

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 May and the first half of June, will appear in the July issue of the Federal Reserve Bulletin and in the monthly reviews of the Federal Reserve Banks.

After a slight decline in April industrial activity increased sharply in May and the first half of June. Wholesale commodity prices showed a further considerable advance and retail prices also increased. Distribution of commodities to consumers was maintained in large volume.

Production

Volume of industrial output increased sharply in May, following a decline in April, and the Board's seasonally adjusted index rose to 149 per cent of the 1935-1939 average, as compared with 140 in April and 143 in March. The decline in April had reflected mainly reduced output of bituminous coal and automobiles occasioned by shutdowns accompanying industrial disputes. These were settled during the month and in May and the first half of June output in these industries rose to the high levels prevailing earlier.

In a number of other lines activity increased steadily throughout the spring months, particularly in the machinery, aircraft,

and shipbuilding industries. Steel production was maintained at 99 per cent of capacity, except for a short period during late April and early May when output was reduced somewhat owing to a shortage of coal. Output of nonferrous metals also continued near capacity; deliveries of foreign copper in May increased to 49,000 tons, amounting to about one-third of total deliveries to domestic consumers. Toward the end of the month, as it became apparent that combined military and civilian need for these metals would soon greatly exceed available supplies, a General Preference Order covering all iron and steel products was issued by the Priorities Division of the Office of Production Management and in June mandatory priority controls were established for copper and zinc.

Textile production rose further in May, reflecting increased activity at cotton, wool, and rayon mills. A continued rise in output of manufactured food products was likewise reported and activity in the chemical and shoe industries was maintained at earlier high levels, although usually there is a considerable decline at this season. Petroleum production increased, and output of anthracite also advanced following some curtailment in April. Iron ore shipments amounted to 11,000,000 tons in May, a new record level and near the shipping capacity of the present Lake fleet.

Value of construction contract awards rose sharply in May, reflecting increases in both public and private construction, according to F. W. Dodge reports. Awards for private residential and

nonresidential building increased more than seasonally, and contracts for defense projects continued in large volume.

Distribution

Distribution of commodities to consumers was sustained at a high level in May. Department store sales showed a further rise, while sales at variety stores declined by slightly more than the usual seasonal amount. Retail sales of new automobiles continued at the high April level and sales of used cars rose further.

Freight-car loadings increased sharply in May, reflecting a marked rise in coal shipments and a further expansion in loadings of miscellaneous freight. In the first half of June total loadings were maintained at the advanced level of other recent weeks.

Commodity prices

Wholesale prices of a number of agricultural and industrial commodities showed further increases from the middle of May to the middle of June and the general index of the Bureau of Labor Statistics advanced two points to 87 per cent of the 1926 average. Federal action to limit price increases was extended to some consumer goods, principally new automobiles, hides, and certain cotton yarns. In retail markets prices of most groups of commodities have advanced, reflecting in part increases in wholesale prices earlier this year.

Bank credit

Commercial loans at reporting banks in 101 cities continued to rise during the four weeks ending June 11. Bank holdings of United

States Government securities increased further, chiefly through the purchase of bills by New York City banks and of bonds by banks in other leading cities. As a result of the expansion in loans and investments bank deposits continued to increase.

United States Government security prices

Following a rise in the latter part of May Treasury bond prices declined slightly in the first half of June. On June 14 the 1960-65 bonds were $7/8$ of a point below the all-time peak in prices of December 10. Yields on both taxable and tax-exempt 3- to 5-year notes declined slightly from the middle of May to the middle of June.