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Infomat

A Weekly Review

Friday, May 25, 2001

OVERVIEW

- **Both exports and imports up**

  Canada's merchandise exports rallied 2.3% in March as a result of a slight upturn in the high-tech sector. Imports grew 1.7% with a rebound in the automotive sector.

- **Inflation rate hits highest point in a decade**

  In April, the prices of goods and services in the Consumer Price Index basket were 3.6% higher than in April 2000. This is the largest increase since December 1991.

- **Manufacturing shipments regain some ground**

  Led by the motor vehicle and computer and electronic products industries, manufacturing shipments rose 1.7% in March, regaining some of the ground they lost in February.

- **Retailers post higher first-quarter sales**

  Retail sales rose 0.3 % in March, offsetting February's decline. After remaining flat in the fourth quarter of 2000, sales increased 1.1 % in the first quarter of 2001.

- **Wholesale sales bounce back in the automotive sector**

  Wholesale sales, heavily influenced by the automotive sector, rose 1.7% in March. Had it not been for the large fluctuations in that sector, wholesale sales would be little changed.

Both exports and imports up

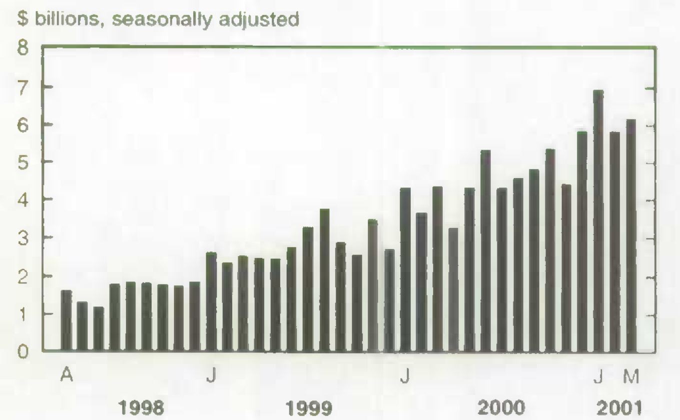
Canada's merchandise exports rallied 2.3% to just over $36.0 billion in March. The increase stemmed from a modest upswing in machinery and equipment exports, largely in the high-tech sector, and higher exports of agricultural and fishing products. Imports were up for the first time in four months, increasing 1.7% to $29.9 billion.

As a result, the merchandise trade surplus increased to $6.2 billion in March from $5.8 billion in February. A slight decline in the trade surplus with the United States was offset by an improved trade balance with other trading partners.

Exports of machinery and equipment, which accounted for one-quarter of Canada's merchandise exports, grew 6.4% to $9.1 billion in March. Exports of other equipment and tools, mainly high-tech equipment, rebounded 5.5%. This followed two months of decline.

Agricultural and fishing exports rose 3.6% to a record high $2.5 billion. In particular, export shipments of meat and meat products have increased for five straight months. Wheat exports jumped 23.7%, and canola exports were up 29.0%. China turned to Canada as a source of canola because its traditional suppliers in Europe and Australia were experiencing shortages.

Merchandise trade balance



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... Both exports and imports up

Automotive products exports increased 2.5% to $7.4 billion. Exports of trucks rose 7.5%, and exports of motor vehicle parts were up 3.5%. Passenger car exports were virtually unchanged.

Exports of forestry products edged up 0.4% to $3.2 billion. Newsprint, paper and paperboard exports rose 2.1% on strong demand from the United States, while exports of lumber and sawmill products fell 1.7% in March, the final month of the Canada-U.S. softwood lumber agreement.

Imports were up in March on the strength of the automotive sector. Automotive imports rebounded to $5.9 billion, up 7.6% after two consecutive monthly declines. Imports of passenger cars jumped 16.7%, as consumers responded to manufacturers' sales promotions and incentives. Imports of motor vehicle parts increased only 1.8%, as inventory levels of parts continued to decline.

