OCTOBER 1955

FEDERAL RESERVE BANK OF SAN FRANCISCO

REVIEW OF BUSINESS CONDITIONS

The level of economic activity in the Twelfth District rose to another new high in August and September. Although complete data are not yet available, there appears little doubt that the third quarter was the most active three months on record. New high levels of operation have been reached in a wide range of industries, and employment and incomes have reached correspondingly high totals. Consumer spending, as reflected in sales of retail stores, has been running at record rates.

The rate of increase in general levels of activity has slackened considerably in recent months, however. This is not necessarily a sign of weakness in the underlying situation but reflects rather a tapering off as full capacity and employment levels are approached. Also, some moderate slackness has appeared in particular lines of activity. The over-all economic situation continues strong and, aside from the temporary setback at the outset of the illness of the President, the high degree of confidence exhibited thus far by businessmen and consumers in the outlook for the remainder of the year appears unimpaired.

Employment rise continues but at slower pace than before

The total number of wage and salary workers employed in District nonfarm establishments rose to another new high in August, after seasonal adjustment, reaching a level nearly 6 percent ahead of August last year. On the basis of preliminary information, the employment total will probably show a further seasonally adjusted gain in September. If this happens, employment will have reached a new high in each of the eight months since January and will complete nearly fourteen months of continuous advance. It is significant to note that the District shows a gain of more than 2.5 percent from the previous employment peak in July 1953, while the nation's nonfarm employment is still slightly under its previous peak which occurred in the same month of 1953.

While further employment expansion is expected, the rate of advance has slowed significantly since June and it appears likely that future growth will also be moderate. This slackening in the rate of growth reflects a number of factors. Perhaps of most significance in the current situation is the fact that an increasing number of District industries are reaching their practical full-capacity level

of operations. Consequently, future gains in employment will tend to be limited to the rate of new capacity formation, which is unlikely to lead to a rate of new job opportunities that even approaches the growth during the past year. The very low proportion of unemployed workers to total civilian labor force in the District also precludes any significant further rise in employment from withdrawals from the unemployed pool, leaving future growth to come from new additions to the labor force, including in-migration. In addition, signs of weakness have appeared in some lines, principally construction, that will serve as a brake on further growth in total employment. It is also important to note that monthly employment comparisons in the future will be with months in the latter part of 1954 when employment was on the upswing, rather than as in the past when the year-ago figures reflected a recessionary downswing.

The seasonally adjusted employment increase from July to August was quite small, about 6,000 workers. This slight upward change, however, masks some significant changes in the various segments of the nonagricultural economy. Among the expanding industry divisions, mining employment provided the largest gain both absolutely and in percentage terms. Most of the increase of 7,300 workers from July to August at District mines reflected the return to work of copper miners following a strike against the major producers in Utah and Arizona. Continued modest employment advances occurred in transportation and utilities, finance, and in District manufacturing. Trade and service employment remained virtually unchanged from July to August, although the level of jobs was still 3 or 4 percent ahead of August last year.

Employment in contract construction, after seasonal adjustment, has declined by more than 9,000 workers or nearly 2.5 percent since it reached a peak of 404,000 in June. Nearly all of the decline occurred in the period

Also in This Issue

Personal Income in The Twelfth
District, 1954

from July to August. Despite recent losses, construction employment is still nearly 10 percent ahead of a year ago. Nevertheless, the signs of growing weakness in the overall construction situation have become quite apparent in recent months and merit more detailed consideration.

Construction shows signs of faltering

In addition to the recent employment decline, other signs have appeared that indicate that perhaps the building boom is losing some of its headway. The total value of District building permits issued by local authorities has shown a successively smaller gain over year-ago periods since May. This percentage gain, which reached 39 percent in March and 37 percent in May, was less than 2.5 percent in September relative to September a year ago. Most of the reduction in the percentage gain from last year is due to a slowing down in new residential construction. The number of residential units for which permits were issued fell below comparable months last year in both June and July, rose slightly ahead of last year in August, and in September was roughly equal to September a year ago. The rise in August, moreover, reflected primarily a rush to get projects formally qualified for exemption from the tightened terms on FHA and VA mortgages which became effective at the beginning of that month.

