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Infomat

A Weekly Review

Friday, May 28, 1999

OVERVIEW

- **Transportation costs drive inflation up**

  In April, consumers paid 1.7% more than they did a year earlier for goods and services—the highest annual inflation rate seen since October 1997. Roughly one-third of the increase was due to higher costs for transportation.

- **Quarterly trade surplus with the U.S. reaches a record high**

  Higher exports and stable imports in March accentuated the positive merchandise trade balance in the first quarter of 1999. The trade surplus with the United States reached a record high in the first quarter.

- **Widespread increase in shipments**

  In March, manufacturers' shipments climbed 2.0%—the largest increase since October 1998. The growth was widespread, with shipments rising in 16 of the 22 major industry groups and in 11 of the 12 provinces and territories.

- **Retail sales rise in every province in the first quarter**

  Advancing sales in all sectors pushed total retail sales up 1.1% in March. March's increase in retail sales contributed to a strong quarter in every province.

- **Another good month for wholesalers**

  Wholesalers reported higher sales in the first quarter following increases in both January and February and again in March, when sales rose 0.8%.

Transportation costs drive inflation up

Consumers paid 1.7% more in April than they did a year earlier for the goods and services contained in the Consumer Price Index (CPI) basket. It was highest annual inflation rate seen since October 1997 (+1.5%), and it was up from March's rate (+1.0%). Roughly one-third of April's increase was due to higher transportation costs. This reflected price hikes for gasoline, new cars, new trucks and air fares. The rest of the advance was led by prices for shelter (natural gas and property taxes) and food. The upward price pressure was partly offset by lower average prices for computer equipment and telephone services.

In April, gasoline prices were higher than they were a year earlier by 5.9%. That increase can be explained by higher demand for gasoline, tighter North American supply and lower production of crude oil by OPEC countries. April marked the first year-to-year increase in gasoline prices since October 1997 (+1.5%).

From March to April, the CPI rose 0.5%. Higher prices for gasoline were largely responsible, rising 8.5%. Fuel oil prices were also up (+6.8%), which is unusual because prices tend to stabilise at this time of year as the home heating season ends. Bear in mind that crude oil prices spiked upward from February to

Consumer Price Index, April 1999
% change from previous year, not seasonally adjusted

	All-items	Food	Shelter	Transportation	Energy
Canada	**1.7**	**1.8**	**1.3**	**2.8**	**3.8**
Newfoundland	0.9	0.6	0.7	1.0	-1.5
Prince Edward Island	0.1	-0.2	-0.7	-1.7	-9.8
Nova Scotia	1.2	0.9	0.7	1.5	-0.5
New Brunswick	1.4	1.7	0.4	2.8	2.2
Quebec	1.5	1.7	1.0	3.3	3.7
Ontario	1.9	2.1	1.9	3.0	5.3
Manitoba	2.0	1.9	1.9	3.4	4.8
Saskatchewan	1.6	1.2	2.2	2.7	4.5
Alberta	1.7	1.8	2.4	1.7	1.8
British Columbia	1.1	2.1	-0.9	3.3	4.1
Whitehorse	0.8	-1.7	0.3	3.0	-1.3
Yellowknife	0.6	-1.0	-0.5	3.4	-1.9

(continued on page 2)

... Transportation costs drive inflation up

March by 25.6% and that it takes about one month for changes in the price of crude to pass through to the CPI.

Also rising from March to April were prices for fresh fruit, home maintenance and repairs, and traveller accommodation (+2.8%). It is customary for traveller accommodation prices to rise in the spring due to increased demand.

Prices fell for natural gas (-4.3%), which is usual because April marks the move to summer rate schedules. Decreases for the month have ranged from 2.1% to 10.1% since April 1996. Prices also declined for women's clothing (sales), fresh vegetables, ham and bacon. Prices for ham and bacon dropped 6.0%. The decrease was a result of the ample supply of pork and the Easter holiday.

Among the provinces, the CPI for New Brunswick increased the most from March to April (+1.0%); the CPI for Prince Edward Island marked the only month-to-month decline in inflation (-0.2%).

Consumers in Manitoba faced the largest increase in the annual inflation rate in April (+2.0%). In Manitoba, prices for natural gas rose in the 12 months to April by 14.3%. This compares with an increase in Canada as a whole of 10.5%. Property taxes, university tuition fees and prices of new vehicles also increased more, on average, in Manitoba than they did at the national level. Manitobans benefited from an average price decline for fresh vegetables of 9.9%, greater than the 3.6% drop in prices within Canada as a whole. Manitobans also benefited from the largest provincial price decrease for prescribed medicine (-7.1%). Prices for furniture fell in Manitoba, whereas they rose at the national level.

