



Infommat

A Weekly Review

Friday, August 25, 2000

Trade surplus reaches a new record

OVERVIEW

◆ Trade surplus reaches a new record

In June, the merchandise trade surplus reached a new record of nearly \$5.0 billion, mainly because of price changes.

◆ Energy still the source of half the increase in consumer prices

In July, consumers paid 3.0% more than they did in July 1999 for the goods and services included in the Consumer Price Index (CPI). The CPI excluding energy rose 1.5%.

◆ Shipments end a volatile period

In June, manufacturers' shipments rose 0.7%, led by the refined petroleum and coal products industry. June marked the end of a four-month period of volatility in shipments.

◆ Retailers powered by automotive sales

Retail sales advanced 0.8% in June. In the second quarter, sales rose 0.7%. Automotive retailers powered sales higher in both May and June. Still, furniture retailers turned in the best quarterly performance.

◆ Wholesalers boosted by demand for electronic components and motor vehicles

Wholesale sales edged up in June by 0.3%. The advance was led by computers and electronic components, as well as by motor vehicles. Wholesalers finished the second quarter up 1.9%.

◆ Business spending continues to drive composite index's growth

In July, the leading indicator grew 0.4%, the same rate as in June. Business spending continued to drive the index's overall growth.

In June, the merchandise trade surplus reached a new record of nearly \$5.0 billion. Export growth continued in June, advancing 2.3% to \$35.3 billion. Imports edged down 0.4% to \$30.4 billion after three consecutive monthly increases. Even so, imports remained 13.3% higher than in June 1999.

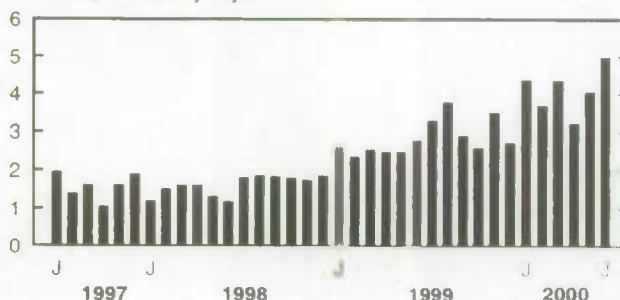
In recent months, the trade surplus has increased mostly on price changes, not volume changes. Exports have risen mainly because of higher metal and energy prices, whereas imports have declined largely because of falling computer prices. The last record surplus was \$4.6 billion, set in May 1996. Notably, Canada's surplus with the United States climbed from \$4.4 billion in May 1996 to \$7.8 billion this June.

Energy exports continued to be strong as hot weather in California helped to lift prices for Canadian natural gas and electricity, which boosted exports of those commodities by 25.5% and 4.4% respectively. Higher prices for crude oil continued to push up the value of crude and refined petroleum exports. Automotive exports gained 2.6%, as exports of auto parts reached a record \$2.5 billion, up 8.0% from May. Truck exports rebounded after two months of decline, but exports of passenger vehicles were virtually unchanged.

Machinery and equipment exports rose 1.1%. Exports of telecommunications and television equipment stayed with the

Merchandise trade surplus

\$ billions, seasonally adjusted



(continued on page 2)



... Trade surplus reaches a new record

upward trend that started in May 1999, climbing another 9.0% in June. This growth stems from ongoing robust demand for optical network equipment and wireless communications equipment. Airplane exports to countries other than the United States also increased, as did helicopter exports to the United States. However, after reaching a record in May, exports of office machines dropped 9.6%.

Imports edged down in June because the petroleum industry completed large capital investments. That dragged imports of machinery and equipment down 2.5%. However, imports of parts for communications equipment continued to grow, as Canadian demand for parts remained strong. Despite falling prices, imports of computers and computer parts spiked up 5.8% because of high demand.

Imports of energy products rose in June for a fifth consecutive month, mostly because of higher crude oil prices. Imports of petroleum and coal products, mainly aviation kerosene, tumbled

21.7%, slowing the growth of imports in the energy product sector. Automotive imports edged up 0.8%. Imports of trucks jumped 7.2%, a second consecutive increase. Imports of passenger vehicles were up 2.0%. However, imports of vehicle parts fell 1.2%, as Canadian manufacturers' vehicle shipments declined.

