

School shooting in Iowa follows record year for incidents in 2023

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On Thursday morning, a student opened fire at Perry High School in Perry, Iowa, killing one student and wounding five others before taking his own life. Police identified the shooter as Dylan Butler, a 17-year-old student at the school.

Students that attend both the high school and middle school on the same campus were returning for their first day of classes from the winter break when shots broke out near the cafeteria approximately 15 minutes before first period classes were set to begin.

Perry is a small, primarily working class town, about 40 miles northwest of Des Moines. Perry High School serves about 600 students in a school district of approximately 1,800. According to the Iowa Department of Education, over 51 percent of high school students were categorized as economically disadvantaged, receiving free or reduced price lunch in the 2020-2021 school year.

According to police, Butler, armed with a pump-action shotgun and a small-caliber handgun, opened fire on students and staff before committing suicide. Additionally, police officers reported finding Butler's body with an undetonated makeshift improvised explosive device (IED).

Butler killed one sixth-grade student and wounded five others. Four students, who have yet to be identified to the public, as well as the high school principal, Dan Marberger, were injured and sent to the hospital for treatment Thursday.

As the shooting began, students and staff barricaded themselves in classrooms and offices, and many fled the school, running to nearby establishments or homes. Rachel Kares, a student at Perry High School, was in band practice when she and her bandmates heard multiple gunshots. In an interview on CNN she recalled, "Our band teacher looked at us and he just goes, 'Run!' None of us hesitated, we just all got up and ran ... anywhere away from the school, we just kept going."

In an interview with NBC News, another student survivor, Ava Augustus, fought through tears to describe her experience hiding in a small office with the school's counselor and two other students during the shooting. "Of course I wanted to call my mom, but when we do our ALICE [Alert, Lockdown, Inform, Counter and Evacuate] drills, it's 'stay down, low, be quiet, don't let people know that you're in here.' And I'm scared and I want to talk to my mom, but you can't!"

Kamron Hall, 15, was near the cafeteria when the shooting happened. He said, "It was kinda terrifying at first honestly ... I saw kids running ... someone screamed 'get out!' ... people were running ... it scares me to think that I could have been one of those few that could have been shot or killed."

Hours before the shooting, Butler posted on his TikTok account a selfie in what appears to be the school bathroom with a duffle bag on

the floor and the caption: "Now we wait." The TikTok post plays the song "Stray Bullet" by German rock band KMFDM, whose lyrics have been cited by multiple school shooters, including the Columbine High School shooters in 1999 and the Jokela High School shooter in Finland who killed 8 people at his high school in 2007.

At a press conference Thursday, Mitch Mortvedt, assistant director of the Iowa Department of Public Safety Division of Criminal Investigation, stated that "[Butler] made a number of social media posts in and around the time of the shooting. Law enforcement are working to secure those pieces of evidence." Multiple reports from users on social media platforms have indicated that Butler live-streamed the entire incident on his Instagram account, including him taking his own life.

As details are still emerging on the incident, the entire mainstream media has focused on the narrow and individual motivation for Butler's violent rampage. There is little doubt that mental illness was involved in Butler's extreme anti-social and homicidal actions, but regardless of individual motivations, school shootings resulting in mass killings are a social phenomenon, both in the US and internationally and reflect deeper social causes rooted in the prevailing capitalist economic system.

Just four days into the new year, the Perry High School shooting is the first mass school shooting and the fourth shooting that has taken place at a K-12 school in 2024. According to the K-12 School Shooting Database, 2023 had the highest number of school shootings on record, with 334 incidents. This figure, a 12 percent increase from the year before, reflects an exponential increase in school shootings over the last six years. The database, which has aggregated data on school shootings dating back to 1966, predicts school shootings will increase to an estimated 400 incidents this year if this trend continues.

Over the past six years alone, there have been 1,257 school shootings on K-12 campuses across the US, which equates to more than half of the total number of school shootings over the course of the past 57 years, totaling 2,380. Extrapolating further, hundreds of thousands if not millions of students, faculty and staff across the US have been impacted by school shootings in their schools and districts.

In the past month there have also been mass shootings at university campuses in the US and internationally. On December 21, a gunman at the Faculty of Philosophy at Charles University in Prague, Czech Republic, killed 14 people and injured 25 others before killing himself. On December 6, a gunman killed three people and critically injured another on the University of Nevada Las Vegas (UNLV) campus.

2024 marks 25 years since the mass shooting at Columbine High School in Colorado shocked the world. On April 20, 1999, students

Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, walked into Columbine High School armed with assault rifles and pipe bombs to carry out a killing spree, murdering twelve students and one teacher before killing themselves.