Canada imported $10.0 billion worth of machinery and equipment, up 1.7% from February. These shipments accounted for 33.6% of all merchandise imported into Canada in March. A push to increase electricity generation capacity led to record high imports of engines and turbines, worth $309.0 million. Imports of high-tech equipment hit a record high of $2.7 billion, up 3.3%.

Compared with the first quarter of 2000, exports were up 8.5% in the first quarter of 2001, while imports were 2.1% higher. As a result, the first quarter trade balance improved from $12.3 billion in 2000 to almost $19.0 billion in 2001.

*The March 2001 issue of **Canadian international merchandise trade** (Internet: 65-001-XIB, $14/$141; paper: 65-001-XPB, $19/$188) contains tables by commodity and country on a customs basis. Current account data are available quarterly in **Canada's balance of international payments** (Internet: 67-001-XIB, $29/$93; paper: 67-001-XPB, $38/$124). For more information, contact Jocelyne Elibani (613-951-9647; 1 800 294-5583), International Trade Division. (See also "Current trends" on page 7.)*

Inflation rate hits highest point in a decade

In April, consumers faced a 3.6% average price increase compared with April 2000 for the goods and services contained in the Consumer Price Index (CPI) basket. This is the largest increase since December 1991. The year-over-year inflation rate in March was 2.5%.

The jump from 2.5% to 3.6% in the CPI is due to the combination of an unusually large decline in energy prices in April 2000 and continued increases in energy prices in April 2001. Higher gasoline prices were the primary contributor to the upswing.

The all-items index excluding energy also contributed to the jump, rising 2.8% in April, compared with 2.3% in March. Federal-provincial tax hikes on cigarettes in April were largely responsible for this rise in the year-over-year rate. Increases in the purchase prices of motor vehicles also played a role.

Energy prices climbed an average 11.6% from April 2000 to April 2001, accounting for almost one-third of the all-items annual increase of 3.6%. More than half the rise in energy prices came from a 49.9% surge in natural gas prices. Gasoline prices rose 8.3% over the same period.

More than one-quarter of the annual increase in the all-items CPI in April can be attributed to higher food prices. In particular, prices for fresh vegetables rose 17.0%, while prices for fresh fruit were up 17.8%, their largest advance since September 1991. These increases are due to the lingering effect of bad weather last winter and higher transportation costs. Beef prices advanced 18.0%, largely because of tight supplies. The 2.5% increase in prices for food purchased from restaurants reflects higher operating costs.

The CPI rose 0.7% from March to April, its largest increase since March 2000 (+0.7%). The monthly rise is also more than double the 0.3% recorded this March.

Gasoline prices advanced 5.5% from March to April, as a result of a 9.3% jump in Ontario prices. This is the largest monthly increase since September 2000. Among the reasons for this rise were an anticipated increase in North American demand for the summer and low U.S. inventories. The 5.8% increase in electricity prices primarily reflects the return to regular billing for BC Hydro customers.

Consumer Price Index, April 2001
% change, previous year, not seasonally adjusted

	All items	Food	Shelter	Transportation	Energy
Canada	**3.6**	**5.1**	**4.7**	**2.2**	**11.6**
Newfoundland	1.2	2.8	-2.4	0.7	-5.8
Prince Edward Island	3.5	4.2	4.6	3.8	10.5
Nova Scotia	3.0	3.6	3.4	2.9	6.0
New Brunswick	2.4	3.4	1.3	3.0	4.1
Quebec	3.8	6.4	2.8	3.6	8.0
Ontario	4.3	5.3	6.5	2.3	18.5
Manitoba	3.2	4.7	5.3	0.4	10.0
Saskatchewan	2.8	3.5	5.8	0.2	6.3
Alberta	2.6	4.7	3.6	1.5	3.7
British Columbia	2.3	3.7	3.3	1.3	11.7
Whitehorse	2.3	5.7	2.6	-0.4	4.9
Yellowknife	1.3	3.5	1.1	1.0	1.3

Average cigarette prices rose 7.7% from March to April, owing to a combined federal-provincial tax of $4 per carton introduced on April 6 in Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Quebec and Ontario. An increase of 4.1% was also observed in Manitoba due to a rise in the provincial tobacco tax effective April 10. Fresh fruit prices were on average 7.7% higher in April than in March. Seasonal decreases in the availability of oranges and a delay in some imported crops were mostly responsible for the increase.

