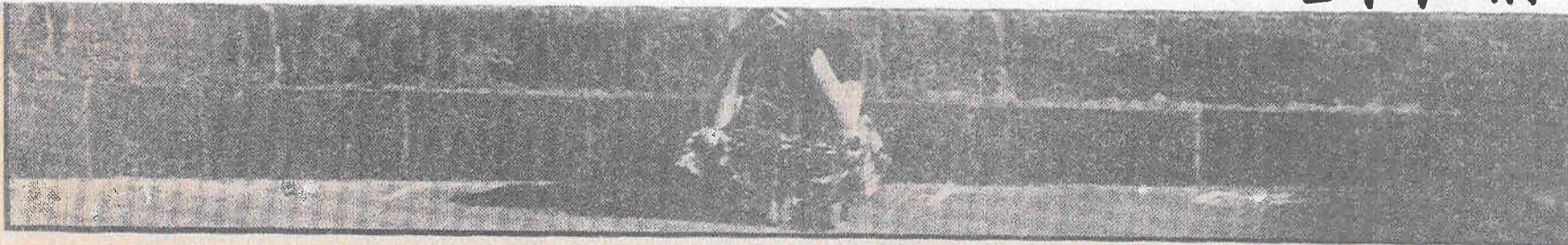


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*Sign of the times in Spain*

As Spain plans reforms of its laws on adultery and contraception, Maggie Jones asks how much real freedom women can expect as the country moves towards democracy

## Will the pill come in with the vote?

THE long awaited breakthrough for Spanish women has come at last. The government has proposed a Bill to remove the law on adultery from the penal code, and the law making contraception illegal is also being changed, by separating contraception from abortion and legalising the former. Doctors will now be free to provide family planning services openly.

The penal code, drawn up under Franco, has till now banned the "dissemination, in whatever form, as well as the public display or offer for sale, of that which is intended to avert pregnancy." Laws about women were equally outdated. A woman could be tried and imprisoned for up to six years for adultery, while a man could have as many affairs as he chose unless he committed adultery within the marital home or caused a public scandal.

Liberalisation has brought with it a wave of pornography — and a rise in VD statistics.

The number of cases reported last year was 80,000, the highest since 1938. But behind the titillation and statistics there has been cause

for deep concern that the new liberalisation has only enforced the already extreme and deep-rooted machismo attitude of Spanish men.

Old attitudes are still strong in post-Franco Spain. In the cities, social attitudes are comparatively liberal, but in the poorer rural areas, and particularly in Andalucia, they are extremely oppressive. Women are simply expected to marry and have a family. Pursuing a career would be unheard of, even for the relatively affluent and educated, and women are regarded as their husbands' property. Wife-battering is relatively common and there is nowhere to go for help or support. Women have been hounded in the streets for adultery, and it is not a country in which to have an illegitimate child — most are put up for adoption as a child without a father does not exist in law.

The attitude of the men has made the feminists in Spain particularly active and well-organised. As one Spanish woman put it "Sex warfare is waged against every woman who walks the streets." Feminist groups or *colectivos* exist in most major towns throughout Spain and

are now centrally co-ordinated. They act at a local level providing support for women, and have become increasingly vocal, mounting large demonstrations to publicise their aims.

Most of the political pressure for law reform came from the feminist movement which has acted as a consciousness-raising group for most Spanish youth.

In spite of the laws against contraception, birth control has in practice been available to informed and persistent women, at least in the large towns and cities. Contraceptive pills are available from sympathetic doctors who may prescribe them for "menstrual irregularities".

A million women are estimated to be on the pill, most of them upper-working and middle classes from urban areas. There are also a handful of enterprising doctors who provide family planning in hospitals in cities such as Barcelona. But IUDs, diaphragms, and contraceptive creams, foams and jellies have been available only through private channels for a very few — sterilisation is almost impossible to obtain. For most women, birth control means "the pill" or

nothing at all, and few can choose which brand or dose. Condoms are easily obtained, but are not popular. They have connotations of prostitution for the women, and men feel that birth control is not their business.

In the light of the changing laws, doctors and feminists are beginning to organise themselves to provide a family planning service, although the difficulties are immense. The cities where most of the work is going on — Bilbao, Madrid, and Barcelona — are separated by wide tracts of rural land which make working together difficult. A clinic is operating in Madrid and in Barcelona, a birth control centre has recently been set up.

A discreet notice on the door gives office hours and inside, a crisp white-painted room boasts posters demonstrating contraceptive methods and relevant cuttings from the local press. It is open three days a week and is staffed by volunteers — many of them medical students. They distribute duplicated sheets of information on methods of birth control, physiology and sexuality, and also on VD and women's health care; they

also arrange talks and lectures.

Increasingly the centre is approached by women seeking abortion: one of the surest pointers to the changing attitudes in Spain is the increase in numbers of Spanish women seeking abortion abroad.

When birth control was still illegal, most of the family planning workers and sympathetic journalists were unworried by the possibility of prosecution; as more was published in the media and services were more openly provided, the likelihood fortunately seemed less.

It was however, an ever-present worry, and while the public prosecutor concluded in a report on pornography that laws governing the seizure of such material were "inefficient and counter-productive," the editor of the Madrid daily *El País* recently faced trial and possible imprisonment for reprinting a Sunday Times article on the facts of contraception. But as one family planning worker said: "If we go to prison, it doesn't matter, because the people will know we have done no wrong and they will help us, I think. It is a democratic country now and things are different."