Over the course of the past quarter century, shootings in schools as well as mass shootings in general have become increasingly commonplace. The mainstream media, as was the case in 1999 and now with each new mass shooting, offers no analysis or explanation of the underlying causes of these horrific events.

In contrast to the claims that each shooting is an individual and inexplicable tragedy, the *World Socialist Web Site* published the following just days after the Columbine massacre:

The concentration on individual warning signs will be of little help in preventing further tragedies. Attention should be focused, rather, on the social warning signs, that is, the indications and indices of social and political dysfunction which create the climate that produces events like the Columbine High School massacre.

Vital indicators of impending disaster might include: growing polarization between wealth and poverty; atomization of working people and the suppression of their class identity; the glorification of militarism and war; the absence of serious social commentary and political debate; the debased state of popular culture; the worship of the stock exchange; the unrestrained celebration of individual success and personal wealth; the denigration of the ideals of social progress and equality.

The social problems enumerated in 1999 above, have only intensified 25 years later. What social conditions are young people confronted with today? In just the past 5 years alone, young people have experienced unprecedented violence and death at the hands of the capitalist system.

We are now in the fifth year of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic which has been systematically covered up by all the capitalist governments. The murderous let-it-rip policies have resulted in the deaths of millions around the world to an entirely preventable disease. Despite the outright lie that “the pandemic is over,” COVID-19 remains a substantial public health threat and continues to be a major underlying factor in excess mortality rates. The global population continues to be subject not only to the trauma of mass death but also the constant threat of infection and reinfection, leading to significant risk of long-term illness and death due to the various symptoms from Long COVID and other health complications.

Young people have never known a single day the US was not at war under false humanitarian pretenses. The images from torture at Guantanamo Bay, Obama’s kill list, and the war crimes leaked by Chelsea Manning and exposed by Wikileaks and Julian Assange showed the brutal and violent reality of US imperialism.

The empty claims that the US “brings democracy” has never been more exposed than it is now in the eyes of workers and youth. For over three months the world has witnessed the leveling of Gaza amid the Israeli government’s genocide against the Palestinians. This rampage has been fully supported and funded by all the major imperialist powers, above all the United States.

Millions of workers and youth around the world, deeply horrified by and opposed to the genocide, are seeing the real face of US

imperialism which continues to attempt to cover itself under lies of “humanitarianism.” Furthermore, to defend its imperialist aims, democratic rights are being eviscerated at home as governments across the world are embracing increasingly authoritarian actions against those who speak out.

These same imperialist interests, driven by the decline in its economic global position, are what lie behind the US/NATO-backed war against Russia in Ukraine. Gaza and Ukraine are but two fronts in an escalating third world war, with the threat of direct fighting between nuclear armed powers, Russia and China.

The US alone has spent billions of dollars on war while its citizens face stagnant wages, interest rate hikes, crippling cost-of-living increases and cuts to vital social programs. The deteriorating state of public education is directly correlated to the state of American society and the conditions facing youth. Schools are grossly underfunded while billions are funneled toward war and mass murder abroad.

At a Thursday afternoon press conference, Iowa’s Republican governor Kim Reynolds said “We will work tirelessly to get the answers so that we can prevent it from happening again.” Reynolds went further to say that the state’s main priority is to support families affected by the shooting and noted that “social workers are embedded into the school system and will provide resources for students, staff, and family members.”

Over the past 25 years, the entire political establishment — both Democrat and Republican — has made no effort to stop mass shootings from continuing. Both factions of the ruling elite are hellbent on dragging the globe into a third world war, whatever the cost of human life. These wars will be funded and paid for in the lives of primarily poor youth looking for a college education. Also omitted from Reynolds’ comments Thursday was any explanation that schools across the US face continued mass austerity and underfunding.

Mental health services among youth have been slashed, a process which has accelerated due to cuts to Medicaid and the drying up of pandemic relief funds. Significantly, an estimated 2 million children have recently been terminated from Medicaid government assistance due in large part to bureaucratic mismanagement. Students are often on long waiting lists in schools to access mental health treatment and therapy.

The wars abroad and austerity at home are two sides of the same coin under the violence of the capitalist system. Young people must fight for the reorganization of society on a socialist internationalist basis. Only this can put an end to mass shootings, war, mass infection, attacks on public education, poverty, homelessness, lack of healthcare and austerity. All young people should reach out to establish chapters of the International Youth and Students for Social Equality on their campuses, high schools and middle schools to take up this fight. Contact us here.



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