Prices for women's clothing fell 2.7% in April as a result of discounts. Motor vehicle insurance premiums declined 1.3%, reflecting a 2.6% decrease in Ontario rates. Prices for fresh vegetables were down 3.3% in April, after rising 5.4% in March. The drop was due to an increase in supplies following improved weather in southwestern U.S. growing regions.

*The April 2001 issue of **The Consumer Price Index** (Internet: 62-001-XIB, $8/$77; paper: 62-001-XPB, $11/$103) is now available. For more information, contact Joanne Moreau (613-951-7130; fax: 613-951-1539; infounit@statcan.ca), Prices Division. (See also "Current trends" on page 7.)*

Manufacturing shipments regain some ground

In March, manufacturers regained some of the ground they lost in February, as shipments rose 1.7% to $43.7 billion. Nevertheless, shipments remained 5.2% below the peak of $46.1 billion in October 2000.

The manufacturing sector has faltered significantly in recent months. Since the autumn of 2000, it has suffered contract cancellations, production slowdowns and layoffs due to a slowdown in the United States economy, higher inventory levels and a general sense of economic pessimism.

Increases in the motor vehicle and computer and electronic products industries boosted shipments in March. Shipments of motor vehicles rose 5.3% to $5.2 billion, the first advance in five months. However, they remained 17.8% below levels reported one year earlier. Climbing 5.9% in March, the computer and electronic products industry got some relief from an otherwise dismal start to 2001. Manufacturers shipped $2.7 billion worth of product in March, well below the average monthly shipments for 2000.

The chemical industry (+3.0%) and the motor vehicle parts industry (+3.5%) were also among the larger movers in March.

Manufacturers' shipments, March 2001
Seasonally adjusted

	$ millions	% change, previous month
Canada	**43,741**	1.7
Newfoundland	198	-0.9
Prince Edward Island	99	0.1
Nova Scotia	744	6.4
New Brunswick	980	-0.7
Quebec	10,328	0.7
Ontario	23,033	2.5
Manitoba	987	4.0
Saskatchewan	643	3.4
Alberta	3,785	0.7
British Columbia	2,940	-0.8
Yukon, Northwest Territories and Nunavut	4	-2.4

Note to readers

Data collected in the Monthly Survey of Manufacturing are now classified according to the 1997 North American Industry Classification System (NAICS), which replaces the 1980 Standard Industrial Classification (SIC). Reference year 2000 is the last year for which data are released on an SIC basis. Data for the period from 1992 to 2000 have been recalculated according to the new classification system.

The major offsetting movement was a 7.6% decrease in the aerospace product and parts industry.

March inventories were $65.3 billion, unchanged from February, but $5.2 billion higher than in March 2000. Several manufacturers are now taking action to adjust inventories to match market conditions. Aerospace product and parts manufacturers had the largest growth in inventories, followed by the chemical industry. These increases were offset by the decline reported by computer and electronic products manufacturers, their second in as many months.

With slightly higher shipments and stagnant inventories, the inventories-to-shipments ratio edged down to 1.49 in March, after hitting 1.52 in February, its highest level since May 1992. The ratio has been climbing slowly since the fall of 1999.

Unfilled orders fell 1.6% to $49.0 billion in March. The decline, the third in four months, was concentrated in the computer and electronic products, machinery, and aerospace product and parts industries. Ongoing market uneasiness and contract cancellations may partly explain the lower orders for the month. In contrast, unfilled orders in the electrical equipment, appliance and component industry rose for the first time in three months.

New orders lost most of the ground they gained in February, decreasing 3.5% to $42.9 billion. The aerospace product and parts, and machinery industries were hardest hit by the decline.

