

A revealing strike by ski patrol workers at Park City, Utah resort

Alex Findijs, Shannon Jones
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An important struggle is being waged by workers at the Park City Mountain Resort, 30 miles east of Salt Lake City, Utah, that highlights the staggering inequality in America. Two hundred and four ski patrol workers, who provide safety on the slopes, have been on strike for nearly two weeks bringing most of the operations at the exclusive resort to a halt during the busiest time of the year.

News coverage of the strike has largely focused on the inconveniences it has caused for affluent patrons on their ski vacations. Several complained that they had spent tens of thousands of dollars on passes, travel and lodging to visit the resort only to wait several hours for a lift to take them up the slopes. In social media posts, several complained about the picket lines set up by ski patrol workers.

It apparently does not occur to these people that the targets of their venom are the workers who would rescue them if they got in a serious ski accident or were buried in snow.

The workers, who are paid around \$21 an hour, cannot afford to live in Park City, one of the most expensive towns in the country. According to rental and home sale site Zillow, the median price for a rental is \$3,500 a month, well over the monthly take-home pay for the average ski patroller after taxes. Even in nearby Salt Lake City, median rent is \$1,500, which would make a ski patrol worker nearly 50 percent rent-burdened and place extra commuting costs on workers.

Since the ski season lasts only a few months, ski patrol workers, who are often younger, must hold other jobs to survive. Many must work in tourist-related fields during the summer as fly fishing, mountain biking or white-water rafting guides.

The workers are members of the Park City Professional Ski Patrol Association (PCPSA), which

is affiliated with the Communications Workers of America (CWA). The union's demands are modest, to say the least. A two-dollar raise in base pay to \$23 an hour, which would still leave them far below a living wage.

The strike has shut down substantial portions of the resort's 7,300 acres, and as of this writing, only 26 of the resort's 41 lifts and 104 of 350 trails were open. Nevertheless, management has stuck by its insulting offer of a 4 percent raise. The union points out that this includes merit increases earned under the last contract, which management has been withholding. When that is subtracted, management's net offer is 0.5 percent.

Vail Resorts is the owner of Park City Mountain. Based in Breckenridge, Colorado, the resort consortium owns 41 ski resorts across the US, Canada, Australia and Switzerland. Vail Resorts embodies the increasingly dominant presence of Wall Street in ski towns. Vail is largely owned by several major financial firms, including Blackrock and Vanguard, and the broader intrusion of large corporations into ski towns has led to just 11 companies owning more than 20 percent of the ski resorts in the US. These corporations are also invested in building luxury housing that forces the cost of living for workers up, as well as the building of employee housing units that can serve to make employees dependent on the employer for housing.

This corporate expansion has been extremely profitable for Wall Street. In 2024, Vail Resorts made a net profit of \$230 million and approved the buyback of 1.7 million shares.

To maintain even limited operations at the Park City, Vail has brought in ski patrollers from its Vail, Colorado resort and other operations. In a press statement Beth Howard, vice president and chief operating officer, at Vail Mountain, claimed, "I want to

reassure our guests that this assignment for a very limited number of Colorado patrollers and safety professionals has had no impact on the safety at our resorts in Colorado.”

While the strike has upset the well-to-do and led to 6.5 percent falloff in Vail’s stock value, the spirited walkout has garnered widespread support from workers and young people. An online gofundme account has raised over \$300,000 so far, well over the initial goal of \$100,000.

One supporter, who donated \$200, wrote, “The Patrol has always been undervalued. I worked the mountain from 79-86. We made \$8 per hour. Such a poor business model. The resort would pay for us to go to continuing education for medical and avalanche training and then not pay us enough to live. They just were banking on our love of the job. We all had second jobs as I’m sure you all do. The cost of living/housing was sooo much less then.”

A 30-year veteran ski patroller wrote in a post on Facebook, “I call on everyone to support the Ski Patrollers on strike at resorts owned by Vail. Patrolling required high skill level in emergency medicine, snow science, public safety, and required us to put our bodies on the line physically and mentally every day. As a professional, I was forced to take other jobs once I had a mortgage and kids and continued patrolling, only part-time after that.”

Vail Resort’s largest ski resort in the US, Park City features several training courses for the US Olympic ski team and has hosted major snowboarding and alpine giant slalom events. It has been chosen as one of the main venues for the 2034 Winter Olympics, which will be held in Salt Lake City.

The fierce resistance of management to the modest pay demands of these 200 workers highlights the real state of class relations in America. The financial oligarchy fears that any concessions could encourage other workers in the resorts and broader sections of the working class to press ahead with their demands. The incoming Trump administration, made up of mega-billionaires and fascists has no intentions of granting anything to the working class. On the contrary, they want to reinforce the servility of labor to capital.

In recent years there has been a surge of unionization among ski patrol workers driven by the rising cost of living in the pricey ski resort towns and reflective of a

broader mood of militancy in the working class. In addition to Vail resorts, ski patrollers at Eldora Mountain Resort and Loveland Ski Resort in Colorado have also unionized. The ski patrol at Arapahoe Basin Ski Area, also in Colorado, is scheduled to vote on unionization.

The strike called by PCPSA is being promoted as an unfair labor practice (ULP) strike, not an economic strike. This creates the danger that the strike may be shut down without a contract if the union decides there is “progress” in negotiations. Ski patrollers would be advised to oppose any such maneuver and insist on no return to work without a signed contract meeting their demands.



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