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Volume Title: Capital Consumption and Adjustment
Volume Author/Editor: Solomon Fabricant
Volume Publisher: NBER

Volume ISBN: 0-87014-034-5

Volume URL: http://www.nber.org/books/fabr38-1
Publication Date: 1938

Chapter Title: Available Figures on Capital Adjustment
Chapter Author: Solomon Fabricant
Chapter URL: http://www.nber.org/chapters/c4722
Chapter pages in book: (p. 207-225)

## Part V

Capital Adjustment in Business Enterprises

Chapter 12
Available Figures on Capital Adjustment

CAPITAL ADJUSTMENT AS DEFINED BY ACCOUNTING RECORDS
Changes in the value of durable goods, not arising from current production or new investment, are recorded by entries representing:

1) Retirements and abandonments
2) Write-ups and write-downs of capital assets
3) Gains and losses on the sale of capital assets

All three entries may be grouped together, if we may stretch an accounting term, as 'capital (or surplus) adjustments', entries not considered relevant to the computation of current net profit or loss or of current capital consumption.

Data on capital adjustment, as just defined, are scarcer than other records of capital consumption. Retirements and abandonments are available for merely a few companies, and are not reported consistently even by them. Gains and losses on sales of capital assets, while collected and published by the Treasury Department for all corporations, relate to investments in stocks and bonds, as well as to property, plant, and equipment. Figures on revaluations of fixed assets by large industrial corporations have only recently been made public in usable form in reports to the Securities and Exchange Commission. Fragmentary though these materials are, however, their significance in measures of capital change prompts their examination here. Problems of interpretation are considered in the next chapter.

## RETIREMENTS AND ABANDONMENTS

We indicated in Chapter 5 that losses (or gains) revealed upon the retirement of assets may be treated, in accounting records, either as current charges (or credits) or as capital charges (or credits). The former practice is followed only when the annual accounts are not seriously distorted thereby. There is implicit acceptance, therefore, of gains and losses on retirements and abandonments as capital adjustment items.

Few data on retirements of fixed assets by business enterprises are available. The only figures we can present are those of steam railways (Table 41). They do not overlap those in Table 12, which represent retirements charged to current operations. The present figures reflect "charges connected

Table 41
Gains and Losses on Road and Equipment, Retired or Sold, 1919-1935
Class I Steam Railways (Unit: \$r,ooo,ooo)

|  | GAIN | LOSS | NET LOSS |
| :--- | :---: | ---: | :---: |
| 1919 | 1.2 | 5.5 | 4.3 |
| 1920 | 6.4 | 10.5 | 4.1 |
| 1921 | 2.6 | 11.7 | 9.1 |
| 1922 | 1.5 | 33.6 | 32.1 |
| 1923 | 4.1 | 19.9 | 15.8 |
| 1924 | 2.9 | 20.5 | 17.6 |
| 1925 | 5.5 | 26.5 | 21.0 |
| 1926 | 4.3 | 26.6 | 22.3 |
| 1927 | 8.5 | 28.3 | 19.8 |
| 1928 | 8.3 | 24.6 | 16.3 |
| 1929 | 8.1 | 44.1 | 36.0 |
| 1930 | 7.4 | 39.0 | 31.6 |
| $193 I$ | 3.6 | 33.6 | 30.0 |
| 1932 | 6.7 | 25.0 | 18.3 |
| 1933 | 1.5 | 54.7 | 53.2 |
| 1934 | 0.7 | 70.4 | 69.7 |
| 1935 | 0.8 | 69.7 | 68.9 |

with the abandonment of lines and retirements of equipment which are not ordinarily chargeable to operating expenses. Included are the losses on property (other than land and equipment) retired and not replaced, and also the depreciation charges applicable to the period prior to July 1, 1907, not previously written off or provided for on equipment retired during the year." ${ }^{1}$ The figures cover also gains on retired road and equipment and gains or losses on sales of fixed assets, with which they are combined in the original records.

Owing to the nature of the assets and finances of steam railways, and the control to which they and their accounts are subject, the importance and the time pattern of retirements of industrial property cannot easily be judged from these data.

