

Texas State University upholds firing of Professor Tom Alter for political speech

International Youth and Students for Social Equality

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Professor Thomas Alter, a historian of labor and the American left, has been fired by Texas State University for political speech. The move is not only an attack on Alter's rights as a tenured faculty member, a worker, and a citizen, it is an assault on freedom of speech and political organization, and the right to education of college students.

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) denounces Alter's removal, demands his immediate reinstatement, and calls for an independent inquiry into the actions of Texas State President Kelly Damphousse.

Damphousse's decision was delivered to Alter and his attorneys on Monday. It invokes Texas State University System Rules and Regulations, Chapter V, paragraph 4.53, declaring to Alter that "your last date of employment with Texas State University will be October 13, 2025."

The letter states that Alter is "subject to summary dismissal" for what the university deems "serious professional or personal misconduct." But the letter does not even make an effort to describe professional misconduct of any sort. Rather, it denounces Alter's political speech, specifically his advocacy for socialism.

Alter's dismissal is based on remarks he delivered at a gathering called the Revolutionary Socialism Conference, an on-line event that took place on September 7, 2025. In his comments, Alter addressed issues of political organization, criticized the capitalist status quo, discussed his interpretations of the American left, and spoke about his views on the need to build a revolutionary socialist party. When questioned by attendees about his teaching role, Alter described his work with education majors and spoke about Texas State's long-standing involvement in training public school educators.

On September 10, without prior warning or any opportunity for Alter to respond, Texas State University summarily terminated him via email. He was immediately locked out of his university email and denied access to all campus systems, separating him from his students and abruptly halting his classes and ongoing academic responsibilities. Alter's firing cut him off not only from his salary, but also from university-provided health insurance for his family.

All of this was done without any hearing or investigation, in clear violation of basic due process and the protections that tenure is supposed to guarantee. Alter was given no chance to communicate with his students and colleagues. For days, he did not know if or how he would be able to defend himself against the allegations.

It was only after Alter filed a lawsuit and obtained a temporary restraining order from a Hays County judge that he was briefly reinstated—though still barred from teaching—pending a hearing. Even then, the process that followed remained under the tight control of the

university president and provost, culminating in a second termination after a brief and highly orchestrated meeting, with no real recourse or transparency granted to Alter or his legal counsel.

Alter's removal was centrally orchestrated by Karlyn Borysenko, a fascist provocateur and Fox News commentator who declared recently that Hitler went to heaven and Jews chose their own deaths in the Holocaust. Borysenko surreptitiously recorded Alter's remarks as part of her campaign to infiltrate left-wing political events under false pretenses and destroy the lives of targeted individuals.

Despite the illegitimate and potentially illegal origins of the recordings and the openly fascist agenda of the source, the university administration treated the supposed "complaint" as credible and proceeded to act upon it, ignoring procedural norms, tenure rights, and basic freedom of speech in the process.

Alter is the author of *Toward a Cooperative Commonwealth: The Transplanted Roots of Farmer-Labor Radicalism in Texas*, published by University of Illinois Press in 2022. The book examines the evolution of agrarian radicalism in Texas, following three generations of German immigrants to illuminate how farmer-labor alliances, rooted in transnational radical ideas, shaped working class politics, political protest movements, and economic reform. Alter is esteemed among his students and colleagues alike for his dedication to teaching and mentorship. His courses regularly draw strong enrollments and enthusiastic engagement. Alter was awarded tenure in September 2025.

The university's letter sent to Dr. Alter on October 13 upholding his firing makes clear that its concern is not with the conduct of teaching or scholarship, but the content and political character of Alter's speech. The letter attributes "misconduct" to the fact that Alter promoted a "vision for the recruitment of Americans into a Revolutionary Socialist Party with the stated goal of overthrowing the United States government."

The entire premise rests on criteria that can be wielded against anyone who opposes the policies of the American government, policies that currently include support for Israel's genocide of the Palestinians, summary assassination of people on boats in the Caribbean at the direction of the American president, and the deployment of the military in American cities in violation of the Constitution. Indeed, what shapes the university's judgment is Alter's opposition to, in his own words, the "most bloodthirsty, profit-driven, mad organization in the history of the world—that of the US government."

The letter declares that Alter's advocacy of socialism is a violation of Texas State's "academic neutrality." But Texas State, like nearly every American university, accepts and encourages overtly partisan

activity by faculty and students on behalf of Democratic and Republican causes.