Data on applications received and appraisal assignments at District offices of the Federal Housing Administration and the Veterans' Administration reflect developments similar to those revealed by the building permit series. Gains over comparable year-ago months at both FHA and VA offices were substantial until July, ranging from 37 to 113 percent. In July, however, FHA applications received and VA appraisal assignments fell below last year. The rush to qualify for pre-change mortgage terms caused an upward spurt in August, but a decline from last year occurred again in September.

With construction employment declining, building permits showing a sharply narrowing margin over last year, and activity falling off at FHA and VA offices, total building activity would appear to be changing from a sharp expansionary force to one that will contribute less support to the otherwise strong over-all business situation. A number of factors, both financial and other, accounts for this change in the position of the construction industry. Although the current volume of mortgage lending is at or near a record high level, the growing tightness in the supply of mortgage funds and the higher rates these funds command have exerted a downward pressure on residential building. The recently imposed FHA and VA requirements calling for higher down payments and shortened maturities have also been a factor of some importance, although their effect has not yet been fully felt owing to the large volume of houses still available on the earlier and easier terms. Recently the Federal Home Loan Banks announced a tightening in loan policy restricting the new mortgage lending of savings and loan associations to the volume of new savings and repayments. To the extent that this policy is effective, it will reduce the flow of mortgage funds from these organizations. In addition to the financial factors there is a substantial segment of opinion in particular areas of the District that the over-all demand for housing may be declining and some building in excess of effective current demand is becoming evident. These views are based largely upon a rise in vacancy rates in some areas along with the feeling that declining household formation is finally being felt in current demand for new residential units.

In the field of nonresidential building, activity appears to be holding up well. This is especially the case for commercial, educational, religious, and recreational structures. However, whether or not further gains in these types of construction will be sufficient to offset the apparent growing weakness in housing remains to be seen.

Lumber markets reflect tapering off in house building

The growing weakness in the national rate of new house building, the principal source of demand for District lumber, has resulted in a drop off in orders received by the mills and has been the primary cause of a sharp break in prices for some lumber industry products. Most of the weakness in demand and prices is concentrated so far in the dimension grades usually sold undried and utilized for the most part in framing new residential units. Although prices and new orders usually decline seasonally following Labor Day, the price break and continued decline has been somewhat more severe than was expected. Official price indexes are as yet unavailable for September, but trade reports indicate that prices of Douglas fir green dimension 2 x 4's which sold for \$78 per thousand board feet early in September were quoted at \$70 or less in early October.

Production and employment, however, continued high in all of the major lumber producing regions. In the Douglas fir region, for example, average weekly production during September was 8 percent above September last year. Employment data, after making an estimated allowance for the strike last year, indicate a similar gain in the Pacific Coast states where a large part of the District industry is concentrated. In the plywood segment of the industry prices continue to hold firm in the face of record production. Production of Douglas fir plywood for the first nine months of the year was nearly 37 percent ahead of the comparable period last year.

Metal mining recovers from strike interruptions

Operations at District metal mines rebounded sharply in August and September from the strike-induced lows of the preceding month and a half. Mining employment, seasonally adjusted, rose by 7,300 workers from July to August with some further gain indicated for September. Demand continues strong for all three of the nonferrous metals mined in the District and there appear to be no signs of post-strike price weakness. The domestic price for refined copper continues firm at 43 cents per pound.

The price of lead rose from 15 cents per pound to 15.5 cents per pound in late September.

Demand for bank loans continues strong

High and rising levels of production and sales have occasioned a very active demand for bank credit extension to business firms and to consumers. For the twelvemonth period ended October 19 total loans of weekly reporting member banks in the District rose by more than \$1,2 billion. This gain in outstanding loan volume compares with a decrease of \$272 million during the comparable period one year earlier. Since midyear the increase in outstanding loans has been \$455 million or 36 percent of the total rise for the entire twelve-month period. The largest proportion of the gain over the year period and since midyear has taken place in advances to commercial, industrial, and agricultural enterprises. Loans in this category for the year period ended October 19 increased \$587 million (\$178 million since the end of June) compared with a decrease in this type of credit of \$250 million in the preceding twelve-month interval. Sharply increased borrowings by firms in wholesale and retail trade, sales finance companies, and construction enterprises along with a very substantial cut in the rate

of reduction in outstanding bank indebtedness of metals and metal product manufacturers account for the principal portion of the rise in business loans.