Table 42
Net Profit or Loss on Sales of Capital Assets, 1929-1935
(Unit: $\$ 1,000,000$ )

|  | 1929 | 1930 | 1931 | 1932 | 1933 | $1934{ }^{2}$ | 1935 ${ }^{2}$ |
| :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: |
| All enterprises |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Corporate | 815 | -290 | -1,403 | $-1,563$ | $-1,424$ | -54 | 231 |
| Non-corporate ${ }^{1}$ | 5 | -49 | -114 | -67 | -83 |  |  |
| Total | 820 | -339 | -1,517 | -1,630 | -1,507 |  |  |
| All enterprises other than financial |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Corporate | 380 | -54 | $-561$ | -674 | -627 | -33 | 44* |
| Non-corporate ${ }^{1}$ | 5 | -49 | -114 | -67 | -83 |  |  |
| Total | 385 | -103 | $-675$ | -741 | $-710$ |  |  |

${ }^{1}$ Estimated in the National Bureau study of national income.
${ }^{2}$ Not strictly comparable with figures for 1933 and earlier years owing to changes in the income tax law; see text.

* Preliminary estimate.

SALE OF CAPITAL ASSETS
Table 42 suggests the order of magnitude of the net gain or loss resulting from the sale of property, plant, and equipment. Since the gains and losses reported by financial companies relate mainly to investments in stocks and bonds the exclusion

[^0]of this group yields figures more closely related to durable tangible goods. Even these figures are inexact for industrial corporations hold a considerable number of investments, ${ }^{2}$ and land is included among capital assets. But on the basis of these figures, we may make a guess as to the magnitude of the gains and losses arising from the sale of fixed tangible assets. At the bottom of the severe depression covered in Table 42, annual net losses did not much exceed a half billion dollars. This figure is not more than 6 or 7 per cent of total depreciation, depletion, and maintenance charges and constitutes about 0.6 per cent of the corresponding capital assets (Table 51 ).

While the absolute magnitudes of the gains and losses are in doubt, there is reason to believe that Table 42 reflects the kind of movement characterizing the true magnitudes. The net figure became negative in 1930, reaching a maximum negative value in 1932. Between 1932 and 1934 the negative figure was cut in half, and in 1935 the net figure was positive.

The figures for 1934 and 1935 require qualification. The Revenue Act of 1934 limited deductions for capital losses, as follows: "Losses from sales or exchanges of capital assets shall - be allowed only to the extent of $\$ 2,000$ plus the gains from such sales or exchanges. ${ }^{3}$ The large decline in losses between 1933 and 1934 may therefore reflect, to a considerable extent, the limitations imposed by this provision of the law. However, it is clear from the increase in the profits on sales of capital assets of those companies reporting net gains, between 1933 and 1934, that the direction of movement was upward, that is, toward smaller losses or even profits. ${ }^{4}$

[^1]
## REVALUATIONS OF FIXED ASSETS OF LARGE INDUSTRIAL

 CORPORATIONSWe turn now to the available material bearing on asset revaluations, write-ups and write-downs in 1925-34 inclusive, derived from reports made to the Securities and Exchange Commission. The data are confined to 272 large industrial corporations for the whole period and to 355 corporations for ${ }^{1929-34}$ (Table 43); ${ }^{5}$ public utilities, finance, and real estate corporations are not included. ${ }^{6}$

## Table 43

Write-ups and Write-downs of Property, Plant, and Equipment, 1925-1934

272 Large Industrial Corporations ${ }^{1}$ (Unit: $\$ 1,000$ )

|  | WRITE-UPS | WRITE-DOWNS | NET WRITE-UPS |
| :--- | :---: | :---: | ---: |
| 1925 | 28,309 | 12,813 | 15,496 |
| 1926 | 65,944 | 24,356 | 41,588 |
| 1927 | 23,248 | 16,432 | 6,816 |
| 1928 | 26,255 | 68,429 | $-42,174$ |
| 1929 | 14,359 | 128,578 | $-114,219$ |
| 1930 | 24,392 | 16,723 | 7,669 |
| 1931 | 5,924 | 194,686 | $-188,762$ |
| 1932 | 23 | 251,468 | $-251,445$ |
| 1933 | 123 | 117,315 | $-117,192$ |
| 1934 | 77 | 117,426 | $-117,349$ |

${ }^{1}$ If we restrict ourselves to ${ }^{1929-34}$, it is possible to increase the sample to 355 companies:

|  | WRITE-UPS | WRITE-DOWNS | NET WRITE-UPS |
| :--- | :---: | :---: | ---: |
| 1929 | 16,064 | $I 39,705$ | $-123,641$ |
| 1930 | 25,171 | 18,789 | 6,382 |
| 1931 | 6,863 | 205,715 | $-198,852$ |
| 1932 | 633 | 287,491 | $-286,858$ |
| 1933 | 247 | 154,918 | $-154,671$ |
| 1934 | 789 | 129,800 | $-129,011$ |