The March 2001 issue of the ***Monthly Survey of Manufacturing*** *(Internet: 31-001-XIB, $15/$147) is now available. More detailed data on shipments by province can be obtained on request. For data or general information, contact the Dissemination Officer (1 866 873-8789; 613-951-9497; manufact@statcan.ca). For analytic information, contact Russell Kowaluk (613-951-0600; kowarus@statcan.ca), Manufacturing, Construction and Energy Division. (See also "Current trends" on page 7.)*

Retailers post higher first-quarter sales

Retailers sold $23.7 billion worth of goods and services in March, up 0.3% from the previous month. This increase offset the 0.3% decline in February. Retail sales were up sharply in January 2001 and December 2000, after remaining essentially unchanged since July 2000.

In March, consumers spent considerably more in furniture stores (+1.9%) and clothing stores (+0.9%) than in other retail establishments. Smaller sales advances were noted in the automotive sector (+0.5%), in general merchandise stores (+0.4%) and in drug stores (+0.4%). Food stores reported a 0.3% decline in sales.

Despite remaining flat overall in February and March, retail sales were 1.1% higher in the first quarter of 2001 than in the fourth quarter of 2000. This quarterly gain followed unchanged sales in the last quarter of 2000 compared with the third quarter.

Furniture outpaced other sectors in the first quarter with a 4.0% jump in sales. The housing market, still building on its 2000 performance, was partly responsible for the strong first-quarter sales results in furniture stores. A significant gain in department store sales (+4.8%) led to a 2.7% sales increase in the general merchandise sector. The opening of several new stores in late November 2000 stimulated department store sales in the first quarter of 2001. This was the strongest quarterly gain in department

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... Retailers post higher first-quarter sales

store sales since the third quarter of 1999 (+5.9%), when the stock of a major player was being liquidated.

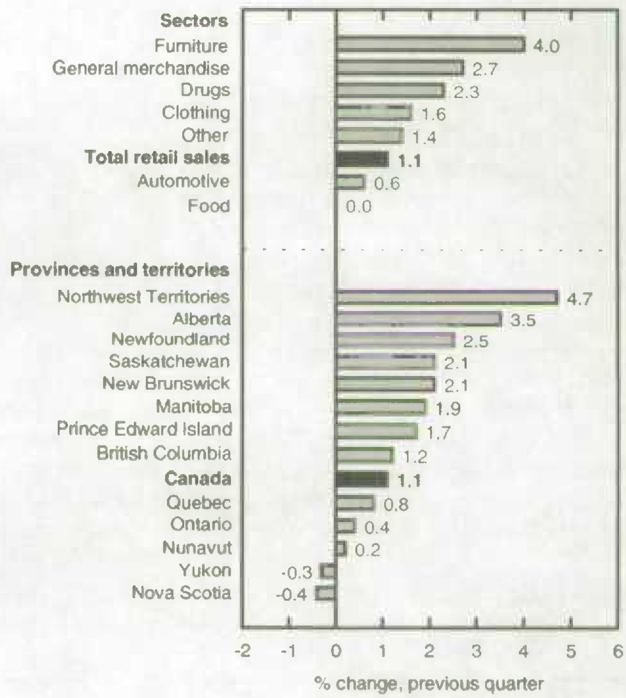
The automotive and food sectors were the only groups reporting sales below the overall retail average in the first quarter. The automotive sector's lacklustre growth (+0.6%) was due primarily to lower sales by gasoline service stations (-0.7%). The average price of gasoline at the pump fell 4.4%, the first quarterly decline in gasoline prices since the last quarter of 1998. Sales of motor and recreational vehicles rose 1.1%, following a 3.6% decline in the fourth quarter of 2000. After posting the strongest quarterly gain of all sectors in the fourth quarter of 2000 (+1.8%), sales in food stores remained unchanged in the first quarter of 2001.

In the first quarter, retail sales advanced in all provinces and territories except Yukon and Nova Scotia. The Northwest Territories and Alberta led all other regions in retail sales growth.