The industrial goods and materials sector's imports were 1.8% higher in June, at a record \$6.1 billion. This was due to imports of low-priced steel products from Asia, ongoing growth of chemical and plastic product imports and imports of metal fabricated basic products, mainly coin to be polished and stamped.

The June 2000 issue of Canadian international merchandise trade (print: 65-001-XPB, \$19/\$188; online at www.statcan.ca: 65-001-XIB, \$14/\$141) includes tables by commodity and country. Current account data are available quarterly in *Canada's balance of international payments* (print: 67-001-XPB, \$38/\$124; online: 67-001-XIB, \$29/\$93). For further information, contact Jocelyne Elibani (613-951-9647 or 1 800 294-5583), International Trade Division. See also "Current trends" on page 7.

Energy still the source of half the increase in consumer prices

In July, consumers paid 3.0% more than they did in July 1999 for the goods and services included in the Consumer Price Index (CPI). In June, they paid 2.9% more compared with a year earlier. Once again, higher energy prices were the major contributors to the upward pressure on the CPI. In fact, in every month since late 1999, higher energy prices have accounted for roughly half the yearly increases in the CPI.

Among the energy commodities, the biggest impact was made by gasoline prices. From July 1999 to July 2000, gasoline prices climbed 24.9%. July marked the 16th consecutive month that gasoline prices showed a yearly increase. Natural gas prices increased 27.8% over the same 12 months, while prices for fuel oil surged 35.5%.

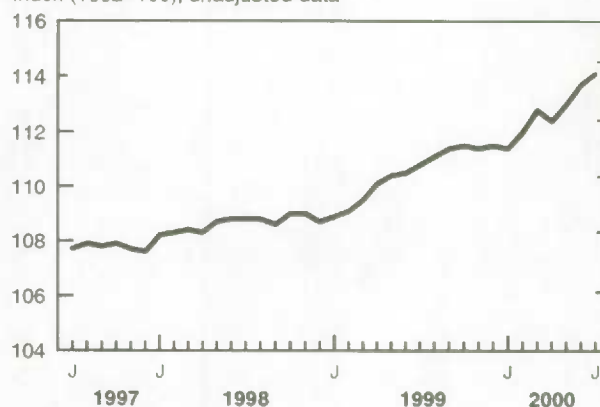
Consumer Price Index, July 2000

% change, previous year, not seasonally adjusted

	All items	Food	Shelter	Transportation	Energy
Canada	3.0	1.9	3.7	5.2	17.8
Newfoundland	3.3	0.8	5.3	8.5	20.0
Prince Edward Island	4.7	1.7	9.7	7.5	31.8
Nova Scotia	3.6	1.6	6.5	7.1	21.2
New Brunswick	3.8	3.0	5.3	7.1	18.3
Quebec	2.6	2.6	3.1	5.3	14.4
Ontario	3.1	2.1	3.4	5.0	17.6
Manitoba	2.6	2.6	2.7	3.2	8.7
Saskatchewan	3.0	1.9	4.0	4.4	12.5
Alberta	4.0	2.4	7.9	6.2	27.9
British Columbia	2.0	-0.4	2.4	4.9	20.5
Whitehorse	2.5	0.4	4.5	4.6	17.3
Yellowknife	1.7	1.3	3.6	1.2	15.7

Consumer Price Index

Index (1992=100), unadjusted data



However, higher energy prices did not spill over into generalized price increases for other goods and services in the CPI basket. Consequently, the CPI excluding energy rose 1.5% in July, an increase just slightly above the 1.4% annual averages seen in the CPI in both 1998 and 1999.

On a monthly basis, the advance in consumer prices slowed, from 0.6% in June down to 0.6% in July. Notably, natural gas prices jumped 8.0%—the largest monthly increase since October 1996. Mostly, this jump was because of price increases in Alberta (+18.6%) and British Columbia (+25.8%). Natural gas prices only increased slightly in Ontario (+1.5%) and Quebec (+1.4%). The upward pressure on domestic prices is a result of growing demand for exports of Canadian natural gas. Environmental concerns are causing more U.S. companies to switch to natural gas for thermal electric power generation.

