

# COMMITTEE TO DEFEND **TOM ALTER**



## **REINSTATE TOM NOW !**

### **DEFEND FREE SPEECH !**



### **DEFENDTOMALTER.ORG**



## **FIRED FOR “CRIME” OF SPEAKING AT SOCIALISM SUMMIT, TEXAS PROFESSOR SPEAKS OUT**

OCTOBER 31, 2025

INTERVIEW WITH **TOM ALTER**

**Ashley Smith:** You were recently summarily fired without due process by Texas State University for speaking on your own time and own capacity at a socialist conference. After a judge ruled the university had violated your rights, Texas State temporarily reinstated you. But then the president held a due process hearing and fired you again. How did the president justify such a violation of your First Amendment rights and academic freedom?

**Tom Alter:** In his October 13 dismissal letter, Texas State University President Kelly Damphousse justified my firing on grounds that threaten not only academic freedom but civil rights in general. He claimed my remarks at the online socialism conference called for building a revolutionary socialist party with, according to Damphousse, “the purpose of overthrowing the United States Government, and they provide a roadmap for doing so.”

He admits, “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, I find that your recorded remarks ... implicate Texas State” and that “disruption of university operations, the destruction of university property, and

acts of violence on university campuses across our country are real. The threat of these activities to the Texas State campus community is also real.”

There are two things at play here by Damphousse that do not line up with the facts. First, I did not call for overthrowing the U.S. government. My talk was largely about different forms of working-class organization and struggle. As part of this, I posed the question, for those engaged in direct action tactics in a future hypothetical revolutionary situation, of “How does one expect to overthrow the U.S. government without organization?”

Secondly, the sole piece of evidence Damphousse cites is a YouTube video of my online conference talk edited by a self-described fascist. Conference organizers and I went to extra efforts so that conference speakers would not be identified by their places of employment. In none of the conference promotional material was I identified as a Texas State University faculty member.

In introducing myself at the conference, I did so as a member of Socialist Horizon and of the Texas State Employees Union (TSEU). The TSEU represents employees of the entire state of Texas. Attendees at the conference had to pre-register and the conference had a no recording policy.

The fascist grifter, unknowingly to us, filmed the entirety of the live stream, including when the conference went to break between sessions. It was during a break between sessions, when most participants left their screens, that someone who knew me asked what it is like teaching at Texas State.

The fascist grifter took this casual exchange during a break and edited the footage to make it seem like my employment at Texas State was part of my conference presentation. This was explained in detail to Damphousse. Without needing a forensic examination of the video, it is clear that the video on YouTube has been edited.

My session had a co-presenter, along with a chair, and a question-and-answer period. None of this is present in video held up by Damphousse because it has all been edited out by the fascist. The truth does not matter to Damphousse, just how things seem to a far right audience uninterested in knowing the truth.

Damphousse is carrying out a politically motivated attack on a socialist and a union member. His language of inciting violence and criminal activity mirrors the language used by Trump and other far right politicians around the world in going after left-wing and even liberal organizations. This sets a very dangerous example for anybody concerned with the rights of free speech and assembly.

As a government employee I have protected free speech in my capacity as a private citizen. I also have the additional protection of being a tenured professor with the ability to speak on matters of "public concern." If I can be fired for exercising my basic rights, then no one is safe.

**This seems to be a part of a campaign organized by the state government and far right on higher education and civil liberties in general in Texas.**

**This seems to be a part of a campaign organized by the state government and far right on higher education and civil liberties in general in Texas. What does it look like on your campus and others in the state?**

There is no doubt that my firing is part of a campaign organized by the far right on higher education across Texas. A few days before my first dismissal in September, a professor at Texas A&M University was fired for teaching issues related to gender identity. The president of the university was even forced to resign for not firing the professor soon enough.

In the wake of the Charlie Kirk assassination, two African American students, one at Texas Tech and another at Texas State, were singled out on X by Texas Gov. Greg Abbott for using their free speech rights to protest Kirk memorials held in public spaces on campus. The Texas Tech student was expelled and the Texas State University student was forced to withdraw or be expelled. A staffer at Texas State was fired for expressing her free speech on social media.

Since then, Abbott on October 19 announced that the state is “targeting professors ... pushing leftist ideologies.” Shortly after it was announced that a University of Texas professor had been removed from an administrative role over “ideological differences.” Far right politicians, like Abbott, in an Orwellian manner say they are trying to stop indoctrination of students while actively working to turn universities in Texas into centers of far right indoctrination.

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Amid this, the Texas State University administration

as ordered an audit of courses to remove classes that discuss LGBTQ topics and issues of sexuality. Texas Tech has also gone through a similar audit. The University of North Texas is being investigated by Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton for refusing to “address left-wing extremism” and “terror.” The “extremism” and “terror” Paxton is referring to are the actions of people who protested the racism and attacks on academic freedom being carried by Turning Point USA.

