



SURVEY OF CURRENT BUSINESS

WEEKLY SUPPLEMENT

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
BUREAU OF FOREIGN AND DOMESTIC COMMERCE



WASHINGTON, D. C., MARCH 14, 1940

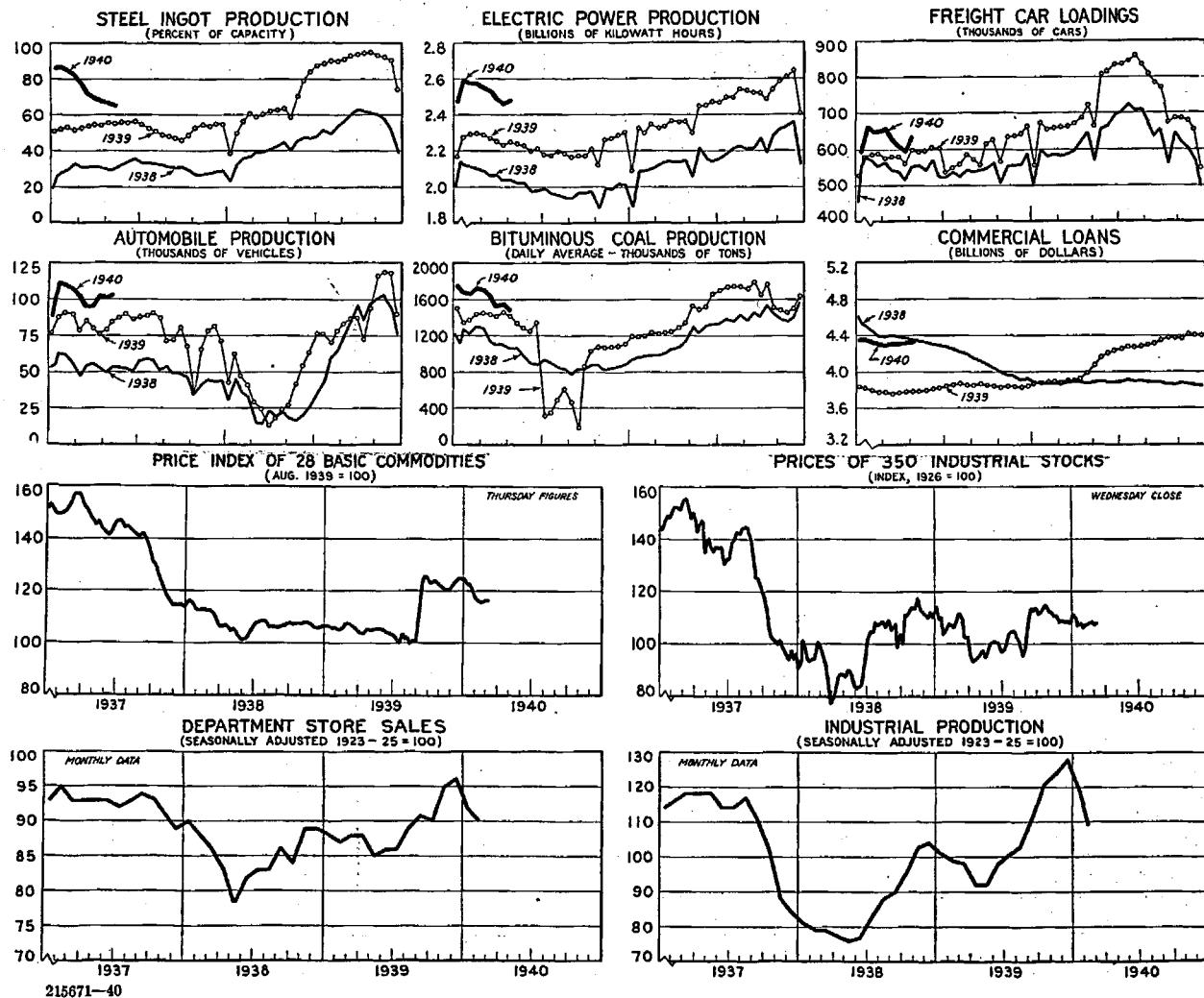
SUMMARY OF BUSINESS TRENDS

ASIDE from the favorable showing of the automotive trade, the available retail sales data for February reveal a continuation of the January recession. Department store sales last month did not increase materially from January and the adjusted index was lowered 2 points to 90 (1923-25=100). Though dollar sales at department stores were 3 percent higher than a year ago, the seasonally adjusted index of sales was back to about the August level and was some 5 points lower than in the last 2 months of 1939. Sales of variety stores were apparently little changed on a seasonally corrected basis from January after the drop in that month. Partial reports on retail automobile deliveries suggest a moderate contraseasonal rise for February. Retail sales of new passenger cars and trucks by General Motors were up more than 40 percent from the daily average in February 1939.

Automobile assemblies have continued slightly above 100,000 units a week and Ward's Automotive Reports does not anticipate much of an increase from this rate over the next few weeks. As a result of the high rate of assemblies during January and February, dealers have been supplied with very large

stocks of new cars to meet the seasonally high spring deliveries. Indications of a halt in the sharp reaction in industrial activity that has been under way this year are not generally apparent as yet. However, steel-ingot production which has slumped more than 20 points from 86 percent of capacity at the beginning of the year has been declining less rapidly recently—for the week ending March 16, moreover, output at 64.7 percent of capacity is unchanged from the preceding period. The stability over a 2-week period, of course, is not a decisive indication that the decline is over. The rate of incoming orders in the steel industry is still considerably lower than production and has shown few signs of revival. The cotton-textile industry thus far has not curtailed to any considerable degree, even though output has been running at a very high level for an extended period. As the general rate of industrial production continued downward throughout February, the current position is below the average for that month. The preliminary estimate of the Federal Reserve adjusted production index for February was 109 (1923-25=100) in comparison with 119 for January and 128 for December; as may be seen in the chart below.

SELECTED BUSINESS INDICATORS



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