Damphousse's unabashed hypocrisy is all the more glaring in his condemnation of Alter's alleged "goal of overthrowing the United States government." The Republican Party orchestrated efforts on January 6, 2021 to overturn the results of the presidential election—an *actual* attempt to topple the government. This was backed by 147 congressional Republicans who voted to object to the electoral count after the Capitol riot, and was subsequently defended or minimized by much of the party's leadership, as well as that of the Democratic Party. No doubt it would be possible to locate many statements by Texas State University Republicans justifying the attempted coup, but Damphousse took no action against them.

As for Damphousse's invocation of the potential "disruption of university operations, the destruction of university property, and acts of violence on university campuses across our country," this is entirely speculative and untethered to anything in Dr. Alter's record or actions.??

The university's letter in fact reveals just how tenuous its justification truly is. Its authors concede that "while this type of activism in itself, if undertaken on your own personal time and without reference to your role as an associate professor at Texas State University, likely would not constitute serious misconduct," they nonetheless assert that Alter's remarks "implicate Texas State, its students and employees, and safety on campus during a time when tensions on campuses across the country, including at Texas State, are high."

The point is unmistakable: the university will quash speech that criticizes fundamental aspects of US society—imperialism, state violence, capitalism and social inequality. Perhaps Damphousse has special concern for the last category. His salary totaled \$815,000 for the 2024-2025 academic year, roughly 10 times the pay of a tenured professor and nearly 30 times that of the approximately 500 food, custodial, and maintenance workers at Texas State.

The final lines of the Damphousse letter threaten not only Alter's livelihood, but the future of open debate and academic inquiry on campus:

Your comments, taken as a whole, go beyond speaking on a topic of academic interest or advocating, in your personal capacity, for a particular political agenda. The totality of your actions and your subsequent explanation for such actions reflect a serious lapse of judgment which has affected the trust placed in you by this university. For these reasons, I find that you remain subject to summary dismissal.

Dr. Alter has every right—morally, legally, and academically—to freely express his political viewpoints. The recognition that the United States is a world leader in imperialist violence is not a radical or irresponsible claim, but a sober analysis supported by overwhelming evidence and abundant scholarship.

The core justification for tenure is to allow precisely for intellectual engagement shielded from administrative reprisals. The firing of Alter makes a mockery of those protections. The process by which this determination was reached—a hearing at which Alter's attorney presented materials but received little substantive recognition, and a rapid, summary decision—underscores the predetermined nature of the

administration's approach.

Alter's firing has drawn strong condemnation of Texas State University's actions from students, faculty, and historians across the country and beyond. Supporters have raised over \$47,000 through a GoFundMe campaign to assist with Alter's legal expenses and ongoing living costs during his fight for reinstatement. Petitions demanding that Texas State University reverse its decision and restore Alter to his post have collectively garnered hundreds of signatures.

Graduate students in the Texas State History Department issued a statement denouncing the dismissal for undermining both "the university's own commitment to academic freedom" and "the values that are foundational to higher education." The Texas State University student newspaper, the *University Star*, noted the case's chilling effect on free speech and the warnings it sends to other faculty: "What is at stake is not simply one job or the reputation of one scholar, but the rights and freedoms of all those who work and learn at public universities."

The Organization of American Historians, the American Historical Association, the Labor and Working Class History Association, and the Canadian Committee on Labour History have all condemned the firing and described it as a violation of fundamental professional standards and due process and an attack on the discipline of history itself.

The determined campaign to reinstate Professor Alter and defend academic freedom at Texas State University now stands as a critical test for students, educators, and all defenders of democratic rights. The International Youth and Students for Social Equality reiterates its demand for Alter's immediate reinstatement and a full, independent inquiry into the actions of President Damphousse and the university administration. Attacks on scholars, campus speech, and student organizations must be met with the broadest opposition across campuses nationwide and internationally.

Students at Texas State and beyond must draw the necessary conclusions from this precedent. It is not only one professor, but the right to dissent and the future of critical thought that are at stake. We encourage all students who want to fight back against censorship and political victimization to join the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE). The IYSSE fights to unite students and youth in the struggle against war, authoritarianism, and social inequality, advancing the perspective that only the independent political mobilization of youth and the working class, organized on socialist principles, can defend and extend our most basic rights.



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