

Peers petition Queen on Europe

By Caroline Davies

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FOUR peers invoked ancient rights under the Magna Carta yesterday to petition the Queen to block closer integration with Europe.

The Duke of Rutland, Viscount Masserene and Ferrard, Lord Hamilton of Dalzell and Lord Ashbourne were imbued with the spirit of the ancient Charter, thrust on King John in 1215. In accordance with the Charter's Clause 61, the famous enforcement clause, the four presented a vellum parchment at Buckingham Palace, declaring that the ancient rights and freedoms of the British people had to be defended.

The clause, one of the most important in the Charter, which was pressed on King John at Runnymede, allows subjects of the realm to present a quorum of 25 barons with a petition, which four of their number then have to take to the Monarch, who must accept it. It was last used in 1688 at the start of the Glorious Revolution.

The four peers, who were all thrown out of Parliament in November 1999, proved they had that quorum by presenting Sir Robin Janvrin, the Queen's private secretary, with the petition signed by 28 hereditaries and letters of support from another 60. In addition, they claim the support of thousands of members of the public.

They say that several articles in the Treaty of Nice agreed by Tony Blair in December will destroy fundamental British liberties. The Queen has 40 days to respond. Under the Magna Carta's provisions, if the Sovereign does not observe the Charter the people may rise up and wage war on her, seizing castles, lands and possessions until they have redress.

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