Real estate loans, reflecting the near-record volume of new residential construction in the past year, expanded sharply, up \$344 million in the year ended October 19 and up \$141 million from the end of June. This is the largest one-year gain since 1948 and substantially exceeded the yearly increase recorded during the 1950 peak in house building. Outstanding real estate loans have risen without interruption throughout the post-World War II period. With the growing weakness in new residential construction activity mentioned earlier and continued tightness in the money markets, the rate of increase in outstanding real estate loans will likely decline in the months ahead.

Other loans, consisting mainly of borrowings by consumers, have also risen sharply in the past twelve months. The increase in outstanding volume for the year ended October 19 was \$286 million which compares with a decline of \$166 million in the like period a year earlier. Nearly 40 percent of the rise has come since midyear. The major factor in the rise in consumer loans has been the unusually high sales of new automobiles.

PERSONAL INCOME IN THE TWELFTH DISTRICT, 1954

NEW series on estimates of personal income by states A has recently been initiated by the Department of Commerce. Based on the new estimates, personal income received by individuals in the Twelfth District rose by somewhat more than 1 percent from 1953 to 1954, reaching a record \$38,803 million. Comparison with a national increase of slightly less than 1 percent during the same period indicates that this region weathered the 1953-1954 recession and the initial phases of the subsequent recovery only slightly better than the country as a whole—at least in terms of personal income. As shown in Table 1, the District increase reflects a rather wide dispersion of changes among the District states. Personal income showed about the same percentage increase in California, which accounts for approximately 70 percent of the District total, as in the District as a whole. At the extremes, personal income declined slightly more than 2 percent in Idaho and rose about 9 percent in Nevada, the largest percentage increase in the nation.

Per capita personal income declined in both the District and the nation, reflecting a more rapid growth of population than of income (Table 2). The decline was somewhat larger in the District since the rate of population growth in the West exceeded that of the country as a whole. Nevada was the only District state with an increase in per capita income. On the other hand, per capita incomes in California, Oregon, Utah, and Idaho showed larger percentage decreases than the national average.

The new series on state personal income replaces the previously published series on state income payments. The Department of Commerce points out that, as a result of the change in definition and use of better statistical sources, the state personal income series will provide both a more comprehensive and more precise coverage of personal income flow by state than the old series. This new state series conforms to the United States personal income series included in the national income and product accounts prepared by the Office of Business Economics of the Department of Commerce. The only conceptual difference is that the state personal income series excludes Federal Government disbursements to civilian and military personnel outside the continental United States. This gives rise to only a relatively small difference between the two series, however, and as a result total personal income for the nation as a whole exceeded the combined total for the 48 states by slightly more than 1 per-

Table 1
Personal Income
Twelfth District and United States, 1953-54
(in millions of dollars)

(in millions	of dollars)		Percent change	
Area	1953	1954	1953-54	
Arizona	1,428 26,592	1,468 27,026	$^{+2.8}_{+1.6}$	
Washington	4,863 2,906 876	4,934 2,881 857	$\begin{array}{c} +1.5 \\ -0.9 \\ -2.2 \end{array}$	
Idaho	1,126 466	1,130 507	+0.4 +8.8	
Twelfth District	38,257	38,803	+1.4	
United States	283,388	285,368	+0.7	

Source: United States Department of Commerce, Survey of Current Business, September 1955.

¹This article is based primarily upon the estimates which appear in the United States Department of Commerce, Survey of Current Business, September 1955, pp. 12 ff.

TABLE 2 PER CAPITA PERSONAL INCOME TWELFTH DISTRICT AND UNITED STATES, 1953-54

(in dollars)		Percent change		
Area	1953	1954	1953-54	
Arizona	1,597	1,582	0.9	
California	2,194	2.162	1.5	
Washington	1,960	1,949	-0.6	
Oregon	1,794	1,757	-2.1	
Idaho	1.475	1,433	2.8	
Utah	1,503	1,483	-1.3	
Nevada	2,390	2,414	+1.0	
Twelfth District	2,051	2,024	-1.3	
United States	1,790	1,770	1.1	

Source: United States Department of Commerce, Survey of Current Business, September 1955.

cent in 1954. Further differences between the personal income and income payments series are discussed at the end of this article.