Retail sales, March 2001
Seasonally adjusted

	$ millions	% change, previous month	% change, previous year
Canada	**23,737**	**0.3**	**3.8**
Newfoundland	397	3.1	5.7
Prince Edward Island	105	1.3	4.4
Nova Scotia	721	4.1	2.5
New Brunswick	585	-0.3	-0.4
Quebec	5,415	0.6	2.1
Ontario	9,006	-0.2	2.8
Manitoba	802	0.0	2.9
Saskatchewan	687	-0.3	0.8
Alberta	2,838	1.8	10.0
British Columbia	3,099	-0.6	5.8
Yukon	29	-6.9	0.9
Northwest Territories	37	4.1	12.1
Nunavut	16	0.4	3.0

Retail sales, first quarter 2001



However, retailers in Ontario and Quebec posted sales increases below the national average for the second consecutive quarter.

The March 2001 issue of ***Retail trade*** *(Internet: 63-005-XIB, $16/$155; paper: 63-005-XPB, $21/$206) is now available. For data or general information, contact Client Services (1 877 421-3067; 613-951-3549; retailinfo@statcan.ca). For analytical information, contact Paul Gratton (613-951-3541; gratpau@statcan.ca), Distributive Trades Division.*

Wholesale sales bounce back in the automotive sector

Wholesale sales, heavily influenced by the automotive sector, rose 1.7% in March to $32.2 billion. This gain almost completely offset February's 1.8% decline, also attributable to the automotive sector. This sector accounts for about 17% of total wholesale sales. Had it not been for the large fluctuations in the sector in February and March, wholesale sales would have been relatively unchanged.

Wholesale sales of motor vehicles, parts and accessories jumped 10.8% to $5.8 billion in March, erasing February's 9.9% drop. Recent volatility in this sector is due to the fact that wholesalers have been reacting to unpredictability in demand, falling production, and fluctuating inventories of automotive products, which fell 3.9% in March. Wholesalers of motor vehicles, parts and accessories have seen their sales generally decline since the spring of 2000.

Wholesale trade, March 2001
Seasonally adjusted

	$ millions	% change, previous month	% change, previous year
Canada	**32,241**	**1.7**	**2.0**
Newfoundland	232	3.2	5.6
Prince Edward Island	48	-2.7	-10.0
Nova Scotia	546	-1.2	-5.5
New Brunswick	401	-1.0	-0.4
Quebec	6,624	-0.7	2.9
Ontario	15,999	3.2	1.6
Manitoba	949	3.2	9.4
Saskatchewan	955	2.0	0.5
Alberta	3,232	0.8	7.1
British Columbia	3,225	0.8	-2.8
Yukon	9	-31.0	-7.3
Northwest Territories	17	-12.9	37.3
Nunavut	3	13.9	45.9

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... Wholesale sales bounce back in the automotive sector

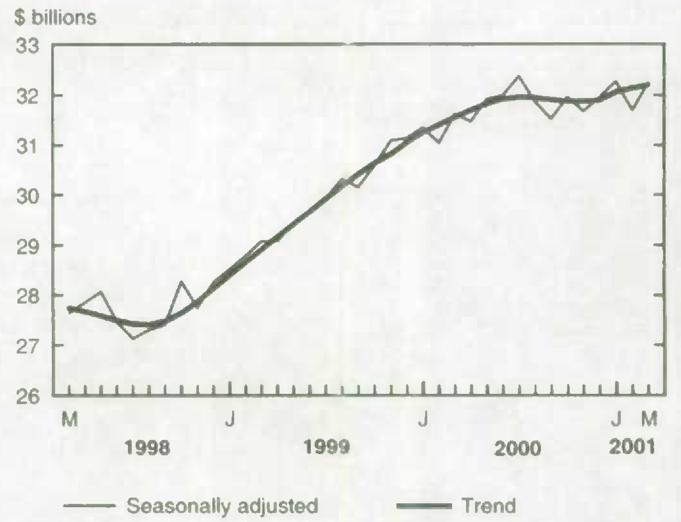
There were also substantial increases in beverage, drug and tobacco products (+2.2%), industrial and other machinery, equipment and supplies (+1.4%), and farm machinery, equipment and supplies (+1.0%). However, a significant decline was reported by wholesalers in the other products category (-1.7%), which includes newsprint, toys and novelties, and waste material. Wholesalers of lumber and building materials (-1.4%), and food products (-0.9%) also saw decreases.