The conformity of revaluations to the state of general business is quite rough. However, the largest negative figures are ${ }_{5}$ Revaluations of land are included, probably more than in proportion to their importance in the total of property, plant, and equipment. However, there is reason to expect that the resulting inflation is not serious.
${ }^{6}$ The sample is described in the note to this chapter.
those in 1931-34, while in four of the six preceding years net revaluations were upward. The large write-downs in 1929 are accounted for chiefly by one company, the United States Steel Corporation. Of the 129 million dollars (Table 43) 113 million were reported by it. The aggregates are thus clearly subject to large erratic movements due to the action of one or two

Table 44
Net Write-ups of Property, Plant, and Equipment, 1925-1934
Two Groups of Large Industrial Corporations ${ }^{1}$ (Unit: $\$ 1,000$ )

|  | 153 <br> CORPORATIONS | 119 <br> CORPORATIONS | TOTAL |
| :--- | :---: | :---: | ---: |
| 1925 | $-2,241$ | 17,737 | 15,496 |
| 1926 | $-17,394$ | 58,982 | 41,588 |
| 1927 | 5,509 | 1,307 | 6,816 |
| 1928 | 2.612 | $-44,786$ | $-42,174$ |
| 1929 | 1,255 | $-115,474$ | $-114,219$ |
| 1930 | 4,685 | 2,984 | 7,669 |
| 1931 | $-91,355$ | $-97,407$ | $-188,762$ |
| 1932 | $-236,269$ | $-15,182$ | $-251,445$ |
| 1933 | $-60,984$ | $-56,208$ | $-117,192$ |
| 1934 | $-59,653$ | $-57,696$ | $-117,349$ |


| 1929 | -9,422 | 1931 | -10,090 | 1933 | -37,479 |
| :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: |
| 1930 | -1,287 | 1932 | -35,413 | 1934 | -11,662 |

large concerns. The same corporation (U. S. Steel) reported write-downs in 1935 of 270 million dollars. This amount is probably sufficient, if we covered that year, to mark it as the low point, in terms of net write-ups. ${ }^{7}$

The random influences mentioned are revealed also if we divide the 272 corporations into two groups (Table 44). ${ }^{8}$ For

[^2]the second group, 119 corporations, large net write-downs are revealed for 1928 and 1929 . For both groups, in each year, 1931-34, the figures are negative; in four of the preceding six years they are positive.

The large influence exerted by huge corporations is avoided if we consider the number of companies reporting revaluations

Table 45
Corporations reporting Revaluations of Property, Plant, and Equipment, Number, $1925^{-1} 934^{1}$

|  | TO'tal |  | 153 corporations |  | 119 CORPORATIONS |  |
| :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: |
|  | Writeups | Writedowns | Writeups | Writedowns | Write ups | Writedowns |
| 1925 | 12 | 10 | 4 | 9 | 8 | 1 |
| 1926 | 13 | 13 | 4 | 8 | 9 | 5 |
| 1927 | 14 | 11 | 7 | 7 | 7 | 4 |
| 1928 | 16 | 16 | 13 | 6 | 3 | 10 |
| 1929 | 12 | 15 | 7 | 6 | 5 | 11 |
| 1930 | 8 | 23 | 4 | 8 | 4 | 15 |
| 1931 | 4 | 48 | 3 | 24 | 1 | 24 |
| 1932 | 1 | 55 | . | 30 | 1 | 25 |
| 1933 | 2 | 44 | . | 22 | 2 | 22 |
| 1934 | 1 | 27 | 1 | 13 | . | 14 |

1 The sample of 83 corporations, previously mentioned but not included above, shows the following figures for the period since 1928:

|  | WRITE-UPS | WRITE-DOWNS |  | WRITE-UPS | WRITE-DOWNS |
| :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: |
| 1929 | 4 | 8 | 1932 | 2 | 15 |
| 1930 | 3 | 4 | 1933 | 1 | 23 |
| $193 I$ | 2 | 10 | 1934 | 2 | 14 |

in each year, rather than the amount of revaluations. Table 45 shows smaller random fluctuations than does Table 44 . While it is, of course, the amount of write-up or write-down that is significant in the measurement of capital adjustment and capital change, it must not be forgotten that our figures are confined to a sample of large companies. If we attempt to draw, from the sample, any conclusions as to all business concerns, the data on number of companies making revaluations are of some use.

The importance of revaluations may be measured in rela-
tion to the corresponding assets. ${ }^{9}$ The ratio for each industrial group is given in Table $46 .{ }^{10}$

Write-ups of property account were surprisingly small, the total for the decade falling well below depreciation charges for one year, except in the construction industry and in three manufacturing subgroups.

