



SURVEY OF CURRENT BUSINESS

WEEKLY SUPPLEMENT



**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
BUREAU OF FOREIGN AND DOMESTIC COMMERCE**

WASHINGTON, D. C., JANUARY 12, 1939

SUMMARY OF BUSINESS TRENDS

REPORTS on retail trade for December were generally favorable with dollar figures in several important lines as high as a year earlier. Since prices are lower than at the end of 1937, it appears that unit volumes were larger than in the final month of that year. Department-store sales increased seasonally from November, the adjusted index of the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System remaining at 89 (1923-25=100); sales equalled the dollar totals in the comparable month of 1937 for the first time. Variety-store sales were higher than in December 1937. According to partial data, retail deliveries of passenger cars were substantially larger than a year earlier, a continuation of the year-to-year gain noted in November.

The improvement in industrial production under way since midyear was not continued throughout December—weekly data revealed a more-than-seasonal slackening in the final fortnight of the year. However, aggregate output for the month was fully one-fifth larger than a year earlier. Curtailment of steel-mill operations during December was sharp though the daily

rate of ingot production, seasonally corrected, was down less than 10 percent from the November average. In early January steel ingot production was above 50 percent of capacity as compared with 39 percent in the final week of 1938 and a rate of 60 percent early in December.

The forward movement in business activity since June 1938 has not been accompanied by any material rise in commodity prices. Quotations for certain of the more sensitive raw materials are currently higher than in June but the wholesale price index for raw materials compiled by the Bureau of Labor Statistics was at a 1938 low in December. Prices of finished manufactured goods at wholesale have continued downward in recent months and in December were 5 percent lower than at the beginning of 1938. Prices received by farmers have increased slightly in recent months. The mid-December index at 96 (1909-14=100) was up 4 points from the 1938 low, but one-fourth below the average in the first half of 1937.

SELECTED BUSINESS INDICATORS



