fact that groups starting independ-

ently in different cities have had little contact — the difficulties in getting together and organising themselves were immense, particularly while family planning was illegal. Often rivalry existed between the different organisations, and there has also been a certain amount of conflict between the more conservative doctors and the feminists, although both have a vital role to play in the emerging movement.

Now however the various organisations are forming a federation which sees its main role as linking these groups and providing an exchange of information and expertise.

A key figure in all this has been Asuncion Villatoro, a gynaecologist who has provided a family planning ser-

vice in Barcelona for some seven years after training in London. Her innumerable newspaper articles and interviews, and radio and television broadcasts, have probably done as much to spread information on birth control as any other factor. She now hopes to set up a clinic outside the hospital in Barcelona where she at present offers a service and also to set up a training centre for other doctors. The changes that she has seen since she began working in this field — at first under constant danger of imprisonment — have been immense, but she still recognises the difficulties and problems which now have to be faced.

Many of the women who come to her are desperate. They have too many children, they are always afraid of

pregnancy, and they do not know how they can get help. Too often the man is not interested in birth control, it is not his problem — birth control for many Spanish men, like a woman who says 'no,' is a threat to his machismo. Attitudes are still traditional and it is difficult for the woman to be independent and to make her own life. Of course things are becoming different here now, but there are parts of Spain where it is not so, and where it is still a terrible stigma to be an unmarried mother or to have an abortion, and where the woman still feels she is the man's property. Sex too is seen as a duty, with childbirth the inevitable burden. Asuncion Villatoro emphasises, as do other workers, the importance of promoting education in sex and personal relationships in schools.

The central problem in Spain has been that a slow evolution of family planning services has not been possible — a sophisticated knowledge is held by a few, but there are not enough workers to back them up. A key point is the absence of trained doctors and facilities for training of personnel. Even if funds were made available now for widespread family planning services there would not be the trained personnel to respond; almost all the doctors working in family planning in Spain received their training or have worked abroad.

Traditional attitudes toward contraception is highly unacceptable to a large number of women, and there are tremendous problems of ignorance and misinformation. With the lack of published material and medical knowledge on the subject within Spain, the Spanish family planning movement has voiced an immediate need for films, books, leaflets and other information to train and educate both medical and lay workers in family planning and the public, in addition to providing formal training for doctors.

Clearly the birth of Spain's family planning movement is to be welcomed. For too long Spanish women have been denied adequate advice on contraception. But it may be a long time before the movement comes of age.