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BOARD OF GOVERNORS
OF THE
FEDERAL RESERVE SYSTEM

STATEMENT FOR THE PRESS

For release in morning papers, Thursday, January 27, 1938.

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

Industrial output declined further in December and, according to preliminary reports, showed little change in the first three weeks of January. Prices of raw materials, which had declined sharply in October and November, have been maintained since that time.

Production

Volume of industrial production declined further in December and the Board's seasonally adjusted index was at 84 percent of the 1923-1925 average as compared with 89 in November. The decline reflected chiefly a continued sharp curtailment of activity in the durable goods industries. Steel ingot production averaged about 26 percent of capacity, output of automobiles and plate glass was reduced considerably, and production of lumber and cement also declined. Total output of nondurable goods declined seasonally. There was a sharp decrease in output at silk mills, and cotton consumption declined further. At woolen mills and shoe factories, however, output was maintained, following a considerable period of sharp decline. Activity at sugar refineries increased further. Mineral production in December, as in other recent months, was at a high level. Output of crude petroleum and bituminous coal declined seasonally, while anthracite production increased somewhat.

In the first three weeks of January output of steel and automobiles increased somewhat from the extreme low levels reached in the latter part of December.

Value of construction contracts awarded in December continued in about the same volume as in the preceding three months. During this period there was a decline in awards for privately-financed projects, reflecting in large part further reductions in residential building, while publicly-financed work increased.

Employment

Factory employment and payrolls showed further declines between the middle of November and the middle of December, and employment at mines, on the railroads, and in the construction industry also continued to decrease. The decline in the number employed at factories was larger than in earlier months in industries producing durable goods, and was particularly marked in the steel, machinery, and automobile industries. For the nondurable goods industries as a group, the decline in December was about the same as in each of the previous three months, after allowance for seasonal changes. There was some increase in employment at shoe factories and little change at plants producing tobacco products, while most other industries in this group showed further decreases.

Distribution

Department store sales increased in December by about the usual seasonal amount, and the Board's adjusted index was 90 percent of the 1923-1925 average as compared with 91 percent in November and an average of 93 percent in the first ten months of the year. Mail-order business and sales at variety stores showed somewhat more than the seasonal increase, while sales of automobiles declined substantially. Preliminary reports indicate that in the first half of January sales at department stores were at about the same level as a year ago.

Railroad freight-car loadings continued to decline in December, and in that month were 18 percent lower than the average for the first half of the year, making allowance for usual seasonal change.

Commodity prices

Wholesale prices of basic commodities, after declining sharply in the autumn, showed little change in December and the first three weeks of January. Grains, cotton, print cloths, steel scrap, and bituminous coal increased somewhat, while leather, rayon, and woodpulp prices were reduced. Prices of a wide variety of finished industrial products showed further declines, and livestock products continued to decrease sharply.

Bank credit

Excess reserves of member banks increased in the four weeks ending January 19 from $1,010,000,000 to $1,370,000,000 and were larger than at any time since May 1. The post-holiday decline in money in circulation, which accounted for this growth of excess reserves, was larger than the increase that occurred before Christmas.

The volume of loans at reporting member banks in 101 leading cities declined sharply in the five weeks ending January 19, while their holdings of investments showed little net change. Declines occurred in loans to security brokers and dealers and in commercial loans, which decreased both in New York City and in other leading cities. Interbank balances were built up during the period, while other deposits decreased somewhat, reflecting largely the repayment of bank loans, partly offset by a return flow of currency from circulation.

Money rates and bond yields

The average rate on new issues of 91-day Treasury bills continued in January at less than 1/8 of 1 percent, and yields on Treasury notes and bonds declined to new low levels for recent months. Yields on the highest-grade corporate bonds also declined somewhat, while those on the lower-grade railroad issues rose.