Wholesalers in Ontario reported an increase of 3.2% in March, due to strong sales in the automotive sector, the industrial and other machinery sector, and the computer and electronics sector. Sales have improved slightly in Ontario since the start of the year. British Columbia wholesalers continued their comeback with a 0.8% rise in March. This third consecutive monthly increase stemmed from healthy wholesale sales in the automotive sector, in industrial and other machinery, equipment and supplies, and in metals, hardware, plumbing and heating equipment and supplies.

Wholesalers have seen their sales level off since mid-2000. However, since the start of the year, wholesale sales have edged higher. Sales in the first quarter of 2001 were up 0.7% over the fourth quarter of 2000. All provinces and territories reported a positive first quarter, except Prince Edward Island and Nova Scotia. The leading provinces in first-quarter growth were Alberta (+3.1%), Manitoba (+2.8%), and Saskatchewan (+2.3%).

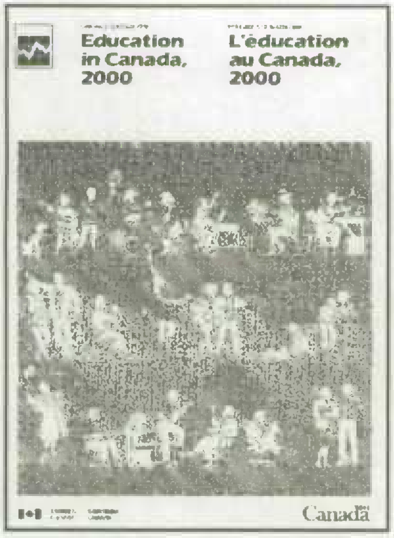
Wholesale inventories fell 0.3% to $44.1 billion in March. In the computer sector, however, inventories climbed 5.2%. A large part of this build-up was to meet firm orders with an April shipping date. The growth of inventories has slowed since the beginning of 2001. The inventory-to-sales ratio fell from 1.40 in February to 1.37 in March. The ratio has stabilized at about 1.38 in recent months.

Wholesale sales



*The March 2001 issue of **Wholesale trade** (Internet: 63-008-XIB, $14/$140) is now available. For data or general information, contact Client Services (1 877 421-3067; 613-951-3549; wholesaleinfo@statcan.ca). For analytical information, contact Alexander Hays (613-951-3552; haysale@statcan.ca), Distributive Trades Division.*

New from Statistics Canada



Education in Canada
2000

Need more data on education in Canada? Want to research issues and trends in more depth? Consult *Education in Canada*, our annual review of statistics on Canadian education.

The publication summarizes data on institutions, enrolment, graduates, teachers and finance for all levels of education. Ten-year time series are shown for most variables at the Canada level and five-year time series at the provincial level. The publication also provides demographic data, and educational attainment, labour force participation rates and unemployment rates of the adult population.

The publication ***Education in Canada, 2000*** *(Internet: 81-229-XIB, $38; paper: 81-229-XPB, $51) is now available. For more information, contact Client Services (1 800 307-3382; 613-951-7608; fax: 613-951-9040; educationstats@statcan.ca), Centre for Education Statistics.*

Children and youth at risk: Symposium report
April 2000

The report *Children and youth at risk* documents the proceedings of a symposium held in Ottawa on April 6 and 7, 2000 to explore research and policy issues concerning the education of children who, for whatever reason, are at risk of not meeting the normal expectations of the education system. The symposium was held as an activity of the Pan-Canadian Education Research Agenda.