(continued on page 3)

... Energy still the source of half the increase in consumer prices

Prices for traveller accommodation increased 7.3%, an increase that marked the peak tourist season and which corresponded with those seen in the last four years. Air transportation prices, meanwhile, were up an average 6.4%—the largest monthly increase in air transport prices since March 1999. It resulted from high-season rates on some routes, especially domestic flights.

Offsetting monthly declines were seen in lower prices for motor vehicles and gasoline. Automobile prices fell 2.4%, mainly because of manufacturer rebates and dealer discounts for certain models in preparation for the arrival of the 2001 models in the fall.

Gasoline prices decreased 0.3% from June to July. This marked the first monthly price decrease for gasoline since April, when prices dropped by 5.6% after the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) agreed to step up oil production. The only provinces where gasoline prices fell in July, however, were Ontario (-3.0%), Quebec (-1.6%) and Nova Scotia (-0.7%).

The July 2000 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 7.

Shipments end a volatile period

In June, manufacturers' shipments rose 0.7% to \$45.1 billion. The refined petroleum and coal products industry led the advance. June marked the end of a four-month period of volatility in shipments. The strong upward trend that began in the summer of 1998 has flattened in recent months due to the declines in shipments that occurred in February and April. Manufacturers' shipments increased 4.1% from January to June 2000, and were 11.4% higher than in June 1999.

The value of shipments rose in 13 of the 22 major industry groupings in June, representing 52.8% of the total value of shipments. The refined petroleum and coal products industry (+6.5%) accounted for more than half the total increase. Prices in the industry increased 4.8% in June. Moreover, since June 1999, those prices have jumped 52%, while shipments have climbed 63%. The other major contributors to June's advance were motor vehicle parts and accessories (+3.0%) and chemical and chemical products (+3.0%).

The largest offsetting decline in shipments was seen in the wood industry (-2.5%), which was concentrated among sawmill, planing mill and other millwork products. The price of lumber fell 1.7% and the industry was affected, though to a smaller degree, by a strike in British Columbia that began in late June. In the primary metals industry, shipments fell 2.3% as nickel and copper prices dropped (-8.0%) after an anticipated strike was averted in June.

Manufacturers' backlog of unfilled orders edged up 0.6% to \$53.6 billion—the first significant increase since December. June's largest increase was in transportation equipment (+1.2%), which was led by the aircraft and aircraft parts industry (+4.1%). The largest offset was in the machinery and equipment industry (-2.0%).

Inventories rose in value in June by 0.1% to \$58.8 billion—the 17th consecutive monthly increase. The major contributors to the

Manufacturers' shipments, June 2000
Seasonally adjusted

	\$ millions	% change, previous month
Canada	45,136	0.7
Newfoundland	217	12.2
Prince Edward Island	78	3.7
Nova Scotia	715	0.3
New Brunswick	894	5.3
Quebec	10,733	-1.3
Ontario	24,324	1.7
Manitoba	873	-1.6
Saskatchewan	591	1.2
Alberta	3,468	0.0
British Columbia	3,238	-0.6
Yukon, Northwest Territories, Nunavut	5	8.5

June increase were chemical and chemical products, wood and primary metals. The main offsetting decreases occurred in the electrical and electronic products industry. Manufacturers' inventories grew 5.8% from January to June 2000, and were 12.1% higher than in June 1999.

Although manufacturers' inventories have been building for almost a year and a half, the value of their shipments has been rising at a similar pace. That is why the trend of the inventory-to-shipments ratio has kept within a relatively narrow band of between 1.29 and 1.31 over that period. The ratio decreased from 1.31 in May to 1.30 in June.

The June 2000 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 7.

Retailers powered by automotive sales

Retail sales advanced 0.8% in June to \$22.9 billion. The gains of May (+0.5%) and June carried retail sales back to slightly above the previous high observed in March. In constant prices, retail sales advanced 0.4% in June.