Changes in personal income reflect year's business activity

State data showing changes between 1953 and 1954 in personal income by source and type of income have not as yet been made available by the Department of Commerce. However, other major business indicators measuring economic developments during the past year suggest the sources of change in total personal income. In the nonfarm sector, the early 1954 recessionary forces in manufacturing, construction, transportation, and mining served to dampen the District rise in personal income.¹ In both the nation and the District, manufacturing accounted for most of the decline in total nonagricultural employment during the first 8 months of 1954. However, the impact of the national recession in manufacturing occurred primarily among industries which are either more important in other regions or are located outside the District.

Trade and services, and Government activity during the year contributed to stability in District personal income. District employment in service, finance, real estate, and insurance rose from 1953 to 1954, and the average number of workers engaged in Government and trade in this region remained relatively stable during those two years. Employment data indicate that personal income arising from nonagricultural business activity generally weathered the early-1954 recession somewhat better in the District that in the country as a whole.

In the farm sector, cash receipts from farm marketings declined slightly more than 5 percent in the District from 1953 to 1954.2 This decline was the result of a drop in farm prices of livestock and livestock products combined with a lower level of crop output. The reduction in gross cash farm receipts coupled with continued high production costs resulted in a drop in net farm incomes in the District and nation. In the country as a whole, net realized income of farmers in 1954 was 10 percent below the 1953 figure.

These agricultural developments especially help to explain the decline in personal income in Idaho. Cash receipts from farm marketings in that state—where farm income accounts for about 16 percent of total income (Table 3)—fell 8 percent from 1953 to 1954. The drop in farm income probably also dampened the rise in personal income in Arizona. Cash receipts from farm marketings in Arizona dropped 12 percent in 1954 compared with 1953.

TABLE 3 MAJOR SOURCES OF PERSONAL INCOME TWELFTH DISTRICT AND UNITED STATES, 1954 (Percent distribution)

Farm	Government	nonfarm
14.6	21.0	64.4
4.6	19.8	75.6
6.3	22.9	70.8
6.4	16.5	77.1
16.1		66.2
5.1		69.9
4.1	19.7	76.2
5.6	20.1	74.3
5.3	16.9	77.8
	14.6 4.6 6.3 6.4 16.1 5.1 4.1 5.6	14.6 21.0 4.6 19.8 6.3 22.9 6.4 16.5 16.1 17.7 5.1 25.0 4.1 19.7 5.6 20.1

Source: United States Department of Commerce, Survey of Current Business, September 1955.

Comparison of the personal income series and the income payments series

The new personal income series represents both a change in definition and an improvement in statistical sources compared to the old income payments series.1 As defined by the Department of Commerce, "state personal income is the current income received by residents of the states from all sources, inclusive of transfers from Government and business but exclusive of transfers among persons." The most important definitional change is that the personal income series provides a broader coverage of income in kind. The major items of income in kind included in the new series, but excluded from the income payments series, are net rental value of owneroccupied dwellings and the value of food and clothing furnished members of the armed forces.

The two series, state personal income and income payments, for the Twelfth District have roughly paralleled each other from 1929 to 1953. The average percentage difference between the two District series over the 25year period is slightly less than 5 percent.

The small differences in the total, however, do not extend to components. Though data are not now available to compare the differences in components, definitional and statistical changes point to a lack of comparability between the two series. Statistically, the Department of Commerce states that there will be a marked improvement in the farm income component. Among the definitional changes, military allowances and allotments and work relief wages which were formerly included under "other income" in the income payments series are now classified as part of wage and salary disbursements, and net rent received by landlords living on farms which was formerly classified as property income is now included in proprietors' income.

¹For a more complete review of Twelfth District industrial activity during 1954 see *Monthly Review*, February 1955, pp. 20-30.

²For a more complete review of Twelfth District farm activity during 1954 see *Monthly Review*, February 1955, pp. 39-46.

¹For more detail on definitions and statistical improvements of the personal income series see the Survey of Current Business referred to in a previous footnote.