**What impact has your firing had on you, your family, coworkers, and students? How has everyone responded?**

My firing has had a severe impact on my family with two school-aged children. We have lost our source of income and our health insurance, and we now face an uncertain future. This is a situation no one wants to be in, though we are not alone as the economic crisis of capitalism deepens for working-class people.

The firing has had a deeply chilling effect on campus. Faculty are afraid to speak out for fear of being fired on a campus where tenure is not honored. I have heard from professors who are now afraid to teach lessons they had previously taught worry-free for years.

Now these professors are scared of teaching basic facts related to race, class, and gender. Language against teaching diversity put forth by the far right is so broad that this fear has even extended into the

sciences. Biology professors are now worried about teaching facts about biodiversity. This would be laughable if it was not actually happening.

Students are worried about protesting after a student who was forced to withdraw from the university for exercising his right to free speech in the university's so-called "free speech zone." While my firing created a repressive environment, especially for faculty, after the first couple of weeks, more faculty and students are coming forward to express their dissent to this far right attack on our fundamental civil liberties.

**What are the implications of your firing for faculty, workers, and students in public education in Texas?**

My firing has serious implications and ramifications. If a professor who has tenure, which is a form of a contract, can be fired for exercising their democratic rights on their own time and in their personal capacity, then really no one is safe. This is why my case is so important.

We must not allow my firing to be used as a precedent to fire more people for using their democratic rights. I say democratic rights because more than free speech is at stake — our rights to freedom of assembly and press, along with due process, are also being violated.

**Your firing is part of a larger bipartisan attack on academic freedom, the right to organize, and freedom of speech. It began under the Biden administration with the attack on students, faculty, and staff organizing in**

**solidarity with Palestinians .... What did that look like and how did it open the door for Trump's full-blown McCarthyism in the wake of Charlie Kirk's assassination? How have university bosses responded to Trump's McCarthyism in Texas and nationally?**

Palestine has been the axis around which many of our struggles currently revolve. Like countless wars before, the U.S. government's funding of Israel's genocide of Palestinian people has drained money from resources needed by working people during this time of economic crisis.

As for basic rights, if one cannot protest a genocide being livestreamed for all to see, then how can we use our democratic rights? Academics have been fired and students expelled for protesting the genocide. The Biden administration, along with Democratic and Republican governors, in attacking the democratic rights of Palestinian liberation activists, opened the door for the far right to attack all forms of expression.

Now all of our democratic rights are under attack under Trump's neo-McCarthyism. Trump has offered preferential funding to universities who comply with his plan to turn universities into centers of far right indoctrination. While some universities have rejected Trump's offer, the University of Texas at Austin is still considering it.

**In response to your case and others, unions, organizations, and student groups have rallied to your defense... How are they responding to this most recent firing? What are the lessons of all this organizing for other defense campaigns?**

Unions, students, and organizations concerned with democratic rights have all rallied to my defense. This has been a moment when everyone has upheld the labor movement's core principle that "an injury to one is an injury to all." The Texas State Employees Union, the Texas State University chapter of the Young Democratic Socialists of America, and San Marcos's chapter of Socialist Horizon have united to organize much of the on the ground support. As part of my defense campaign, they have staged protests and canvased for free speech and academic freedom.

The American Association of University Professors and the Texas-American Federation of Teachers have made the invaluable contributions, especially by providing me with a lawyer and legal advice. The Committee to Defend Tom Alter has brought unions, left organizations, and socialist groups to rally support for me across the country.

The Committee has an advisory board of academics, intellectuals, and longtime activists. While my socialist politics have not always been front and center during parts of the campaign, I have not hidden them. In my private and personal capacity, I continue to advocate for a better future based on the needs of the working class against the profit and greed-driven system of capitalism.

**Finally, what are the next steps in your struggle for reinstatement? What can people do to help?**

The immediate next step in my case is the appeal to the Texas State University System Board of Regents.

We will ask them to reverse President Damphousse's decision and reinstate me to my position at Texas State. On top of that, we will show that Damphousse's groundless decision has compromised academic freedom, violated tenure, and caused a serious blow to the standing and reputation of Texas State.

For many in the Texas State community and myself, the university means a lot to us, and we are deeply saddened by the harm Damphousse's actions have caused to Texas State. The Board of Regents has a chance to undo this harm and restore the previously thriving academic environment at Texas State.

People can help by contacting the board's Subcommittee for Academic and Health Affairs, which will be hearing my appeal and demand my reinstatement. To get further involved in my defense campaign and other struggles to defend civil liberties, go to the website of the [Committee to Defend Tom Alter](#) and join Haymarket Books' special event, "[Speak Out! Tom Alter, MAGA McCarthyism, and the Fight for Free Speech](#)," which will feature, among others, Eman Abdelhadi, Jodi Dean, and Dave Zirin.

And for those who can, please [donate](#) to help support me and my family amid the financial crisis my firing has thrown us into. That will help me focus on the fight to defend my civil liberties and those of everyone else. This is not just about me. All of us, all working class and oppressed people, are in the fight of our lives against Trump and his clique of right-wing billionaires. It is time for us to unite to defend democracy and fight for a society that puts people and the planet before profit.