Note to readers

The April issue of The consumer price index *features an analytical article titled "Behavior of the Canadian consumer price index in 1998". Despite upward pressure on consumer prices from a relatively high capacity utilization rate and a depreciating Canadian dollar vis-à-vis the U.S. dollar, the consumer price index (CPI) rose in 1998 by a modest 0.9%. The analysis shows that three forces moderated the CPI's rise last year: plunging prices for gasoline and fuel; a rapid rate of quality improvement in technological goods; and an appreciation of the Canadian dollar against Asian currencies.*

The annual inflation rate was 1.4% in April in New Brunswick. However, prices for recreational equipment and services in that province fell compared with April 1998 by 12.3%, while they declined in Canada as a whole by 9.5%. Residents of New Brunswick also benefited from a decline in fuel oil prices of 9.3%—the second largest decrease among the provinces—while prices at the national level fell 5.1%.

Prince Edward Island had the smallest annual increase in consumer price inflation in April (+0.1%).

Available on CANSIM: matrices 9940-9970.

The April 1999 issue of ***The Consumer Price Index*** *(62-001-XPB, $11/$103) is now available. For further information, contact Client Services (613-951-9606; fax: 613-951-1539; infounit@statcan.ca), Prices Division. See also "Current trends" on page 8.*

Quarterly trade surplus with the U.S. reaches a record high

The first-quarter trade surplus with the United States reached a record high of $13.5 billion. Exports of automobiles and natural gas to the United States in March were strong and, together with aircraft exports, almost returned the overall export level to the record set in January. With all our other principal trading partners there were trade deficits in the first quarter, mainly due to fewer exports of aircraft and weak ore prices, so the overall trade balance for the first quarter came in at $7.9 billion.

In the first quarter of 1999, export growth was slower than it was in the fourth quarter of 1998. Even so, exports were still 10.8% higher than they were a year earlier in the first quarter of 1998. Imports fell from the fourth quarter in all merchandise sectors. The machinery and equipment and the industrial goods sectors were hardest hit. In March, imports remained virtually unchanged, as a sharp increase in industrial goods, energy and automotive products was almost completely offset by a drop in machinery and equipment imports, particularly aircraft. The trade balance remained strong in March, rising slightly from a revised $2.5 billion in February to $2.6 billion.

Exports advanced 0.6% in March and approached the record set in January. Exports to the United States, Japan and the European Union climbed, whereas shipments to other OECD countries and to other countries declined. In fact, exports to "other countries" fell from February to March by 23.0%, chiefly due to a sharp decline in aircraft exports (to the Middle East and to South Africa) and wheat exports (to North Africa). In the first quarter, exports to "other countries" were down from the first quarter of 1998 by 16.9%, mainly because of low export prices for various minerals, wheat and coal.

Note to readers

Merchandise trade is one component of the current account of Canada's balance of payments, which also includes trade in services.

A sharp increase in passenger car exports in March contributed most to increasing total exports to the United States. Production starts of new models on Canadian assembly lines in the fall of 1998 boosted the value of exports in the first quarter by 27.5% compared with the first quarter of 1998. Meanwhile, energy exports rose in March, due primarily to price increases for natural gas (+11.3%) and crude oil (+11.4%). First-quarter exports from this sector were higher than they were in the fourth quarter of 1998 by 4.7%—the strongest quarterly growth since the fourth quarter of 1996.

On the import side, the machinery and equipment and the industrial goods sectors were hardest hit in the first quarter, a reflection of lower capital spending intentions for 1999. Specifically, lower investment in mines, quarries and oil wells was reflected in first-quarter imports of drilling and mining equipment, which tumbled from the fourth quarter of 1998 by

(continued on page 3)

... Quarterly trade surplus with the U.S. reaches a record high

21.6%. Imports of industrial goods rose slightly in March after two months of decline, mainly due to strong imports of gold, hydraulic valves and other auto parts, as well as organic gardening products.

Imports rose in March in all the energy product sub-sectors. Chiefly, this was due to the upward spike in crude oil prices (+10.0%) and in volumes brought on by the OPEC decision to curtail production. In contrast, imports of auto products rose slightly in March as passenger car imports grew 5.9%. Imports by the sector have remained virtually unchanged since the beginning of the year, however. Despite a sharp drop in aircraft imports in March (-52.8%), they were up in the first quarter by 14.0% compared with the fourth quarter of last year. This was owing to February's spectacular jump. Investment intentions for 1999 remain very high in the aircraft sector, so imports should remain robust for most of the year.

After a slight drop in February, imports from "other countries" rose in March by 8.2%. Primarily, this was due to strong imports of tents, oil, communications equipment and computers, and candles.

Available on CANSIM: matrices 3618, 3619, 3651, 3685-3713, 3718-3720, 3887-3913, 8430-8435 and 8438-8447.