Total write-downs were exceeded by write-ups of property, plant, and equipment, in only three industrial groups: beverages, leather, and printing. This preponderance of writedowns accords with what we know of the economic history of the period $1925-34$. Write-ups during and immediately following the War may have exceeded write-downs, but that period lies outside the scope of the records analyzed here.

In percentages of the corresponding asset values in 1934, write-downs of property and equipment slightly exceeded 10 per cent. Even on a per annum basis they were appreciable compared with depreciation. But their significance is also measured by the total for the decade, since their cumulative effect on book values is important. ${ }^{11}$

The ratios vary considerably from one industry to another, and are influenced, as suggested earlier, by revaluations of one or two large companies in some of the groups. Examination of

[^3]Table 46
Total Write-ups and Write-downs of Property, Plant, and Equipment, 1925-1934, in Relation to the Net Book
Values of the Corresponding Assets in 1934
By Industries

|  | NUMBER OF CORPORATIONS IN SAMPLE | Writeups | AGGRE Writedowns | E <br> Net writeups |
| :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: |
| Industrial group |  | (as a percentage of net book value of assets) |  |  |
| Mining | 19 | 2.8 | 7.3 | -4.5 |
| Manufacturing | 213 | 1.8 | 10.9 | -9.1 |
| Construction | 6 | 31.6 | 36.1 | -4.5 |
| Trade | 27 | 2.5 | 3.1 | -0.6 |
| Service | 7 | 3.1 | 4.1 | -1.0 |
| Grand total | 272 | 2.0 | 10.2 | -8.2 |
| Manufacturing subgroup |  |  |  |  |
| Foods | 17 | 2.3 | 15.7 | -13.4 |
| Beverages | 3 | 5.8 | ... | 5.8 |
| Tobacco | 9 | . . | 14.3 | -14.3 |
| Textiles | 24 | 4.1 | 29.6 | -25.5 |
| Leather | 8 | 25.4 | 29.6 | 1.8 |
| Rubber | 9 | 0.3 | $5 \cdot 5$ | -5.2 |
| Lumber | 3 | 1.9 | 7.9 | -6.0 |
| Paper | 12 | 0.9 | 8.4 | -7.5 |
| Printing and publishing | 5 | 16.3 | 5.1 | 11.2 |
| Petroleum | 13 | $4 \cdot 4$ | 21.7 | -17.3 |
| Chemicals | 15 | 0.9 | 9.2 | -8.3 |
| Drugs | 4 | 2.3 | 2.5 | -0.2 |
| Stone, clay, and glass | 11 | 0.8 | 10.4 | -9.6 |
| Iron and steel | 15 | 0.5 | 5.8 | -5.3 |
| Nonferrous metals | 10 | 1.5 | 3.7 | -2.2 |
| Machinery | 20 | 0.1 | $5 \cdot 9$ | $-5.8$ |
| Automobiles and accessories | 13 | 0.5 | 18.6 | -18.1 |
| Misc. metals | 15 | 12.9 | 33.7 | -20.8 |
| Misc. manufacturing | 7 | 0.3 | 19.3 | -19.0 |
| Total manufacturing | 213 | 1.8 | 10.9 | -9.1 |

the frequency distribution of the ratios, each company counting as one item, indicates how representative the averages are. The distributions also raise questions concerning the nature

Table 47
Net Write-ups of Property, Plant, and Equipment, 1925-1934, as Percentages of the Net Book Values of the Corresponding Assets in 1934

Frequency distribution by sizes of percentages-Each corporation counts as one item

