

Amy on Family Planning

THIS is the second in a series of articles on the memories of 94-year-old Miss Amy Bailey, teacher, social worker and family planning advocate.

By Yvonne Grinam

MISS Amy likes to reminisce about how she got involved in family planning in Jamaica and the opposition she got from people who thought she was 'trying to kill out black people'.

"I'll tell you how my interest in family planning began. My mother had a woman who used to sell us fish. Every time I saw her she was pregnant — she always had a big belly in front of her. I remember I used to say to her 'another one again'. And I remember, this was probably after the sixth child, I asked her about it and she said in distress, 'What a must do?' Obviously she didn't know how to stop them from coming, so I decided to get involved.

May Farquharson

"Myself and May Farquharson were good friends and used to meet and try to help women. I met May on the streets of London in 1938 while I was there trying to raise funds for the Jamaica Save the Children Fund. This was set up to help poor children who could not afford to go to school.

"When we came back to Jamaica to officially launch birth control here, we got Norman Manley to chair the function. I remember it was his first public appearance and he was quite nervous and on top of that some of the men in the crowd were heckling him because of what the function was about — birth control. So I recall him telling them that they could go and spawn in the streets of Kingston, and the next day the *Gleaner* had it in its pages.

"When that meeting was over, I



Amy Bailey

overheard some men saying, 'you see that Amy Bailey, she is a traitor to this country. She bring white woman here to tell our women not to have any pickney'. Well, I turned around and said to them: 'I am Amy Bailey and that is not what this is about. I want to see my people go forward, but they can't do this if they have five, six pickney about them. They won't be able to lift themselves up if they have so many children'. The men were surprised but I convinced them.

Lady Huggins

"Lady Huggins, of the Jamaica Federation of Women, also adopted the family planning idea and all the

women in the Federation who were Catholics had to resign. We got a lot of opposition from the Catholics: they didn't believe in it and prevented their members from going to the clinics.

"We had started a birth control clinic in 1939 at 24 East Race Course. But little by little we were able to seep this thing called birth control into the minds of the people, until the Government took it over and the name was eventually changed to Family Planning.

"But nowadays things have changed and they no longer emphasise the spiritual aspect of birth control. Women should be told that their bodies are not spittoons: women are co-creators with God.

"One day I heard one man telling another, 'Bwoy, everything gone up. Rent gone up, light, water, everything'. Hear the other man to him, 'One thing that not gone up is women, you can get any one for one or two shilling'.

"In the old days we used the diaphragm. But I think that the best contraceptive that a woman can use is the little word 'no'. Otherwise you allow your bodies to become spittoons for men. If you value your body you would not allow it."

Next week Miss Bailey speaks about how women can contribute to production.