*The March 1999 issue of **Canadian international merchandise trade** (paper: 65-001-XPB, $19/$188; Internet: 65-001-XIB, $14/ $141) includes tables by commodity and country. Current account data are available quarterly in **Canada's balance of international payments** (67-001-XPB, $38/$124). For further information, contact Jocelyne Elibani (613-951-9647 or 1-800-294-5583), International Trade Division. See also "Current trends" on page 8.*

Merchandise trade, first quarter 1999
Seasonally adjusted

	$ millions	% change, same quarter previous year
Exports, total	**86,862**	**10.8**
Agricultural and fishing product	2,177	-0.4
Energy products	1,744	-5.2
Forestry products	3,118	6.6
Industrial goods and materials	4,684	-3.8
Machinery and equipment	6,737	10.1
Automotive products	8,019	30.1
Other consumer goods	1,141	19.4
Special transactions trade[1]	584	63.1
Other balance of payments adjustments	502	-5.8
Imports, total	**78,920**	**8.0**
Agricultural and fishing product	4,391	6.1
Energy products	1,995	-13.4
Forestry products	656	9.3
Industrial goods and materials	15,142	3.8
Machinery and equipment	26,250	9.6
Automotive products	18,464	12.6
Other consumer goods	9,102	13.1
Special transactions trade[1]	1,390	-8.3
Other balance of payments adjustments	1,528	2.8

[1] *Mainly, these are mainly low-valued transactions, value of repairs to equipment, and goods returned to country of origin.*

Widespread increase in shipments

In March, manufacturers' shipments climbed 2.0% to $39.8 billion. This latest growth, which followed minor declines in January and February, was the largest increase since October 1998. The trend for shipments remains positive, but it has slowed slightly in recent months.

The growth was widespread: shipments rose in 16 of the 22 major industry groups (representing 81.9% of the total value in March) and in 11 of the 12 provinces and territories. Newfoundland was the only province with a decrease (-2.6%), but that came on the heels of an 11.4% increase in February.

The largest contributor to March's growth was the refined petroleum and coal industry (+10.1%), where the price of refined petroleum products rose 4.4% in March. In order of magnitude, shipments increased 1.6% in the motor vehicle industry and 7.4% in the aircraft and parts industry. Shipments in the primary metals industry rose 2.6%, concurrent with anti-dumping duties (ranging from 32% to 77%) imposed in March by Revenue Canada on Canadian imports of hot-rolled steel from France, Russia, Romania and Slovakia.

Manufacturers' backlog of unfilled orders slipped in March to $49.7 billion (-0.3%). Even so, the trend in unfilled orders remains historically high. The backlog of unfilled orders fell in the motor vehicle industry (-5.0%) and in the electrical and electronic products industry (-2.6%). In order of magnitude, the largest offsetting increase in unfilled orders was in the aircraft and parts industry (+2.3%). The backlog of unfilled orders has been growing robustly since the end of 1996, with most of it concentrated in the aircraft and parts industry. That trend has slowed in recent months, however.

Manufacturers' shipments, March 1999
Seasonally adjusted

	$ millions	% change, previous month
Canada	**39,832**	**2.0**
Newfoundland	162	-2.6
Prince Edward Island	86	6.0
Nova Scotia	549	2.0
New Brunswick	663	3.4
Quebec	9,067	1.7
Ontario	22,138	1.4
Manitoba	903	0.9
Saskatchewan	507	3.1
Alberta	2,755	6.6
British Columbia	2,999	2.8
Yukon and Northwest Territories	3	9.4

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... Widespread increase in shipments

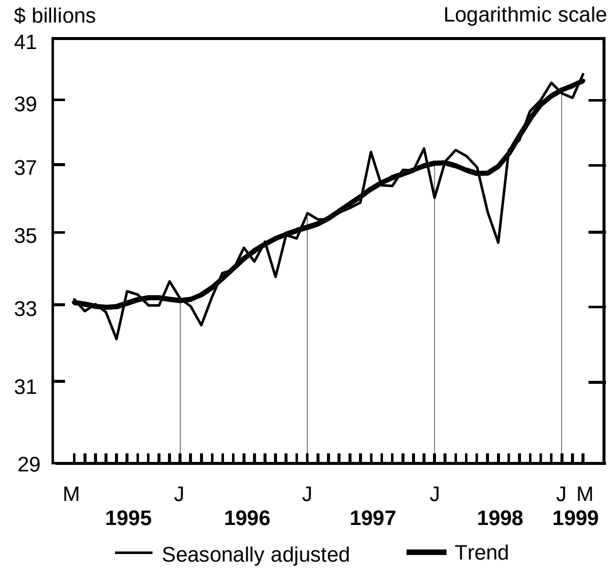
Due to an increase in raw materials on hand (+0.5%), inventories edged up in March by 0.1% to $49.6 billion. However, manufacturers' inventories of goods-in-process declined slightly (-0.1%), as did their inventories of finished products (-0.1%). In order of magnitude, the major contributors to the increase in inventories were the electrical and electronic products (+4.6%) and the refined petroleum and coal (+6.2%) industries. The largest offsetting decreases were observed in the primary metal (-2.5%) and the motor vehicle (-2.2%) industries.