BUSINESS INDEXES—TWELFTH DISTRICT¹ (1947-49 average==100)

Year												Dep't	Retail food	Waterborne foreign	
and month		Petro	leum³	1		Copper	Wheat flour	Electric		employ-		sales	prices	trade ^{8, 6}	
	Lumber	Crude	Refined	Cement	Leads			power	ment	ment4	ber) [‡]	(value) ²	8, 5	Exports	Imports
1929 1931 1933 1935 1935 1939 1940 1941 1942 1943 1944 1945 1946 1947 1948 1949 1950 1951 1952	95r 50r 40r 54r 73r 71r 78r 92r 89r 88r 75r 80 97r 100r 113r 113r 116r 118r	87 57 52 62 71 67 67 67 67 4 85 93 97 94 100 101 99 106	78 555 50 56 63 63 68 71 83 93 98 91 98 100 103 112 112 1123 119	54 36 27 33 56 61 81 81 96 79 63 65 81 100 112 128 124 134 132	165 100 72 86 114 93 108 109 114 100 90 94 105 101 109 89 86 74 70	105 49 17 37 88 80 94 107 123 125 112 90 71 106 101 93 115 115 111 111 101	90 86 75 87 84 91 87 88 98 101 112 108 88 86 95 96 99	29 29 26 30 38 40 40 43 60 76 82 78 90 101 108 119 136 141 161 173	100 101 96 95 99 102 99 103 111 118 122 120		102 68 52 66 81 77 82 95 102 99 105 100 101 100 94 97 100 101 100 98	30 25 18 24 30 31 33 40 49 59 65 72 91 98 104 98 109 114 115	64 50 42 48 50 47 47 52 63 69 68 70 96 103 100 113 115 113	190 138 110 135 170 163 132 89 129 85 91 186 171 140 131	124 80 72 109 119 95 101 57 81 121 137 200 308 260
1954 August September October November December	87 110 <i>r</i> 125 <i>r</i> 121 <i>r</i> 133 <i>r</i>	104 105 104 104 105	115 121 116 119 119	137 138 143 132 132	73 69 70 73 6 9	75 97 110 116 114	101 108 105 104 101	174 174 176 177 173	119 120 121 121 121 122	131 137 138 139 140	90 97 102 98 106	114 114 116 115 118	113 113 113 111 111	96 115 112 118 113	282 262 277 196 313
1955 January February March April May June July August	134r 134 121 120r 120r 121r 112 123	105 106 106 106 106 106 106	116 122 120 118 115 120 128 127	119 131 137 149 155 153 157 160	74 76 82 77 78 76 72r 66	118 130 130 127 131 129 40r 90	107 112 108 97 96 97 94 101	173 179 188 191 189 200 191 196	122 122 123 124 124 125 125r 126	140 140 140 141 143 145 145r 144	$\begin{array}{c} 106 \\ 99 \\ 103 \\ 105 \\ 110 \\ 111 \\ 99r \\ 107 \\ \end{array}$	$\begin{array}{c} 125 \\ 118 \\ 118 \\ 120 \\ 118 \\ 118 \\ 123 \\ 122p \end{array}$	112 112 113 113 113 112 113 111	163 184 163 149 162 152	287 263 240 290 280 299 368

BANKING AND CREDIT STATISTICS—TWELFTH DISTRICT (amounts in millions of dollars)