## **Reinstate Dr. Tom Alter | Defend Free Speech**

10/13/2025:

Texas State University President Kelly Damphousse Undermines Free Speech, Upholds Firing of Professor Tom Alter After Sham Process

San Marcos, TX- 10/13/25 – In a deeply troubling move that strikes at the heart of the First Amendment, Texas State University President Kelly Damphousse has upheld the termination of Dr. Tom Alter, a tenured history professor, after a coerced and fundamentally flawed due process hearing.

Damphousse's decision, which he promised would be released by Friday October 10th but was delayed until Monday the 13th, betrays not only his word but the university's public commitments to fairness, transparency, and the protection of free expression. This delay reflects the same disregard for accountability and due process that has marked the administration's handling of this entire case.

“President Damphousse had an opportunity to uphold the first amendment,” said Ilesa Daniels Ross, President of the Texas State Employees Union. “Instead, he chose to send a chilling message to every faculty member and student who dares to speak out or stand up for their rights at Texas State.”

In a campus-wide message sent just hours before Dr. Tom Alter was informed that his termination would be upheld, President Damphousse spoke at length about shared governance, collaboration, and his concern for how the university community is affected by “current challenges.” Yet his decision to uphold the firing of a tenured faculty member for protected speech exposes the emptiness of those words.

The contrast between Damphousse’s rhetoric and his actions is stark. While he calls on faculty and staff to “move forward” and trust in the administration’s judgment, his refusal to defend free speech or engage transparently on this issue undermines the very trust he says he wishes to rebuild.

Observers across campus have noted that President Damphousse’s decision comes amid intensifying political pressure on Texas universities to fall in line with partisan agendas hostile to free speech. This pattern raises serious questions about whether President Damphousse’s choices reflect his own views on free expression, or if this decision is part of an effort to appease political forces that punish campus leaders who act otherwise.

Dr. Alter's firing, which a court compelled the university to re-examine after finding due process violations, has drawn national attention from academic, labor, and civil liberties organizations.

The Texas State Employees Union (TSEU CWA Local 6186) condemns this action in the strongest possible terms. The university's leadership has made clear that speech that does not fall in line will be punished, not protected.

"Kelly Damphousse's tenure as president will be remembered not for strengthening this university but for breaking its trust with those who make it what it is, that is its faculty, staff, and students," said a faculty member speaking anonymously out of fear of retaliation.

TSEU will continue to fight alongside Dr. Alter and all university workers for justice, free speech, and a campus that lives up to its public mission. TSEU is proud to be in coalition with the Committee to Defend Tom Alter.

9/10/2025: The Texas State Employees Union CWA Local 6186 (TSEU) condemns the abrupt termination of Dr. Tom Alter, a respected historian, educator, and active member of the Texas State University community, for statements he made as a private citizen.

Without a hearing or any meaningful opportunity to respond, university administrators under the leadership of President Kelly Dampousse removed Dr. Alter from his position in response to an online campaign led by Karlyn Borysenko. Borysenko has publicly called for embracing fascism, stated that Jewish people chose to die in the Holocaust, and refers to herself as an 'anti-communist cult leader.' She recorded a talk that Dr. Alter gave at the Revolutionary Socialism Conference on Sunday, September 7th and began calling for his firing on social media on Monday, September 8th. The transcript of the talk can be viewed here.

“This is exactly what the First Amendment protects against,” said TSEU President Ilesa Daniels Ross. “No public employee should fear losing their job because they expressed personal views outside of work. Texas State University’s decision sends a chilling message to every faculty member, staff member, and student: your livelihood can be taken away if political actors don’t like what you say on your own time.”

Dr. Alter, a beloved professor known for his scholarship in U.S. labor and social movement history, received no due process. He gave the talk in question at a conference on Sunday, September 7th, and Texas State University President Kelly Dampousse released a public statement announcing Dr. Alter’s termination on Wednesday, September 10th. The statement has since been updated to remove mention of Dr. Alter by name.

## **TSEU calls on Texas State University to:**

- 1.Reinstate Dr. Alter immediately.
- 2.Publicly affirm the constitutional right of all employees to speak as private citizens without retaliation.
- 3.Establish clear policies guaranteeing due process before any termination related to off-duty expression.

“This isn’t just about one professor,” added Daniels Ross. “It’s about protecting every Texan’s freedom to speak their mind without government interference. If a university president can cave to an extremist YouTuber today, what stops the next attack on free expression tomorrow?”

TSEU urges students, faculty, and community members to stand together and demand that Texas State University live up to its First Amendment obligations.

# COMMITTEE TO DEFEND TOM ALTER



## SUPPORTING ORGANIZATIONS

**LAWCHA**  
The Labor and Working-Class History Association



Canadian Committee on Labour History  
Comité canadien sur l'histoire du travail



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