The inventory-to-shipments ratio fell from 1.27 in February to 1.25—its lowest level since July 1997. The ratio has been following a downward trend after peaking in July 1998 at 1.34.

Available on CANSIM: matrices 9550-9555, 9558, 9559, 9562-9565, 9568-9579 and 9581-9595.

*The March 1999 issue of **Monthly Survey of Manufacturing** (31-001-XPB, $20/$196) presents the full report. Detailed data on shipments by province are available on request. For further information, contact Craig Kuntz (613-951-7092; kuncrai@statcan.ca), Manufacturing, Construction and Energy Division. See also "Current trends" on page 8.*

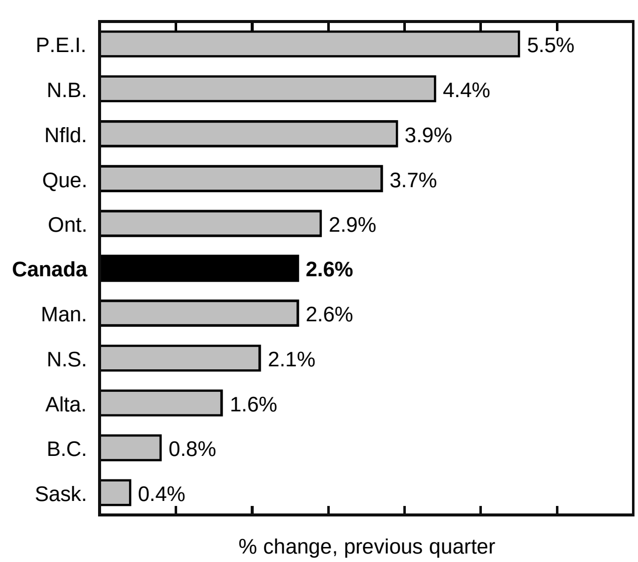
Manufacturers' shipments



Retail sales rise in every province in the first quarter

Advancing sales in all sectors pushed total retail sales up 1.1% in March to $21.3 billion. This followed the 0.2% decline in February. March's increase, together with the strong gain in January (+2.1%), resulted in the strongest quarterly sales growth (+2.6%) since the fourth quarter of 1996. The first quarter's advance may have been partly attributable to the employment growth seen in the last half of 1998, as well as to the historically low interest rates. The quarterly sales growth was led by general merchandise stores (+4.5%) and stores in the automotive trade group (+3.6%).

Retail sales, first quarter 1999



Retailers in Quebec recorded the strongest sales growth in Canada in the first quarter of 1999 (+3.7% from the fourth quarter of 1998). This was the strongest quarterly increase in Quebec since the fourth quarter of 1996. The automotive group and the general merchandise stores led the way, but all the trade groups in the province posted higher quarterly sales. Retail sales growth paused in Quebec in both the summer of 1997 and the summer of 1998.

In Atlantic Canada, retailers posted quarterly sales growth of 3.4%—the best quarterly performance there in three years. Excepting drugstores, all retail trade groups in the region grew their sales in the first quarter. After stagnating in the spring and summer of 1998, retail sales in Atlantic Canada have been picking up since the fall of 1998.

Retail sales in Ontario in the first quarter of 1999 were up from the previous quarter by 2.9%. Although the automotive trade group and the general merchandise stores led the way, all sectors contributed to the advance. Ontario retailers have generally posted healthy sales figures since mid-1996.

The Prairie provinces' retailers turned in an increase in the first quarter of 1.6%. The higher sales were spread across the retail groups with the exception of a small decline in food store sales. Retail sales in the Prairies have picked up slightly in the last few months after having been flat since the start of 1998.

Consumers in British Columbia increased spending in retail stores in the first quarter by 0.8%—the first quarterly increase since the second quarter of 1998 (+0.2%). A sales decline for the

(continued on page 5)

... Retail sales rise in every province in the first quarter

automotive group of retailers in the first quarter of this year masked the strong increases made in the rest of the retail trade groups in the province.

Turning to the March results at the national level, sales in the automotive trade group advanced for a fifth consecutive month and, of all the trade groups, posted the largest monthly increase (+1.8%). Representing about 40% of all retail sales, the automotive trade group accounted for about two-thirds of the sales growth in March. This group of retailers has been the engine of sales growth recently, increasing 6.7% since October 1998 (the most recent low point in sales for this group). This strength has helped total retail sales to advance over the same period by 4.0%.