Despite a slow start for retailers in 2000, the economic fundamentals that affect retail sales remain strong. In the first quarter, disposable income advanced from the year-earlier quarter by 5.0%. However, interest rates have been increased three times since the start of the year; the Bank Rate rose to 6.0% in May.

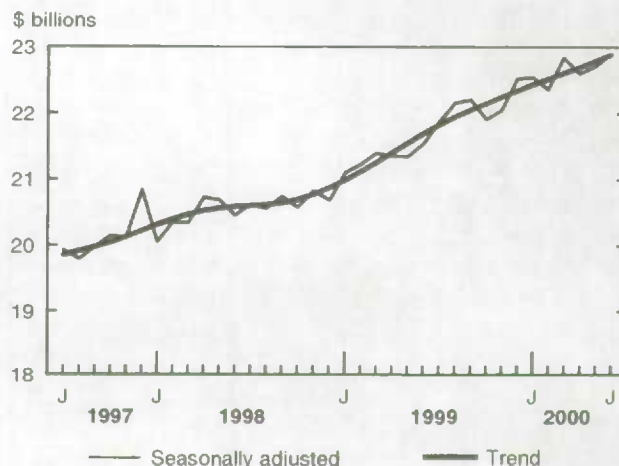
In the second quarter, retail sales rose 0.7% compared with the previous quarter and increased 6.2% compared with the second quarter of 1999. This marked the ninth consecutive quarterly advance. The largest gains in the second quarter were reported by furniture (+2.1%), food (+1.9%) and drug (+1.2%) retailers. The other retail groups posted little or no gains compared with the previous quarter.

Automotive retailers powered the sales growth in both May and June (+1.5% each month). However, those strong gains followed a significant decline in April. Excluding vehicle dealers, retail sales decreased 0.2% in May and increased 0.4% in June. Attractive financial incentives drove vehicle sales up in June, while higher prices lifted sales at gasoline service stations (+2.7%). Within the automotive group, motor and recreational vehicle dealers posted an advance in June (+1.9%), whereas auto parts, accessories and services retailers reported a sales decline (-2.3%).

Retail sales, June 2000 Seasonally adjusted

	\$ millions	% change, previous month	% change, previous year
Canada	22,893	0.8	6.3
Newfoundland	375	1.0	5.9
Prince Edward Island	103	0.1	5.8
Nova Scotia	711	2.4	2.8
New Brunswick	573	0.2	5.3
Quebec	5,207	1.1	3.9
Ontario	8,784	0.2	7.1
Manitoba	778	-0.3	5.5
Saskatchewan	679	0.4	6.2
Alberta	2,648	1.1	10.2
British Columbia	2,960	2.1	6.2
Yukon	29	-0.5	3.8
Northwest Territories	31	-1.5	1.8
Nunavut	15	2.6	5.5

Retail sales



In June, all other retail groups also saw higher sales except furniture stores (-1.0%). Nevertheless, furniture stores have recorded the strongest sales growth of all the trade groups since the spring of 1996. Clothing stores posted sales gains of 1.0% in both May and June. "Other" clothing stores, which include family and children's clothing stores, led the advance (+1.7%). Overall, clothing store sales have been on the rise since early 1996.

June's advance at department stores (+1.6%) led the general merchandise retailers higher for the month (+0.9%)—these retailers' third consecutive gain. Due to the department stores' restructuring, general merchandisers' sales have remained essentially unchanged since the summer of 1999.

Large gains in retail sales were posted in half the provinces in June. In British Columbia, retailers made a healthy 2.1% rebound after flat sales in the first five months of the year. After two months of belt-tightening, consumers in Nova Scotia and Quebec spent more in retail stores in June. Retail sales have generally been growing since the spring of 1997 in Nova Scotia and since the summer of 1998 in Quebec.

The June 2000 issue of *Retail trade* (print: 63-005-XPB, \$21/\$206; online at www.statcan.ca: 63-005-XIB, \$16/\$155) presents the full report. 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.

Wholesalers boosted by demand for electronic components and motor vehicles

Wholesale sales edged up 0.3% in June, rising to \$32.2 billion. The modest advance was led by computers and electronic components, as well as by motor vehicles. As a result of June's advance, wholesale sales finished the second quarter of the year up 1.9% over the first quarter.

