

BOARD OF GOVERNORS
OF THE
FEDERAL RESERVE SYSTEM

STATEMENT FOR THE PRESS

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The following summary of general business and financial conditions in the United States, based upon statistics for April and the first three weeks of May, will appear in the June issue of the Federal Reserve Bulletin and in the monthly reviews of the Federal Reserve banks.

Industrial activity in April and the first half of May was maintained at the relatively high level of recent months. The general level of wholesale commodity prices declined somewhat, reflecting considerable reductions in prices of many raw materials and semi-finished products.

Production, employment, and trade

The Board's seasonally adjusted index of industrial production in April continued at 118 percent of the 1923-1925 average. Manufacturing production rose further, reflecting increased output of durable goods. Activity at steel mills was at a rate slightly higher than in March and about equal to that in the peak month of 1929. Automobile production continued to expand. In the first three weeks of May output in these industries was maintained at the levels reached at the close of April. Increases in output in April were also reported for lumber and plate glass. At textile mills where output has been at a high level in recent months there was a slight reduction in activity.

At bituminous coal mines output declined sharply following an increase in March, when consumers accumulated stocks of coal in anticipation of a

strike. Crude petroleum output, which had risen sharply from November to March, showed further growth in April. Production of most metals also increased.

Value of construction contracts awarded, as reported by the F. W. Dodge Corporation, increased more than seasonally from March to April and continued higher than a year ago, reflecting, as in earlier months of the year, a larger volume of residential building and of other privately-financed work. Contracts awarded for publicly-financed construction have been considerably smaller in the first four months of this year than in the corresponding period of 1936.

Employment rose further between the middle of March and the middle of April. There was a considerable growth in the number of persons employed in manufacturing and on the railroads, little change in those employed in the public utility industries and in trade, and a decline at bituminous coal mines. At factories the principal increases in employment were reported by the steel, machinery, and automobile industries, while the number employed in the clothing industry declined. Working forces at textile mills were maintained, although a decrease is usual at this season. Factory payrolls increased more than employment, reflecting chiefly further increases in wage rates.

In April sales at department stores showed little change and mail order sales were also maintained at the March level, while sales at variety stores declined.

Commodity prices

The general level of wholesale commodity prices, as measured by the

index of the Bureau of Labor Statistics, declined from 88.3 percent of the 1926 average at the beginning of April to 86.9 in the middle of May. Prices of nonferrous metals, steel scrap, cotton, and rubber declined considerably and there were also decreases in the prices of grains, cotton goods, silk, hides, and chemicals, while prices of shoes and clothing showed further small advances. Since the middle of May prices of hogs and pork have advanced sharply and grain prices have also risen.

Bank credit

Following upon the final increase in reserve requirements, which became effective on May 1, excess reserves of member banks declined from \$1,600,000,000 to about \$900,000,000, and in the first three weeks of May fluctuated around the new level. Adjustments by banks to the new requirements were reflected in a decrease in interbank balances and in a small increase in borrowings. The Federal Reserve System in April purchased \$96,000,000 of United States Government securities, for the purpose of easing the adjustment to the new requirements and preserving orderly conditions in the money market.

Total loans and investments of reporting member banks showed a small decline from the middle of April through May 19. Holdings of United States Government obligations and other securities showed some decline, which was offset in part by increases in loans.

While domestic interbank and United States Government deposits declined further, balances of foreign banks and other demand and time deposits at reporting member banks increased.

Money rates

The open-market rate on 90-day bankers' acceptances, which between January and the latter part of March had advanced from 3/16 to 9/16 percent, was reduced to 1/2 percent on May 7, and the rate on nine-months Treasury bills declined to .62 percent on May 24 compared with a high point of .74 percent on May 3. Other short-term rates have shown little change in recent weeks. Yields on long-term Treasury and other high-grade bonds have declined somewhat.