Gasoline service stations reported the largest monthly gain in the automotive trade group in March (+2.5%) on higher prices for gasoline. Meanwhile, motor and recreational vehicle dealers reported their fifth consecutive monthly gain in sales (+1.6%). These dealers' sales have grown considerably since October 1998 (+9.4%), similar to the strong growth seen from mid-1996 until the spring of 1997.

Stores classified in the "other" category saw sales rise in March by 1.5%. The strength in the "other" category came mostly from other semi-durable goods stores (+4.4%). These include a wide range of merchants such as hardware, book, gift, toy and paint stores. Overall, monthly sales in the "other" retail stores have been rising since early 1997.

Sales in clothing stores advanced 1.3% in March. Rising sales in clothing stores in the last three months resulted in first-quarter growth of 1.7%. Four trade groups posted monthly gains that were similar in March: food stores (+0.5%), drugstores (+0.4%), furniture stores (+0.4%) and general merchandise stores (+0.3%). Since the fall of 1998, sales in food stores and general merchandise stores have turned upward. As for drugstores, a rise in sales in the first quarter of 1999 indicates a resumption of growth after a relatively flat 1998. Despite signs of weakness lately, furniture stores still show increasing sales compared with the spring of 1996.

Available on CANSIM: matrices 2299, 2398-2417 and 2420.

The March 1999 issue of ***Retail trade*** *(63-005-XPB, $21/$206) will be available shortly. To order data, or for general information, contact Client Services (1 877 421-3067 or 613-951-3549; retailinfo@statcan.ca). For further analytical information, contact Paul Gratton (613-951-3541; gratpau@statcan.ca), Distributive Trades Division.*

Another good month for wholesale sales

Wholesalers reported higher sales in the first quarter (+1.8%) following increases in both January (+0.5%) and February (+1.0%) and again in March, when sales rose 0.8% to $29.3 billion. Wholesale sales have been growing since the summer of last year.

Sales increased in March in all trade groups except household goods (-1.7%), apparel and dry goods (-1.2%), and motor vehicles, parts and accessories (-1.1%). Strong sales growth was seen in lumber and building materials (+3.6%), computers, packaged software and other electronic machinery (+3.0%), and farm machinery and equipment (+2.6%).

Retail and wholesale trade, March 1999
Seasonally adjusted

	Retail sales		Wholesale sales	
	$ millions	% change, previous month	$ millions	% change, previous month
Canada	**21,341**	**1.1**	**29,282**	**0.8**
Newfoundland	352	4.4	204	0.2
Prince Edward Island	93	4.1	50	1.8
Nova Scotia	662	0.0	543	-1.1
New Brunswick	520	1.5	360	2.8
Quebec	5,030	1.3	6,047	1.3
Ontario	8,092	1.4	14,436	0.6
Manitoba	756	0.9	1,031	5.3
Saskatchewan	630	1.1	838	-7.3
Alberta	2,386	0.7	2,633	1.2
British Columbia	2,748	0.3	3,114	2.0
Yukon	27	-5.3	12	29.7
Northwest Territories	47	4.7	16	-11.1

Wholesalers of lumber and building materials were helped in March by the low Canadian dollar, the ongoing strength of the U.S. economy and the robust housing market south of the border. Direct and indirect exports to the United States to supply millworks, furniture makers and big-box hardware and lumber stores are positively impacting wholesale sales here. Also having an effect is the cautiously optimistic view held by some industry watchers that Japan's economy might have finally bottomed out. It is notable that sales of the "other products" trade group, which includes forest products such as raw logs and pulp, also rose in March (+1.7%).

The generally robust sales of computers, packaged software and other electronic machinery can be attributed not only to the sale of goods, but also to services such as repairs and training.

Sales of beverage, drug and tobacco products have been rising since the end of 1998. A contributor could be the ageing of the Canadian population. Several media reports have suggested that pharmaceutical companies are aggressively marketing their products to a better informed and more health conscious public, particularly to older Canadians. In addition, consumers are becoming more selective in their beverage choices, while new products and new brands are entering the distribution system. It appears that Canadian wholesalers may be benefiting from this product expansion.

Among the provinces, wholesalers in British Columbia are still trying to make a comeback. Despite a rise of 2.0% in March, first-quarter sales for wholesalers in British Columbia were down from the previous quarter by 1.8%—the only first-quarter sales decline among the provinces. Except for the fourth quarter of 1998 (+0.4%), the last four quarters have been negative for wholesalers in British Columbia.

Inventories held by wholesalers rose slightly in March to $41.1 billion (+0.3%). This continued the levelling off of

(continued on page 6)

... Another good month for wholesale sales

inventories that started at the beginning of 1998. The inventories-to-sales ratio declined for a second consecutive month in March, notching down from 1.41 in February to 1.40. Prior to February, the ratio stayed at 1.43 for three of the four preceding months.

Available on CANSIM: matrices 59, 61 and 648-649.

