

# Texas students speak in defense of historian Tom Alter

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Support for victimized labor historian and professor Tom Alter is growing among Texas students. Alter, a professor of history at Texas State University and a historian of American labor, particularly in Texas, was summarily fired September 10 for remarks he made at an online event called the “Revolutionary Socialism Conference.” During the event, held September 7, Alter expressed views in opposition to the capitalist system and in favor of socialism.

In violation of his First Amendment rights to free speech, Alter was dismissed from his position without any review or chance to defend himself. The university claimed that he had violated Texas State’s “academic neutrality” and accused him of supporting “overthrowing the United States government.” A lawsuit filed by Alter resulted in a court order for the university to reinstate him—though he is barred from teaching—until a hearing can be held. Alter’s dismissal, however, was upheld by the university on October 13.

Alter’s politically motivated firing was swiftly condemned by graduate students in the Texas State History Department. Joining them were the student newspaper and the Organization of American Historians, the American Historical Association, the Labor and Working Class History Association, and the Canadian Committee on Labour History.

One student who spoke to the *World Socialist Web Site* said:

I feel like people are just trying to be silenced. It seems that he [Trump] is trying to dictate what we can and cannot do. Especially with the death of Charlie Kirk.

He added:

I feel like it’s basically just saying it doesn’t matter if you’re in your own home or not. If you say something that goes against who you work for you’re just going to be fired. It says no boundaries between what you can say and what you can advocate for, between what your company that you work for could. Or in this case, even your college location.

Another student said:

Everyone should be able to believe what they believe in, and Professor Alter was an amazing professor. I had him, and he always allowed the students to think for themselves. He never told anyone what to think, and I think that it’s important to understand how dangerous this type of rhetoric is. Because we do live right now in a scary time with our government, and not listening to the people who actively make up the community, and this campus is harmful.

Asked about Trump’s efforts to establish a presidential dictatorship, she responded:

It’s happening right now in front of us, being supported by so many people, so many fascists, and we have to open our eyes before it’s too late, because if we don’t actively fight back right now, we’re going to look back in 10 years in a world we don’t recognize.

She added:

I think we shouldn't look at it as an isolated event. It's definitely not. We have to look at the context of his career, what he taught, how he taught it, and it doesn't feel like a coincidence that we fired him specifically. It really doesn't. And that's what should scare you. Not just that they fired someone, but someone so open. That shouldn't have happened in the first place, but it did. And it should scare you.

Speaking on the response of the Democratic Party, she said:

They're doing everything that is safe for them, but they're doing nothing that's safe for us. I think they're two sides at the same coin. Democrats aren't really any different than Republicans. So my thoughts on what they're doing and what they're not doing is it's all the same thing.

When asked about building a movement in the working class to oppose Trump, she said, "I think that's the only way we can fight what we're fighting right now."

Another student of Alter's spoke on the attacks on free speech across the US. She said:

I don't agree with the right-wing campaign against him. I despise it so much because on the day when you limit the freedom of speech, it's like what point do you get to where it's completely gone at this point. And it's not just Texas that I feel like is limiting freedom of speech. I feel like America in general, that we can't even support Palestine and we will get banned from social media or we'll get chastised for supporting a durable country.

She spoke on the significance of Alter teaching the history of the American labor movement, noting that she would not have known about major labor struggles like

the Homestead and Pullman Strikes if not for his class.

This is an essential element of the campaign against Alter and the very concept of academic freedom. The Republican Party's attack on Alter is aimed not just at his right to political speech, but at the material he teaches. Trump and the Republicans are seeking to erase the history that Alter teaches from class rooms and convert schools and universities into mouthpieces for fascist state propaganda.

Other academics in Texas have also been targeted. Shortly before Alter's initial dismissal, Melissa McCoul, an English lecturer at Texas A&M, was fired after a video circulated of a conservative student objecting to a lecture that featured content on gender identity. The video provoked virulent attacks from state Republicans that resulted in the additional firing of College of Arts and Sciences Dean Mark Zoran and department head Emily Johansen.

Hundreds of teachers were hounded by Republican officials and right-wing groups for statements and interactions on social media critical of fascist agitator Charlie Kirk, in some cases for simply not being sufficiently mournful of Kirk.

Texas State University has also moved to restrict course material on gender identity and LGBTQ+ subjects, and, according to the Academic Freedom Monitoring Project's "Free to Think" report, the Trump administration launched 40 attacks on academic freedom in the first half of 2025, ranging from threats to cut funding to attacks on scholars of foreign nationalities.

The attack on Tom Alter must be understood in this broader context as the Trump administration and the Republican Party, with no serious opposition from the Democrats, move to gut academic freedom, purge critical political speech and attack anything related to socialism and the class struggle.



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