

Europe has stolen the rights we won at Magna Carta. Let's fight to reclaim them by Norman Tebbit

King John was forced to sign; what about the European Commission?

I wonder if when he announced his policy of fixed-term Parliaments David Cameron had taken in to account that we would be celebrating the 800th anniversary of Magna Carta at the time of the general election next year. Well, most of us that is. Here in Bury St, Edmunds we will celebrate this year the 800th anniversary of the meeting of the barons here in the rose garden beside the Cathedral at which they first completed drafting the great charter, and then swore terrible oaths that they would stick together and force the King to sign at a council at Runnymede the next year.

I doubt it. Nor I think would he have given much thought to the words of Winston Churchill in an interview with the New Statesman's Kingsley Martin in early 1939.

"The essential aspects of democracy are the freedom of the individual , within the framework of laws passed by Parliament, to order his life as he pleases, and the uniform enforcement of tribunals independent of the executive. The laws are based on Magna Carta, Habeas Corpus, The Petition of Rights and others. Without this foundation there can be no freedom... As long as these rights are defended the foundation of freedom are secure..."



During the debate last year on the Coalition's proposal to

intervene militarily in the Syrian civil war, Nigel Lawson made the related point that democracy will not flourish unless it has been preceded by a period of the rule of law. These are matters which will arise during this year's elections to the European Parliament and the 2015 general election. The European Commission now has the right to make laws without the need to go to even the European Parliament, let alone that of Westminster. The enforcement of those laws or regulations is often arbitrary. The European Arrest Warrant allows countries with very little track record of the rule of law as Churchill would have known it to seize British citizens in our own country and lock them up awaiting trial without effective rights of Habeas Corpus.

These are matters which Mr Cameron will not welcome being debated during the European Elections this year, nor the general election next year, but if the redoubtable Bob Worcester, who has been appointed Chairman of the committee to oversee the anniversary does his job as thoroughly as I would expect him to do, they are bound to feature. The collective King John of Europe which resides in the headquarters of the European Commission would have to be confronted by a gang of 21st-century knights to be brought to heel and for the process of creating a European democracy to begin. That would be uncomfortable for some of the powerful corporate barons of commerce and industry who would rather carve deals with the Commission than conform to a common law for all.

It is hard to be optimistic about that. Democracy develops from the bottom up, not the top down. Even worse, as Enoch Powell observed decades ago, "Europe cannot be a democracy. for there is no European Demos". And the enlargements of recent years have reduced the prospect of that Demos coming into being. The triple lock on pensions is an agreeable prospect for pensioners, but should not Mr Cameron now propose a triple lock on the rights we gained at Runnymede in 1215?