The March 1999 issue of ***Wholesale trade*** *(63-008-XIB, $14/$140) can be downloaded from the Internet at www.statcan.ca. For general enquiries, or to order data, contact Client Services (1 877 421-3067 or 613-951-3549; wholesaleinfo@statcan.ca). For further analytical information, contact Alexander Hays (613-951-3552; haysale@statcan.ca), Distributive Trades Division.*

New from Statistics Canada

Canadian economic observer
May 1999

The May issue of Statistics Canada's flagship publication for economic statistics, *Canadian economic observer*, analyses current economic conditions, summarises the major economic events that occurred in April, and presents a feature article on seasonality in employment.

A separate statistical summary contains a wide range of tables and charts on the principal economic indicators for Canada, the provinces and the major industrial nations.

The May 1999 issue of ***Canadian economic observer*** *(11-010-XPB, $23/$227) is now available. For further information, contact Cyndi Bloskie (613-951-3634, ceo@statcan.ca), Current Economic Analysis Group.*

Organized crime activity: Pilot survey results
1998

This new report on organized crime presents the results of a pilot survey of 16 police services. It examines the feasibility of collecting quantitative information on organized criminal activity in Canada.

Sixteen major police services across the country were asked to provide data about organized crime groups operating in their jurisdictions. The information requested included the size and composition of each of these organizations, the links between various criminal organizations, as well as comparisons of the types of illegal activities engaged in by each organized crime group.

The new report titled ***Organized crime activity in Canada, 1998: Results of a pilot survey of 16 police services*** *(85-548-XIE, $26) is now available for downloading at www.statcan.ca. For further information, contact the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics (613-951-9023; 1 800 387-2231).*

New from Statistics Canada

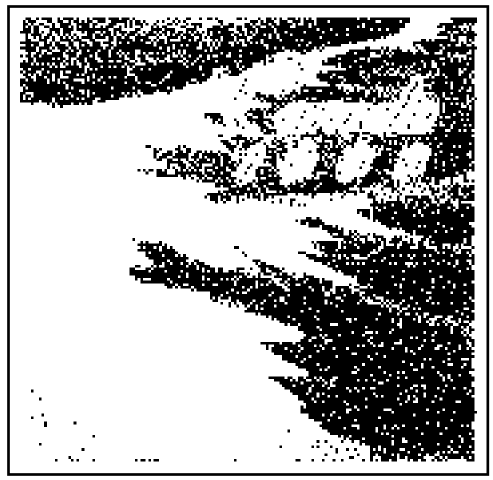
Education and the wage gap between younger and older workers

Over the last two decades, the wage gap between younger and older workers has increased substantially in Canada. During this period, the educational attainment of older workers has risen faster than that of younger workers. A new study titled "The returns to education, and the increasing wage gap between younger and older workers" looks at this problem.

Statistics Canada's Analytical Studies Branch produces research papers on a variety of topics such as labour markets, business firm dynamics, mortality, immigration, statistical computing and simulation, among others. These papers are based on research conducted by branch staff, visiting fellows and academic associates.

The Analytical Studies Branch Research Paper No. 131 titled ***The returns to education, and the increasing wage gap between younger and older workers*** *is now available. The entire series can be downloaded from the Internet free of charge at www.statcan.ca. The reports in the series are also available in print for $5 each by contacting Hélène Lamadeleine (613-951-5231). For further information on this report, contact René Morissette (613-951-3608) or Garnett Picot (613-951-8214), Analytical Studies Branch.*

Canada Year Book 1999 on CD-ROM



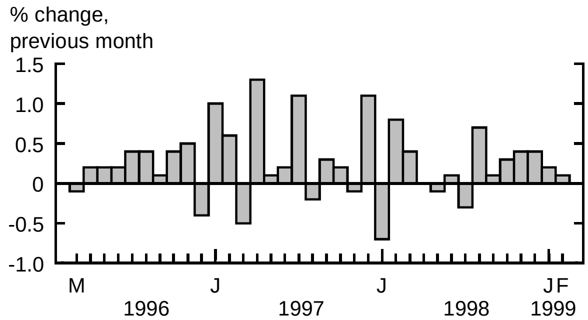
Combining facts, figures and commentary with compelling visuals, the *Canada Year Book 1999 on CD-ROM* reflects the reality of today's Canada. Find out about the environment, the people, the economy and the nation in this multi-faceted resource tool.

This new disc offers the comprehensive content of the book, plus 200 additional tables and 70 charts, hundreds of pages of supplementary text and direct Internet links. And, unique to this CD-ROM, there are additional features, including some provincial and territorial statistics, as well as biographies of Canadian heroes. The CD-ROM works with your favourite browser on either IBM or Mac computers.