Sales volatility was evident in June, as 7 of the 11 trade groups reported sales declines following May's widespread increases. Notable declines were reported in household goods (-3.3%) and in farm machinery, equipment and supplies (-2.7%).

In June, wholesalers of computers, packaged software and other electronic machinery reported their third consecutive monthly increase (+2.5%). Sales have been generally climbing since the start of 2000 and are now approaching levels last seen in mid-1999. Some of these wholesalers continue to report a shortage of electronic parts and components; however, the group appears to be rebounding to meet the ongoing demand for high-speed and convenient communications devices such as the Internet and cellular phones. On the strength of June's sales, wholesalers of computers, packaged software and other electronic machinery finished the second quarter up a strong 4.9% over the first quarter.

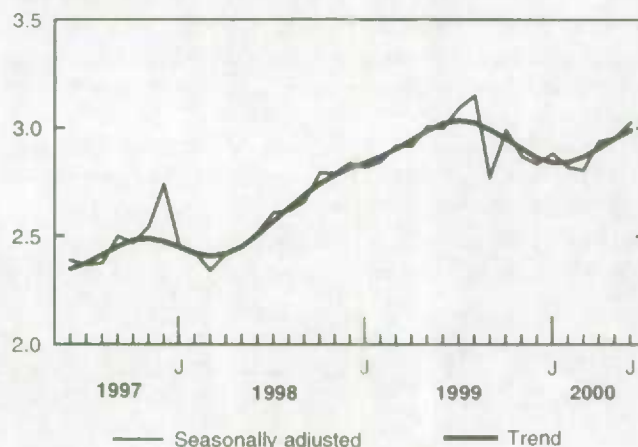
Wholesalers of motor vehicles, parts and accessories reported their fourth consecutive monthly increase in June (+2.0%). As well, exports of automobile products rose 2.6% in June. Wholesale sales of motor vehicles, parts and accessories have been generally rising since mid 1998.

Wholesale trade, June 2000 Seasonally adjusted

	\$ millions	% change, previous month	% change, previous year
Canada	32,154	0.3	8.4
Newfoundland	220	-2.5	0.2
Prince Edward Island	53	-1.9	10.1
Nova Scotia	557	-3.0	0.1
New Brunswick	405	-2.1	8.6
Quebec	6,483	0.3	7.1
Ontario	16,394	1.5	11.1
Manitoba	860	-4.5	-3.2
Saskatchewan	897	-3.1	2.5
Alberta	3,021	-0.8	12.3
British Columbia	3,241	-1.2	1.9
Yukon	9	1.5	-4.3
Northwest Territories	12	-4.6	-1.8
Nunavut	2	-23.5	22.8

Sales of computers, packaged software, and other electronic machinery

\$ billions



Cooler and wetter weather in most parts of the country dampened sales of farm machinery, equipment and supplies in June (-2.7%). Nonetheless, this trade group has seen generally stable sales since mid-1999. Despite all their problems, these wholesalers made up for their weak first quarter (-6.2%) by reporting second-quarter sales growth of 6.0%—the strongest quarterly performance among all the wholesale trade groups.

Looking at the provincial figures, Ontario's wholesalers turned in the largest sales increase in June, owing to the strong performances of two trade groups that are concentrated in the province: motor vehicles, parts and accessories; and computers, packaged software, equipment and supplies. In Quebec, wholesalers also reported an increase in June, matching the national average of 0.3%. All other provinces reported declines in wholesale sales in June. The declines carved a broad swath across all wholesale trade groups, particularly hitting those in Manitoba and Saskatchewan. The inclement weather on the Prairies in June was reported as a major reason for lower sales, especially among wholesalers of farm machinery, equipment and supplies.

The value of inventories held by wholesalers, after dropping 0.2% in May, rose 0.9% in June to \$42.7 billion. The value of inventories has been on the rise for the last several years. The inventory-to-sales ratio rose from 1.32 in May to 1.33. The ratio has been generally falling since early 2000.