V	Conditio	n Items of	all membe	r banks ⁷	Bank	N	Bank debits					
Year and month	Loans and discounts	U.S. Gov't securities	Demand deposits adjusted ⁸	Total time deposits	rates on short-term business loans?	Reserve bank Commercia operations		Treasury operations ¹² Coin and currency in circulation ¹¹		Reserves	31 cities ^{3, 13} (1947-49 = 100) ³	
1929 1931 1933 1935 1937 1939 1940 1941 1942 1943 1944 1945 1946 1947 1948 1949 1950 1951 1952 1953	2,239 1,898 1,486 1,537 1,871 1,967 2,130 2,451 2,170 2,106 4,068 5,358 6,032 5,925 7,093 7,866 8,839 9,220 9,418	495 547 720 1,275 1,475 1,482 1,738 3,630 6,235 8,263 10,450 8,426 7,247 6,366 7,016 6,415 6,463 6,619 6,639 7,942	1,234 984 984 951 1,389 1,740 1,983 2,390 2,893 4,356 5,988 6,950 8,203 8,922 8,655 8,536 9,254 9,937 10,520 10,515 11,196	1,790 1,727 1,609 2,064 2,187 2,267 2,360 2,425 2,609 3,226 4,144 5,797 6,006 6,255 6,302 7,502 7,502 7,997 8,699	3.20 3.35 3.36 3.95 4.14 4.01	- 34 + 21 - 2 + 2 + 2 + 2 + 2 + 2 + 4 + 107 + 214 + 98 - 76 + 17 + 13 + 39 - 121 + 7 - 14 + 7 + 17 + 17 + 17 + 17 + 17 + 17 + 17	0 154 110 163 90 148 596 1,980 3,751 3,534 3,743 1,607 472 930 1,141 1,582 1,912 3,073 2,448	+ 23 + 154 + 150 + 219 + 157 + 245 + 420 + 1,000 + 2,826 + 4,483 + 4,682 + 1,329 + 698 - 482 + 1,198 + 1,198 + 1,198 + 1,198 + 1,198 + 1,198 + 1,158 + 3,158 + 2,328	- 6 + 48 - 18 + 14 - 3 + 31 + 96 + 227 + 643 + 708 + 789 + 545 - 206 - 209 - 65 - 14 + 189 + 132 + 39 - 30	175 147 185 287 549 584 754 930 1,232 1,462 1,706 2,033 2,094 2,202 2,420 1,924 2,026 2,1269 2,514 2,551	42 28 18 25 30 32 39 48 60 66 72 86 95 103 102 115 132 140 150	
1954 September October November December	9,054 9,048 9,343 9,422	7,610 8,014 8,089 7,973	10,463 10,749 10,937 11,158	8,555 8,651 8,596 8,663	4.08 4.01	+ 16 + 9 - 1 0	- 170 - 138 - 244 - 127	+ 196 + 142 + 342 + 175	- 8 + 23 + 27 - 23	2,368 2,364 2,440 2,505	152 150 158 173	
1955 January February March April May June July August September	9,510 9,612 9,696 9,657 9,810 10,102 10,191 10,392 10,559	7,998 7,693 7,390 7,756 7,690 7,446 7,557 7,407 7,375	11,246 10,945 10,733 11,060 10,951 11,023 11,212 11,163 11,312	8,725 8,765 8,837 8,833 8,885 9,026 8,995 9,021 9,054	3.99	- 34 + 15 + 10 + 60 - 55 + 27 + 10 - 23 + 17	- 150 + 26 - 401 - 306 - 51 - 449 - 193 - 253 - 148	+ 77 - 57 + 362 + 261 + 195 + 429 + 217 + 200 + 276	- 79 + 13 - 1 + 15 + 50 + 35 - 9 + 8 + 18	2,481 2,447 2,418 2,432 2,476 2,439 2,495 2,415 2,541	161 166 177 165 170 178 166 177	

Adjusted for seasonal variation, except where indicated. Except for department store statistics, all indexes are based upon data from outside sources, as follows: lumber, various lumber trade associations; petroleum, cement, copper, and lead, U.S. Bureau of Mines; wheat flour, U.S. Bureau of the Census; electric power, Federal Power Commission; nonagricultural and manufacturing employment, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics and cooperating state agencies; retail food prices, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics; carloadings, various railroads and railroad associations; and foreign trade, U.S. Bureau of the Census, ⁹ Daily average. ⁹ Not adjusted for seasonal variation. ⁹ Excludes fish, fruit, and vegetable canning. ⁹ Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Seattle indexes combined. ⁹ Commercial cargo only, in physical volume, for Los Angeles, San Francisco, San Diego, Oregon, and Washington customs districts; starting with July 1950, "special category" exports are excluded because of security reasons. ⁷ Annual figures are as of end of year, monthly figures as of last Wednesday in month or, where applicable, as of call report date. ⁹ Demand deposits, excluding interbank and U.S. Gov't deposits, less cash items in process of collection. Monthly data partly estimated. ⁹ Average rates on loans made in five major cities during the first 15 days of the month. ⁹ End of year and end of month figures. ⁹ Changes from end of previous month or year. ⁹ Minus sign indicates flow of funds out of the District in the case of Commercial operations, and excess of receipts over disbursements in the case of Treasury operations. ⁹ Debits to total deposits except interbank prior to 1942. Debits to demand deposits except Federal Government and interbank deposits from 1942. ⁹ Preliminary. ⁹ Preliminary. ⁹ Revised.