The Canada Year Book 1999 on CD-ROM *(11-402-XCB99001, $74.95 plus $5.00 shipping/handling and applicable taxes; outside Canada, US$74.95 with shipping and handling included) is now available. Save by getting the CD-ROM and book combo (10-3005XKE99001, $123.41 plus $5.00 shipping/handling and applicable taxes; outside Canada, US$123.41 with shipping and handling included). For more information, contact your nearest Statistics Canada Regional Reference Centre. Look at a free Internet demonstration at http://www.statcan.ca/cyb/canada99.htm.*

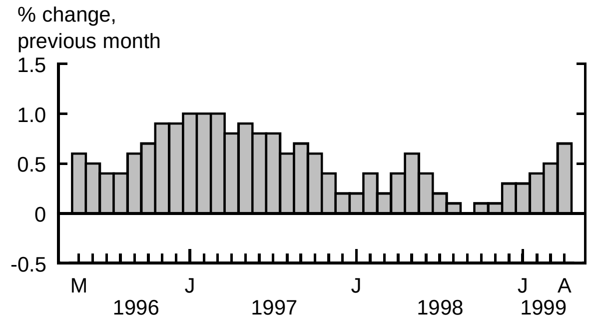
Current trends

Gross domestic product



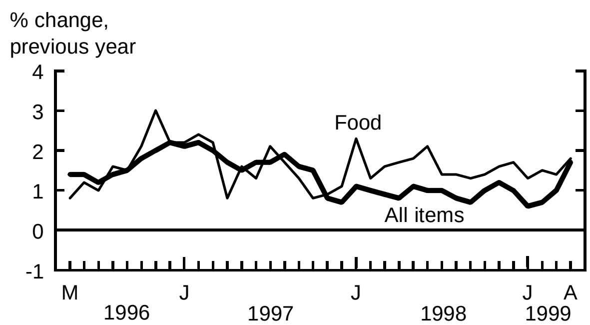
Economic activity advanced a marginal 0.1% in February, the seventh consecutive month of growth.

Composite Index



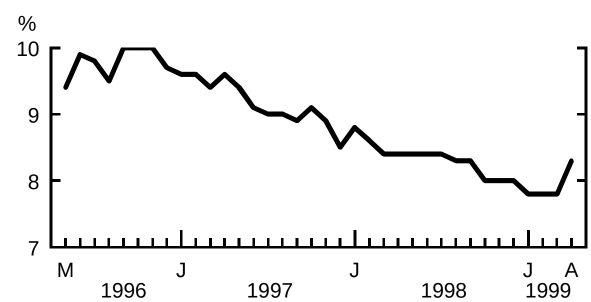
The growth of the leading indicator continued to improve, with a gain of 0.7% in April.

Consumer Price Index



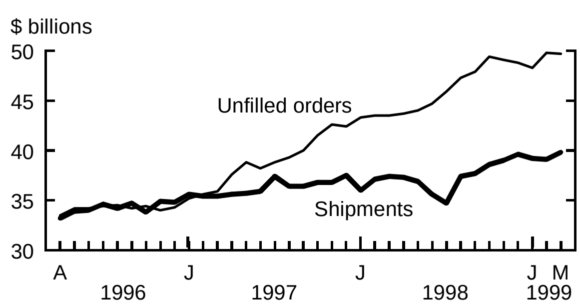
Consumers paid 1.7% more for goods and services in April 1999 than they did a year earlier. Food prices rose 1.8%.

Unemployment rate



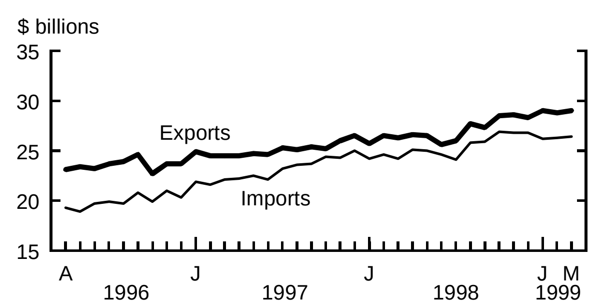
In April, a sharp jump in the number of people looking for work pushed the unemployment rate to 8.3%.

Manufacturing



Manufacturers' shipments increased 2.0% in March to $39.8 billion. The backlog of unfilled orders slipped 0.3% to $49.7 billion.

Merchandise trade



In March, the value of merchandise exports edged up 0.6% from February to just under $29.0 billion. Imports were almost unchanged (+0.2%) at $26.4 billion.