The June 2000 issue of *Wholesale trade* (online at www.statcan.ca; 63-008-XIB, \$14/\$140) presents the full report. To order data, or for general information, 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.

Business spending continues to drive composite index's growth

The leading indicator grew 0.4% in July, the same rate as in June. Of the composite index's 10 components, 6 posted gains. Business spending continued to drive the index's overall growth. It lifted services employment to its best gain in 19 months. Business spending also boosted new orders for manufactured goods, as the workweek levelled off after two months of decline. Meanwhile, high technology stocks continued to power the gains in the stock market.

Household demand remained mixed as labour market conditions softened. Furniture and appliance sales slowed, while demand for

other durable goods declined. The housing index turned up, but mostly because of the end of strikes that gave a lift to housing starts in Toronto. Starts fell throughout Western Canada.

In the United States, the leading indicator turned negative for the first time since early 1996. The drop was largely because short-term interest rates rose above long-term yields, inverting the yield curve. As in Canada, business spending remained firm. This was reflected by high orders for capital goods.

The August 2000 issue of *Canadian economic observer* (11-010-XPB, \$23/\$227) is now available. For further information, contact Francine Roy (613-951-3627), Current Economic Analysis Group. See also "Current trends" on page 7.

New from Statistics Canada



Canadian economic observer August 2000

The August issue of Statistics Canada's flagship publication for economic statistics, *Canadian economic observer*, analyses current economic conditions, summarizes the major economic events that occurred in July and presents a feature article on income inequality in North America.

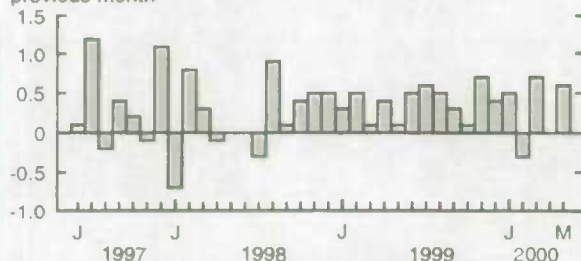
A separate statistical summary contains a wide range of tables and graphs on the principal economic indicators for Canada, the provinces and the major industrial nations.

The August 2000 issue of *Canadian economic observer* (11-010-XPB, \$23/\$227) is now available. For more information, contact Cyndi Bloskie (613-951-3634; ceo@statcan.ca), Current Economic Analysis Group.

Current trends

Gross domestic product

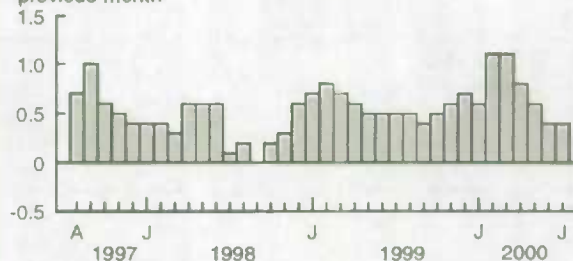
% change,
previous month



Gross domestic product rose 0.6% in May after pausing in April.

Composite Index

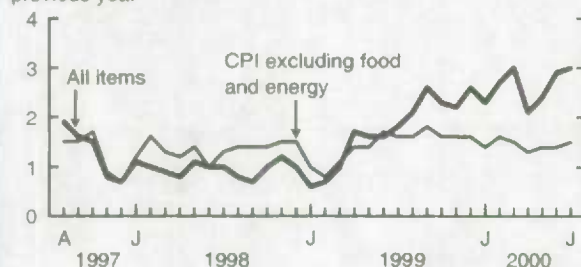
% change,
previous month



The leading indicator grew 0.4% in July, the same rate as in June; 6 of 10 components posted gains.

Consumer Price Index

% change,
previous year



Consumer prices for goods and services were 3.0% higher in July 2000 than they were a year earlier. Excluding food and energy, prices rose 1.5%.

