

THOMAS DORR



Good morning Honorable Judges, Statesmen, and members of the Press.

My name is Thomas W. Dorr and I was just released from prison. I stand here today in front of you a Harvard educated attorney and a former Rhode Island General Assemblyman and Governor.

How did I get myself in prison? Well, during my time in the General Assembly, I was instrumental in launching a campaign to draft a new state constitution and repeal the current voting

restrictions to allow all white men to vote. Men should not have to own land to vote. The industrial revolution is upon us and we have to change with the times. Men are working in the factories and renting city apartments with their families. Every white male should have the right to vote, including the Irish.

The old royal charter did not provide any means for a constitutional convention, so a "People's Party", was formed and held a convention, adopted a constitution and submitted it to a vote of the people. There were approximately 14,000 ballots cast in favor and less than 100 against. Of those in favor, almost 5,000 were qualified voters so the proposed constitution was formally approved by not only the majority of males of over 21 but, the majority of the legal voters as well.

In May 1842 there were two governments which had both held elections and were both claiming to be the government of the people. Myself as governor of the "People's Party", and Governor King of the "Law and Order" party both appealed President John Tyler and got nowhere. In the meantime, Governor King declared the members of the "People's Party" guilty of rebellion and high treason, proclaimed a state of emergency and called out the state militia. He declared martial law and offered a \$5,000 reward for my capture.

During the following year, with public and now Governor King's support, Rhode Island adopted a new constitution replacing the outdated royal charter. Included in the new constitution granted the ability to vote to all white males. Regardless if they owned land, as long as they were able to pay the new poll tax of \$1. This still was an attempt to block the poor Irish vote, but it was a step in the direction of white male suffrage.

I will now be open to answer any questions.