Note: *All series are seasonally adjusted except the Consumer Price Index.*

Latest statistics

	Period	Level	Change, previous period	Change, previous year
GENERAL				
Gross domestic product ($ billion, 1992)	February	730.6	0.1%	2.4%
Composite Index (1981=100)	April	212.9	0.7%	4.1%
Operating profits of enterprises ($ billion)	Q4 1998	28.7	15.1%	– 1.0%
Capacity utilization (%)	Q4 1998	82.5	0.7†	– 0.9†
DOMESTIC DEMAND				
Retail trade ($ billion)	March*	21.3	1.1%	4.9%
New motor vehicle sales (thousand of units)	March	125.2	6.3%	5.3%
Wholesale trade ($ billion)	March	29.3	0.8%	5.2%
LABOUR				
Employment (millions)	April	14.65	0.1%	2.6%
Unemployment rate (%)	April	8.3	0.5†	– 0.1†
Participation rate (%)	April	66.0	0.4†	0.9†
Labour income ($ billion)	January	39.3	– 0.2%	2.6%
Average weekly earnings ($)	February	607.97	0.2%	0.1%
Help-wanted Index (1996=100)	April	150	5.6%	1.4%
INTERNATIONAL TRADE				
Merchandise exports ($ billion)	March*	29.0	0.6%	10.3%
Merchandise imports ($ billion)	March*	26.4	0.2%	8.9%
Merchandise trade balance (all figures in $ billion)	March*	2.6	0.1	0.6
MANUFACTURING				
Shipments ($ billion)	March	39.8	2.0%	6.4%
New orders ($ billion)	March	39.7	– 2.3%	5.9%
Unfilled orders ($ billion)	March	49.7	– 0.3%	14.2%
Inventory/shipments ratio	March	1.25	– 0.02	– 0.04
PRICES				
Consumer Price Index (1992=100)	April*	110.1	0.5%	1.7%
Industrial Product Price Index (1992=100)	March	119.7	0.8%	1.4%
Raw Materials Price Index (1992=100)	March	107.0	5.5%	–2.9%
New Housing Price Index (1992=100)	March	100.5	0.2%	0.6%

Note: *All series are seasonally adjusted with the exception of the price indexes.*
* *new this week*
† *percentage point*

Infomat
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Editor: Tim Prichard (613) 951-1197; prictim@statcan.ca
Head of Official Release: Chantal Prévost (613) 951-1088; prevcha@statcan.ca

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Publications released from May 20 to 26, 1999

Division/Title of publication	Period	Catalogue number	Price: Issue/Subscription Canada (C$)	Outside Canada (US$)
AGRICULTURE				
Economic overview of farm incomes	1996	21-005-XIE	no charge	
CANADIAN CENTRE FOR JUSTICE STATISTICS				
Organized crime activity in Canada: Results of a pilot survey of 16 police services	1998	85-548-XIE	26	
CULTURE, TOURISM AND THE CENTRE FOR EDUCATION STATISTICS				
International travel - Travel between Canada and other countries	1997			
Internet		66-201-XIB	32	
Paper		66-201-XPB	42	42
CURRENT ECONOMIC ANALYSIS				
Canadian economic observer	May 1999	11-010-XPB	23/227	23/227
DISTRIBUTIVE TRADES				
Wholesale trade	March 1999	63-008-XIB	14/140	
INTERNATIONAL TRADE				
Canadian international merchandise trade	March 1999			
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Paper		65-001-XPB	19/188	19/188
Imports by commodity	March 1999			
Microfiche		65-007-XMB	37/361	37/361
Paper		65-007-XPB	78/773	78/773
MANUFACTURING, CONSTRUCTION AND ENERGY				
Coal mining	1997	26-206-XPB	25	25
Gas utilities	January 1999	55-002-XPB	17/165	17/165
Monthly Survey of Manufacturing	March 1999	31-001-XPB	20/196	20/196
Sawmills and planing mills	March 1999	35-003-XIB	9/86	
PRICES				
Consumer Price Index	April 1999	62-001-XPB	11/103	11/103

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Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
	1	2 **Help-wanted index,** May 1999	3	4 **Labour force survey,** May 1999 **Port activity,** 1998*
7 **Building permits,** April 1999 **Industrial capacity utilization rates,** Q1 1999	8 **Bus industry,** 1995-97*	9	10 **National economic and financial accounts,** Q1 1999 **Balance of international payments,** Q1 1999 **New housing price index,** April 1999	11
14 **New motor vehicle sales,** April 1999 **Travel between Canada and other countries,** April 1999	15	16 **Monthly survey of manufacturing,** April 1999	17 **Canadian international merchandise trade,** April 1999 **Wholesale trade,** April 1999	18 **Consumer price index,** May 1999
21 **Retail trade,** April 1999	22	23 **Canada's international transactions in securities,** April 1999 **Composite index,** May 1999 **Employment insurance,** April 1999	24	25 **Industrial product price index,** May 1999 **Raw materials price index,** May 1999
28	29 **Employment, earnings and hours,** April 1999 **Seeded areas of principal field crops,** 1999	30 **Real GDP at factor cost by industry,** April 1999		

Note: *Except for the releases marked with an asterisk, all the release dates in this calendar are fixed. A more detailed calendar of fixed release dates for the entire year is available from Statistics Canada's web site at www.statcan.ca.*