

Peers use Magna Carta to oppose EU charter

By Sarah Womack, Political Correspondent

12:00AM GMT 07 Feb 2001

A GROUP of peers will today use ancient rights granted under Magna Carta to urge the Queen to block further European integration.

Their petition, presented under Clause 61 of the ancient charter, asks the Queen to withhold Royal Assent from the Nice Treaty. It has the backing of 65 Euro-sceptic peers led by Lord Ashbourne and has been organised by Sanity (Subjects Against the Nice Treaty).

Clause 61 of Magna Carta, signed by King John at Runnymede in June 1215, permits the "Sovereign's subjects to present a quorum of 25 barons with a petition which four of their number are then obliged to take to the Monarch who is obliged to accept it. She then has 40 days to respond." The "enforcement powers" granted by King John when he signed the Magna Carta were last used in 1688 at the start of the Glorious Revolution.

Lord Ashbourne, a Conservative hereditary peer ousted from the Lords under Tony Blair's reforms, said: "These rights may not have been exercised for 300 years but only because they were not needed. Well, we need them now. They may be a little dusty but they are in good order."

Campaigners said thousands of letters and postcards had been sent to Buckingham Palace urging the Queen not to grant Royal Assent to the Treaty which they described as a "major step in invading our country by treaties not tanks". They added: "It removes the right of veto in virtually all areas."

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