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Public Statement from Historians at the University of Toronto

April 22, 2021

Faculty members at the University of Toronto

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As faculty of the University of Toronto's History Department, we join with hundreds of our colleagues in the fields of health and medicine in condemning the Government of Ontario's refusal, through 13 months of this devastating pandemic, to even consider funding paid sick leave and paid time off for vaccinations for essential workers in this province. While the April 20th announcement extends the hope that a plan is finally coming, it is critical to remember that this government has repeatedly refused to implement these policies despite multiple calls to do so from the members of its own COVID-19 Science Table, leading public health experts, as well as ER and ICU physicians.

The provincial government's evident disregard for scientific advice is costing the health and lives of the most vulnerable Ontarians, many of whom are racialized people, immigrants, women, single parents, the homeless, the disabled and the underhoused. The government, in its utter failure to live up to its basic responsibilities, betrayed its democratic mandate and provoked an unnecessary political crisis. On April 16th, rather than acting responsibly and listening to its own public health experts, the provincial government sought to impose authoritarian measures that undermined democracy while doing nothing to address the public health disaster that its own negligence helped to create.

Many of our own colleagues here at the University of Toronto were among those who warned the Ford government months ago that this public health emergency would come. Despite these warnings, the government willfully ignored scientific advice, forcing vulnerable people back into unsafe workplaces with no protections against this disease. The government's decisions have now compromised one of the best public healthcare systems in the world. Every single one of the more than 250,000 backlogged surgical procedures represents a person living unnecessarily with illness and pain. Now, here we are, in peace time, watching as our health care providers face the terrible prospect of having to practice wartime medicine, triage ICU beds and decide who lives and who dies.

[Read the full statement]

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