The report includes summaries of presentations, discussions and commissioned research papers. The themes and issues are summarized in a synthesis written by Dr. Robert Crocker of the faculty of education at Memorial University of Newfoundland.

The report ***Children and youth at risk—symposium report*** *(Internet: 81-589-XIE, free; paper: 81-589-XPB, free) is available on Statistics Canada's Web site (www.statcan.ca). Under "Our products and services" page, choose "Free publications," then "Education." The report is also available on the Council of Ministers of Education Web site (www.cmec.ca), which also contains information on the Pan-Canadian Education Research Agenda. For more information, contact Client Services (1 800 307-3382; 613-951-7608; fax: 613-951-9040; educationstats@statcan.ca), Centre for Education Statistics.*

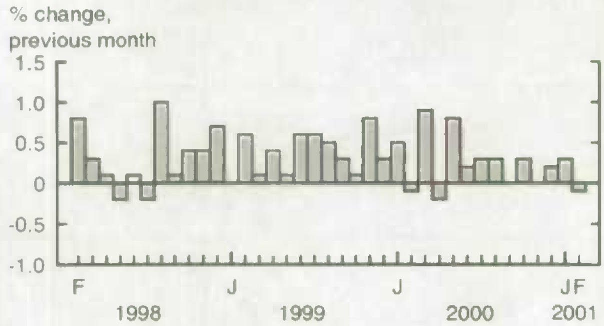
Perspectives on labour and income
May 2001 online edition

The May 2001 issue of *Perspectives on labour and income* contains an article on the use of computers at work, including who uses them, what for, how often and how did workers learn to use them.

The May 2001 online edition of ***Perspectives on labour and income****, Vol. 2, no. 5 (Internet: 75-001-XIE, $5/$48) is now available. For more information, contact Henry Pold (613-951-4608; henry.pold@statcan.ca), Labour and Household Surveys Analysis Division.*

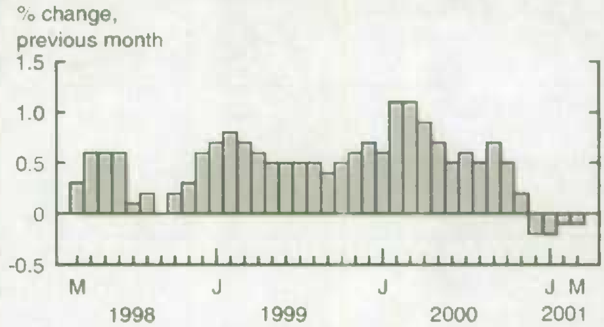
Current trends

Gross domestic product



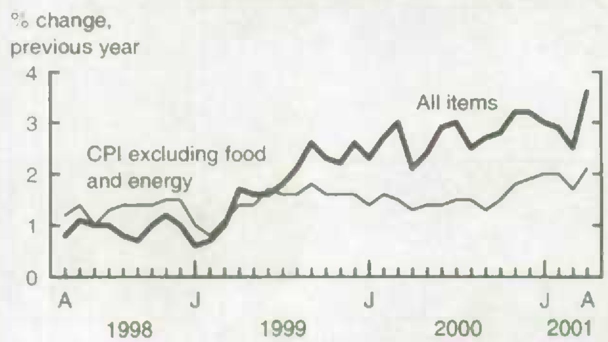
After January's 0.3% gain, gross domestic product slipped 0.1% in February, led by a sharp drop in the production of telecommunications equipment.

Composite Index



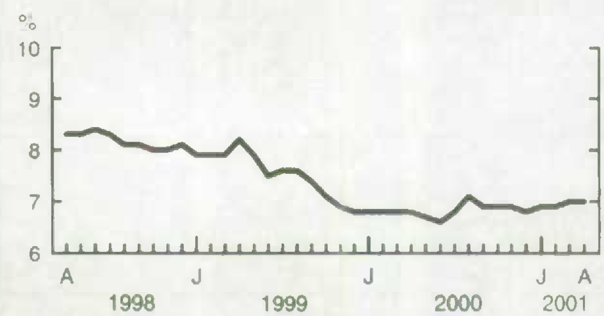
The leading indicator edged down 0.1% in March, its fourth straight decline. The stock market and the manufacturing sector remained the main sources of weakness.

