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Covid-19 pandemic in France

Car manufacturer PSA backs down under pressure from employees

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Although the management of the PSA plant in Valenciennes - Trith-Saint-Léger wanted to resume activity, as of Tuesday, 31 March 2020 it had to back down following opposition from the CGT and CFTC unions represented on the establishment's Economic AND Social Committee (CSE). A first victory against the plans of PSA who wanted to make this a test factory.

The site, which manufactures gearboxes for the group, has 1,700 employees. This resumption required the presence of 150 to 200 people. It would be “a very gradual activity, from Tuesday, on a voluntary basis” we were told on Friday. With reinforced precautionary measures, promised the management.

A test site

“There are masks, gloves, the teams will not meet, the schedules will be shifted,” reassured management. The Valenciennes factory is a test site. That of Douvrin (Pas-de-Calais, manufacture of engines) is in the same situation. Sevelnord, in Hordain (utilities), would have been the next unit to resume production.

But “for us, it is premature to restart production when the peak of the epidemic has not passed, insisted early in the afternoon Sébastien Leroy (CFTC, the biggest trade union), who attended the long and stormy CSE this Friday morning. Admittedly, there is an organization on sharp protection, these measures are acceptable, but not now, not before the peak of the epidemic has passed.”

“We are not a business of basic necessity,” said the trade unionist. We know how to discuss, we are a reform union, but not on a subject like that. If the management does not want to listen to us to postpone the date of resumption of activity, we will make an assessment with an independent body.”

Trade union unity

The same line from the CGT: “Resuming at the height of the epidemic, it makes no sense! thundered Cédric Brun. We had the scenario just put before us, without asking our opinion. We are the test factory, they told us that Tavares (the boss of the PSA group) had his eyes on us. What I say to employees is that they will risk their lives, bringing the disease home. Yes, we lose money by short-time working. But it's about our lives!”

The two trades unionists also agree on another aspect: the management promised materials, including masks, while the hospitals ran out. “Outrageous!”, according to Cédric Brun.

The controversy ended this Friday at 3:50 pm, with a simple text message from management: “The resumption of production at the PSA site in Valenciennes is postponed.” Without, for the moment, more information concerning the reasons for this abandonment and the next schedules.

At Toyota Onnaing, an extraordinary CSE also took place, Friday, 27 March from 3 p.m. Factory management has

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announced that production will not resume before 20 April at the earliest

30 March 2020

Translated by **International Viewpoint** from [l'Anticapitaliste](#).

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