Unemployment rate

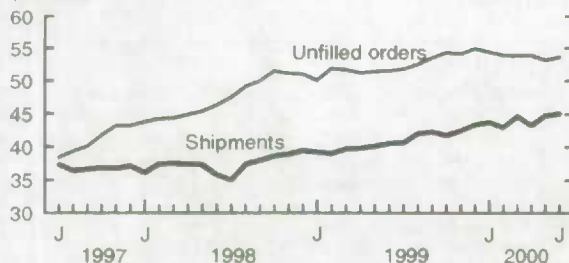
%



In July, the unemployment rate increased 0.2 percentage points to 6.8%.

Manufacturing

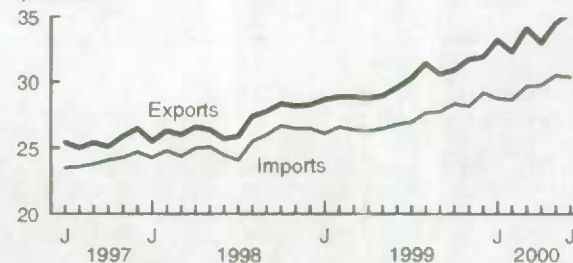
\$ billions



Manufacturers' shipments rose 0.7% in June to \$45.1 billion. The backlog of unfilled orders increased 0.6% to \$53.6 billion.

Merchandise trade

\$ billions



In June, the value of merchandise exports advanced 2.3% from May to \$35.3 billion. Imports edged down 0.4% to \$30.4 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)	May	779.9	0.6%	4.8%
Composite Index (1992=100)	July	163.8	0.4%	8.0%
Operating profits of enterprises (\$ billion)	Q1 2000	53.3	12.3%	37.5%
Capacity utilization (%)	Q1 2000	87.6	1.1†	4.3†
DOMESTIC DEMAND				
Retail trade (\$ billion)	June*	22.9	0.8%	6.3%
Department store sales (\$ billions)	June	1.52	1.5%	2.4%
New motor vehicle sales (thousand of units)	June	133.9	3.6%	7.5%
Wholesale trade (\$ billion)	June*	32.2	0.3%	8.4%
LABOUR				
Employment (millions)	July	14.87	-0.1%	2.3%
Unemployment rate (%)	July	6.8	0.2†	-0.8†
Participation rate (%)	July	65.6	-0.1†	0.0†
Average weekly earnings (\$)	June*	626.29	0.1%	2.7%
Help-wanted Index (1996=100)	July	171	1.2%	6.9%
INTERNATIONAL TRADE				
Merchandise exports (\$ billion)	June*	35.3	2.3%	19.5%
Merchandise imports (\$ billion)	June*	30.4	-0.4%	13.3%
Merchandise trade balance (all figures in \$ billion)	June*	5.0	0.9	2.2
MANUFACTURING				
Shipments (\$ billion)	June	45.1	0.7%	11.4%
New orders (\$ billion)	June	45.5	3.0%	12.2%
Unfilled orders (\$ billion)	June	53.6	0.6%	4.1%
Inventory/shipments ratio	June	1.30	-0.01	0.01
PRICES				
Consumer Price Index (1992=100)	July*	114.1	0.4%	3.0%
Industrial Product Price Index (1992=100)	June	127.3	0.0%	5.5%
Raw Materials Price Index (1992=100)	June	144.8	2.1%	28.3%
New Housing Price Index (1992=100)	June	103.0	0.0%	2.4%

Note: All series are seasonally adjusted with the exception of the price indexes.

* new this week

† percentage point

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A weekly review

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International travel, vol. 16, no. 6: advance information	June 2000	66-001-PIB	6/55
CURRENT ECONOMIC ANALYSIS			
Canadian economic observer	August 2000	11-010-XPB	23/227
DISTRIBUTIVE TRADES			
Wholesale trade	June 2000	63-008-XIB	14/140
LABOUR STATISTICS			
Employment, earnings and hours	May 2000	72-002-XPB	32/320
MANUFACTURING, CONSTRUCTION AND ENERGY			
Construction type plywood	June 2000	35-001-XIB	5/47
Monthly survey of manufacturing	June 2000	31-001-XPB	20/196
Primary iron and steel	June 2000	41-001-XIB	5/47
Shipments of solid fuel burning heating products	Q2 2000	25-002-XIB	6/19
PRICES			
The consumer price index	July 2000	62-001-XPB	11/103
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