

## GAY

Preview

March  
pastPaul Burston on  
Lesbian And Gay Pride

Is Pride political? Yes, I am aware that this sounds like a totally stupid question. In fact, I'm embarrassed at having to ask it, but judging from the furious exchange of letters to the gay free papers over the past couple of weeks, I think it's one question we really ought to be asking ourselves. One thing most people seem to agree on: as an expression of our refusal to be rendered invisible, the annual Lesbian and Gay Pride March (yes, those two little words 'lesbian' and 'gay' really do belong in there!) is by its very nature a political event. For one day in

to the notion of equality in the workplace completely passes me by, but in any event I'm tired of hearing that well-worn, catch-all excuse 'Pride is for everyone', particularly when 'everyone' is really just a polite way of saying 'the least politically-active element'. If things had been left to them there wouldn't be a Pride for us to quarrel over. 'Pride is for everyone' is the excuse offered each year for the continued shift in emphasis from the angry marches of the '70s to the events of today, where the march itself plays an ever-diminishing role, regarded merely as a way of ensuring that we all build up a good thirst before staggering along to the beer tent (I wonder how many people have simply stopped marching because it no longer fills a need? I wonder how long it will be before someone decides to drop the parade altogether, to save us the bother of hiking across town to Brockwell Park?)

'Pride is for everyone' was the excuse recited, parrot-fashion, to members of ACT-UP two years ago when they requested that the Pride Organising Committee (as it was then called) make special provision for people with HIV and AIDS. Suggestions that the march be set at a pace that would be comfortable for people in wheelchairs or with walking difficulties were dismissed on the basis that this might impair other people's enjoyment of 'their Pride day'. (Excuse me while I



every year, the march provides us with the opportunity to flaunt ourselves in public, to demonstrate our difference, our diversity, our Doc Martens, our dungarees, our denims, our drag. Anyone who objects to this first principle of Pride ought really to ask themselves what they're doing reading these pages. But I'm straying from the point. The issue people are falling out over is, just how political should an expression of Pride be?

It's hardly surprising that the call for a more overtly politicised event has come from OutRage. Earlier this year, members of the direct action group wrote to the Pride Trust with the suggestion that this year's march be given a theme ('Equal Rights At Work'), and that the Trust push for a higher profile route than the one the march is routinely forced to take. The Pride Trust wrote back, explaining that they were hoping to negotiate for a better route, but dismissing the suggestion of a theme as 'too political' and 'divisive'.

Just who they thought would object

choke on my gay freedom rings. If we really aren't capable of tailoring our pleasures to the needs of the increasing numbers of people with AIDS within our community, just what have we got to be so damn proud about?)

This week sees the video release of 'Before Stonewall', the acclaimed documentary of the pre-history of the American lesbian and gay rights movement. It's an absorbing combination of archive footage and interviews with some of the activists who first gave us a sense of collective identity (many of them now dead). The film traces the history of lesbian and gay resistance from the underground scene of the '20s to the events of that famous night in Greenwich Village in 1969, the Stonewall riot which gave birth to the modern liberation movement. My advice is that you buy a copy. Borrow one. Steal one. Do whatever it takes. But watch it, and (re)discover why we ever named this thing 'Lesbian And Gay Pride' in the first place.

'Before Stonewall' is released on Pride Video on June 10, priced £14.99.

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