

Anti—Obscenity Campaign

Over the last decade, women's groups have been protesting against indecent exposure of women in advertizing and films. Not only has this gone unheeded but the attack upon people's sensibilities has assumed new dimensions, the trend has been towards increasingly using women as sex objects and has veered away to some extent from traditional stereotype. The cheerful companion and devoted mother of yesteryear is giving way to the "bare-all" and "dare-all" woman that is so easily accessible.

The Law of Obscenity

The Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act was passed in Parliament on the 23rd of December 1986. The law prohibits advertisements containing derogatory/indecent representation of women... (3) "No person shall publish, or cause to be published, or arrange or take part in the publication or exhibition of of any advertisement which contains indecent representation of women in form any".

Clause 4 states "No person shall produce or cause to be produced, sell, let to hire, distribute, circulate or send by post any book, pamphlet, paper, slide, film, writing, drawing, painting, photograph, representation or figure which contains indecent representation of women in any form."

An offence punishable under this Act is cognizable. A first conviction could lead to imprisonment of either description for a time which may extend to two years

and with fine which may extend to two thousand rupees. A subsequent conviction could lead to imprisonment for a term of not less than six months but which may extend to five years and also with a fine not less than ten thousand rupees but which may extend to one lakh rupees.

Our Campaign

In spite of the law there has been an increase in the number of obscene posters and advertisements displayed in Delhi.

On 2.4.87 we blackened a hoarding advertizing Gossamer innerwear. The poster was brought down by the company the following day.

On 27th we once again blackened posters advertizing a film called "Fraternity Vacations". The advertisement was being sponsored by Esquire Cigarettes. We blackened and brought down ourselves several indecent posters at Archana Cinema.

We followed up our actions with complaints at the local police stations. The police, after much persuasions, took action under the old laws. Because of our increasing pressure the government finally drafted the rules for the new Act, which has become effective from 2nd October 1987.

Meanwhile the Commissioner of Police, Delhi appointed a Committee to assist him to judge whether a poster is "obscene". This Committee does not include

any women who have been in the forefront of the struggle and we need to watch its functioning.

Future Actions

It is now important that all concerned groups and individuals should be vigilant and register complaints at their local police station. If you send us a copy of the complaint, we can attempt to follow up.

While we have stated our action against obscene hoardings, it is clear that we cannot stop here. Adver-

tisements in newspapers and magazines need to be scrutinized and acted upon. Television is a powerful medium which needs to be constantly monitored.

The new law gives the police wide ranging powers to search and seizure. We need to develop safeguards against the misuse of the law. Therefore it is important that we develop a sound definition of "obscenity" which will not take us back to medieval values but will view men and women as people with dignity rather than disembodied things.

