

Park City Mountain ski patrollers' strike concludes after 2 weeks

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The two-week strike by 204 ski patrollers at Park City Mountain Resort in Utah came to an end this week after workers unanimously voted to ratify a tentative agreement, according to a statement from the Park City Professional Ski Patrol Association.

Highlights of the contract released include a \$2 an hour wage increase to the base pay from \$21 to \$23 (the main demand of workers), as well as an average increase of \$4 an hour for more experienced workers, up to a \$7.75 wage increase for the most experienced workers. The contract will also add access to two weeks of paid parental leave and restructure the wage growth scheme to allow for more pay for workers with longer tenures at the resort. The new contract will last through 2027.

Union officials said that negotiations with the company had stalled before the strike, with management refusing to meet or respond to communications for weeks on end. Workers unanimously voted to strike and issued a strike notice on December 16 before beginning the strike on December 27.

The strike garnered national attention after wealthy patrons of the world famous ski resort took to social media to complain of hours-long wait times at the small number of ski lifts still open. Skiers complained of spending tens of thousands of dollars only to get a few minutes on the slopes. Expressing the self-absorption of the upper middle class and wealthy clientele of the resort, skier Christopher Bisailon filed a class action lawsuit against Vail Resorts, which owns Park City Mountain, for defrauding customers by not disclosing the impact of the strike.

While the wealthy roiled at having their luxury vacations inconvenienced, the striking ski patrollers won widespread support from working people around

the country. A strike fund set up by the union on GoFundMe raised over \$300,000 with donations from thousands of people. The fund was started to cover the lack of financial support from the Communications Workers of America (CWA), which the PCPSPA is affiliated with, which would only offer \$300 a week of strike pay after 15 days on strike.

The strike encapsulated an essential feature of labor struggles around the world: a direct confrontation with the financial oligarchy. Park City Mountain Resort is one of 41 ski resorts around the world owned by Vail Resorts, which is worth nearly \$10 billion and is owned by a number of the most powerful financial firms in the world, including Blackrock and Vanguard. Along with other large corporate resort companies, Vail has consolidated a commanding grip over ski towns. With 37 resorts in the US, the company controls 36 percent of the ski resort market. Second place Alterra owns 15 percent.

This corporate domination has been a disaster for local residents. According to the Park City Community Foundation, 70 percent of the housing stock in Park City is unoccupied or is owned as a second home. Just 20 percent of homes are owner-occupied. Despite an average household income of over \$150,000 a year, average worker wages in the city and surrounding county are \$4,000 a year less than the Utah average and \$10,000 less than the national average of \$74,153. The average house costs more than \$2 million.

This makes living in town virtually impossible for workers, with over 85 percent of workers commuting from out of town to work. There are more workers in the city (11,000) than the official population (8,500).

The result is the conversion of ski towns into expensive playgrounds for the super rich, while workers are forced out of town.

This is one expression of the broader cost-of-living crisis gripping the United States, as working class and especially young people struggle to afford housing. For most, home ownership is an impossibility.

The courageous fight of the Park City ski patrollers against a powerful corporation was a revealing struggle of the fierce resistance of the financial oligarchy to the demands of workers to even modest demands.

Despite winning their demands, the patrollers union admits that the living wage in Park City is \$27 an hour for a single adult, still above the new starting pay for patrollers. The contract also includes a pay parity clause with non-unionized resorts. While this means that pay increases at other resorts will translate to Park City, it also implies that the strike did not win a significant advantage over non-union resorts.

Nevertheless, the Park City strike will likely inspire workers to struggle at other ski resorts and tourist towns across the country. Workers are already seeking an avenue to fight against the companies, with unionization of ski workers doubling since 2021, according to the United Mountain Workers, the umbrella union that the PCPSPA is part of under the CWA. The PCPSPA claims to represent 1,100 members.

However, the demands of ski workers will quickly run into conflict with the pro-capitalist orientation of the trade union bureaucracy.

Expressing the class collaborationist politics of the trade unions, Ryan Anderson, vice president of the ski patrol union at Breckenridge Ski Resort in Colorado, also owned by Vail, said the strike could lead to the end of “extractivism in our mountain towns,” adding that “I hope that this strike has the effect of announcing that these communities must be taken as serious partners in successful ventures rather than simply a source of labor that can be exploited.”

Workers must not fall into this political trap. Workers can never be “partners” with the same financial oligarchy that has a vested interest in the immiseration of the working class and the desolation of mountain communities in the pursuit of profit.

The outcome of this strike must be taken soberly. The ruling class is preparing attacks on social services, jobs and the rights of workers. As new and deeper struggles of the working class erupt, including of ski resort employees, they will crash against an intransigent

bureaucracy, one that would not even offer strike pay to its members.

As these struggles develop, the rank-and-file workers must organize themselves to take power out of the hands of the trade union bureaucracy and return it to the shop floor. This is the task of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), which is fighting to build an independent movement of the international working class against capitalist exploitation, austerity and war.



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