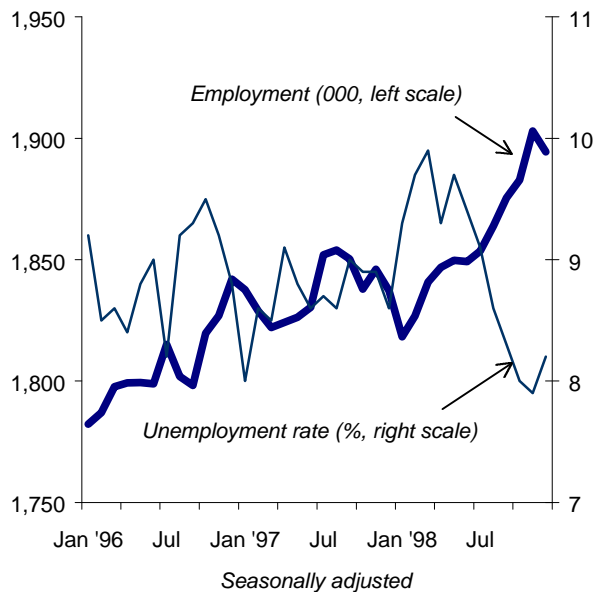


Current Statistics ♦ January 1999

BC's unemployment rate fell in the latter half of 1998, as the number of people with jobs began to rise



- **British Columbia's unemployment rate fell during most of 1998, ending the year at 8.2% (seasonally adjusted), just slightly above the national average of 8.0%.** December's unemployment rate was 0.3 percentage points higher than in November, the first increase since May. Employment dipped 0.4% (by 8,400) between November and December. At the same time, the size of the labour force edged down slightly (-2,600), as fewer people were either working or looking for work last month. *Source: Statistics Canada*
- **In December, 1.895 million British Columbians were employed, down 0.4% from November, but 3.1% more than in the same month of 1997.** Job growth in the province continued to be largely due to an increase in part-time employment. The number of jobs in the province climbed during the latter half of 1998. As a result, the job market ended the

year on a relatively positive note, in contrast to its weak performance during the winter of 1997/98. *Source: Statistics Canada*

- **The number of jobs in British Columbia increased more than a fifth (22.6%) between December 1989 and the same month last year.** This was twice the national average (+10.8%). *Source: SC, Catalogue 71-005-XPB*
- **Wages and salaries (excluding benefits) paid to BC workers rose 0.3% (seasonally adjusted) between September and October.** Wages were up 0.7% at the national level, with the strongest gains posted in eastern Canada. The three western provinces—Alberta (+0.5%), Saskatchewan (+0.4%) and BC (+0.3%)—recorded the lowest wage growth in the country. *Source: Statistics Canada*
- **There were 601 consumer bankruptcies registered in BC in October, compared to 604 in the same month of 1997, a decrease of 0.5%.** Consumer bankruptcies have been falling in most parts of the country, decreasing 16.0% overall. Year-to-date, the number of consumer bankruptcies in the province was down 3.5% from the first ten months of 1997. Nationally, consumer bankruptcies fell 13.0%. Six of the twelve regions posted double-digit declines. *Source: Industry Canada*
- **Business bankruptcies in the province remained above 1997 levels in October.** There were 76 business bankruptcies recorded in October, compared to 66 in the same month of 1997. The number of business bankruptcies registered in the province has remained above 1997 levels since May. During the first ten months of last year, there were 832 bankruptcies recorded in the province, compared to 743 in the same period of 1997. Nationally, the number of business bankruptcies was down 13.0% year-to-date. *Source: Industry Canada*

- **The value of building permits issued by BC municipalities rose sharply (+34.4%, seasonally adjusted) in November.** Building permits for residential construction projects were up almost fifty percent (+48.7%), while the value of non-residential permits was 17.1% higher than in October.

Source: Statistics Canada

- **British Columbia's annual inflation rate was 0.3% in 1998, the lowest it has been since 1978, when the first provincial CPIs were produced.** Declining shelter costs continue to be the main reason for the province's very low inflation rate. Shelter costs fell for the fourth straight year, declining 1.9% despite a modest increase (+0.7%) in the cost of rented accommodation. The cost of owned accommodation (mortgage interest, property taxes, insurance and other expenses) decreased 3.6% during 1998. Lower transportation costs (-1.2%) also helped keep inflation down during 1998. Offsetting this were increases in the cost of household operations (+3.5%), health and personal care (+2.4%), clothing (+1.8%) and food (+1.5%). The cost of other goods purchased by households increased more moderately.

Source: Statistics Canada

- **Exports of BC products were up for the fourth straight month in November, increasing to 1.6% above the November 1997 level.** International sales of consumer goods (+27.2%), automotive products (+21.8%) and machinery and equipment (+19.8%) rose sharply, as exporters continued to benefit from the low value of the Canadian dollar. Forest product exports were up a more modest 2.4%. Bolstered by a 20.5% increase in exports from Ontario, the Canadian total was 8.1% higher than a year earlier.

Source: Statistics Canada

- **British Columbia exports totalled \$23.4 billion during the first eleven months of last year, 5.2% less than in the same period of 1997.** Weakness in the industrial goods (-14.9%) and forest products (-11.4%) sectors was the main reason for the decline.

Source: Statistics Canada

- **Shipments by BC manufacturers fell 1.5% (seasonally adjusted) in November, after**

increasing in the previous five months. Shipments of durable goods fell 2.6%, pulled down by double-digit declines in machinery and equipment (-17.1%) and electrical and electronic product (-13.0%) shipments, and weakness in most other durable goods industries. Wood shipments fell (-1.1%) for the first time since the summer. The non-durables sector was stagnant, with shipments edging down 0.1%. A 1.7% increase in food shipments was enough to offset weakness in most other sectors. Paper shipments continued to show little change, declining 0.2% after increasing marginally (+0.2%) in the previous month.

Source: Statistics Canada

- **Retail sales in British Columbia declined 0.2% (seasonally adjusted) between October and November.** Sales have decreased in all but three months since January. Canadian sales improved in November, rising 1.1% after falling back 1.7% in the previous month. Sales were up in all other regions except PEI, where they were unchanged from October. New Brunswick (+2.8%) posted the strongest gain.

Source: Statistics Canada

Softwood prices declined in 1998, but paper prices recovered