Consumer Price Index



Consumer prices for goods and services were 3.6% higher in April than they were a year earlier. Excluding food and energy, prices rose 2.1%.

Unemployment rate



At 7.0%, April's unemployment rate was unchanged from March.

Manufacturing

Manufacturers' shipments rose 1.7% in March to $43.7 billion. The backlog of unfilled orders resumed a downward shift for the third time in four months, decreasing 1.6% to $49.0 billion.

Merchandise trade

In March, the value of merchandise exports increased 2.3% to just over $36.0 billion. Imports rose 1.7% to $29.9 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 ($ billions, 1992)	February	798.1	-0.1%	3.1%
Composite Index (1992=100)	April*	166.4	0.0%	3.0%
Operating profits of enterprises ($ billions)	Q4 2000	54.0	2.2%	13.9%
Capacity utilization (%)	Q4 2000	85.4	-0.2†	0.7†
DOMESTIC DEMAND				
Retail trade ($ billion)	March*	23.7	0.3%	3.8%
Department store sales ($ billions)	March	1.63	0.4%	9.4%
New motor vehicle sales (thousands of units)	March	126.1	0.5%	-6.7%
Wholesale trade ($ billion)	March*	32.2	1.7%	2.0%
LABOUR				
Employment (millions)	April	15.10	0.2%	1.6%
Unemployment rate (%)	April	7.0	0.0†	0.2†
Participation rate (%)	April	66.1	0.0†	0.3†
Average weekly earnings ($)[1]	February	660.22	0.0%	1.9%
Help-wanted Index (1996=100)	April	168	0.0%	-1.2%
INTERNATIONAL TRADE				
Merchandise exports ($ billions)	March*	36.0	2.3%	5.5%
Merchandise imports ($ billions)	March*	29.9	1.7%	0.1%
Merchandise trade balance (all figures in $ billions)	March*	6.2	0.3	1.8
MANUFACTURING				
Shipments ($ billions)[1]	March	43.7	1.7%	-2.4%
New orders ($ billions)[1]	March	42.9	-3.5%	-5.1%
Unfilled orders ($ billions)[1]	March	49.0	-1.6%	3.1%
Inventory/shipments ratio[1]	March	1.49	-0.03	0.15
PRICES				
Consumer Price Index (1992=100)	April	116.4	0.7%	3.6%
Industrial Product Price Index (1992=100)	March	130.1	0.5%	2.4%
Raw Materials Price Index (1992=100)	March	144.0	-2.1%	1.1%
New Housing Price Index (1992=100)	March	105.2	0.3%	2.6%

Note: *All series are seasonally adjusted with the exception of the price indexes.*
* *new this week*
† *percentage point*
[1] *These estimates are now based on the North American Industry Classification (NAICS). They are not comparable to the previously published estimates based on the Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) of 1980.*

Infomat
A weekly review

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The first (official) release of all statistical information produced by Statistics Canada occurs in *The Daily* (www.statcan.ca), available at 8:30 a.m. *The Daily* presents highlights from new data releases, along with sources, links and contacts for further information. It also contains schedules of upcoming major news releases and announces the Agency's new products and services.

Products released from May 17 to 23, 2001

SUBJECT AREA Title of product	Period	Catalogue number	Price ($) (issue/subscription)
AGRICULTURE			
Livestock statistics updates	Q1 2001	23-603-UPE	45/149
CULTURE, TOURISM AND THE CENTRE FOR EDUCATION STATISTICS			
Children and youth at risk—symposium report	April 2000	81-589-XIE	no charge
Children and youth at risk—symposium report	April 2000	81-589-XPB	no charge
Education in Canada	2000	81-229-XIB	38
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