|  | 50.0 | 40.0 | 30.0 | 20.0 | 10.0 | 0.1 | 0.0 | -0.1 |
| :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: |
|  | AND | то | то | то | то | то |  | то |
|  | . OVER | 49.9 | 39.9 | 29.9 | 19.9 | 9.9 |  | -9.9 |
| Industrial group |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Mining | 1 | . | . | 1 | . | 1 | 12 | 1 |
| Manufacturing | 4 | 2 | 5 | 1 | 3 | 11 | 84 | 26 |
| Construction | . . | 1 | . | . | . | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Trade | . | $\cdots$ | . | . | - | - | 17 | 4 |
| Service | . | . | . | 1 | . | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Grand total | 5 | 3 | 5 | 3 | 3 | 14 | 115 | 33 |
| Manufacturing subgroup |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Foods | 1 | . | . | 1 | . | 2 | 6 | 3 |
| Beverages | . | . | 1 | . | . | . | 2 | . |
| Tobacco | - | . | . | . | . | . | 7 | . |
| Textiles | . | 1 | 1 | . | . | . | 10 | 3 |
| Leather | 1 | . | . | . | . | . | 4 | 1 |
| Rubber | . | . | 1 | . | $\cdots$ | . | 2 | 2 |
| Lumber | . | $\ldots$ | . | . | . | . | 2 | . |
| Paper | . | . | . | . | $\therefore$ | 1 | 5 | 2 |
| Printing and publishing | . | 1 | . | . | . | . | 1 | 2 |
| Petroleum | . | . | . | . | 1 | . | 3 | - |
| Chemicals | . | . | . | . | . | 1 | 8 | 1 |
| Drugs | . | . | - | - | . | 1 | 2 | . |
| Stone, clay, and glass | . | . | . | . | . | . | 5 | 2 |
| Iron and steel | 1 | . | 1 | . | . | 3 | 6 | 2 |
| Nonferrous metals | . | . | . | . | 1 | 1 | 1 | 3 |
| Machinery | . | . . | . | . | 1 | $\cdots$ | 9 | 2 |
| Automobiles | - | . | . | . | . | 1 | 4 | . |
| Misc. metals | 1 | . | . | . | . | 1 | 4 | 2 |
| Misc. manufacturing | $\cdots$ | . | 1 | $\cdots$ | . | $\cdots$ | 3 | 1 |
| Total manufacturing | 4 | 2 | 5 | 1 | 3 | 11 | 84 | 26 |

of the underlying forces making for revaluations or their absence (Tables 47 and 48).

It is clear from Table 47 that the revaluations summarized

| -10.0 T0 | -20.0 T0 | -30.0 T0 | -40.0 T0 | $\begin{gathered} -50.0 \\ \text { T0 } \end{gathered}$ | -60.0 T0 | $\begin{gathered} -70.0 \\ \text { To } \end{gathered}$ | $\begin{gathered} -80.0 \\ \text { то } \end{gathered}$ | $\begin{aligned} & -90.0 \\ & \text { то } \end{aligned}$ | $\begin{gathered} -100.0 \\ \text { AND } \end{gathered}$ | TOTAL |
| :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: |
| -19.9 | -29.9 | $-39.9$ | -49.9 | -59.9 | -69.9 | -79.9 | $-89.9$ | -99.9 | UNDER | NUMBER |
| 1 | 1 | . | .. | . | . | . | . | . | 1 | 19 |
| 12 | 12 | 13 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 7 | 2 | 4 | 14 | 213 |
| 1 | 1 | . | . . | . | . | . | . | . | . | 6 |
| 1 | . | 1 | 1 | . | 1 | - . | 1 | . | 1 | 27 |
| 2 | . | . | -• | . | . | . | . | . | 1 | 7 |
| 17 | 14 | 14 | 5 | 4 | 6 | 7 | 3 | 4 | 17 | 272 |
| 1 | . | 1 | 1 | 1 | -• | . | . | . | - | 17 |
| -• | . | - | - | - | . | $\ldots$ | . | . ${ }^{\text {. }}$ | . | 3 |
| -• | -• | 1 | - | . | . | . | . | 1 | . | 9 |
| 1 | 1 | 2 | . | . | 2 | - | $\ldots$ | $\cdots$ | 3 | 24 |
| . | . | . | - | . | 1 | . | . | 1 | . | 8 |
| 3 | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | 1 | 9 |
| . | - | . | -• | $\cdots$ | - | - | . | . | 1 | 3 |
| 1 | . | .. | 1 | 1 | .. | . | . | 1 | . | 12 |
| 1 | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | - | 5 |
| 1 | 2 | 1 | - | - | - | 1 | 1 | . | 3 | 13 |
| . | 2 | 1 | .. | . | . | . | . | . | 2 | 15 |
| . | 1 | . | . | - | - | .. | . | - | . | 4 |
| -• | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | - | $\cdots$ | - | - | . | 11 |
| 1 | . | 1 | . | . | - | . | . | . | $\cdots$ | 15 |
| . | . | 3 | - | . | - | 1 | - | $\cdots$ | . | 10 |
| 1 | 2 | 1 | . | . | - | 2 | . | 1 | 1 | 20 |
| 1 | 1 | . | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | . | . | 1 | 13 |
| 1 | 1 | 1 | .. | $\cdots$ | . | 1 | 1 | . | 2 | 15 |
| $\cdots$ | 1 | . | . | . | 1 | $\cdots$ | - | . | . | 7 |
| 12 | 12 | 13 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 7 | 2 | 4 | 14 | 213 |

in Table 46 represent revaluations by little more than onehalf of the corporations in the sample. Thirty-three of the corporations reporting revaluations reported net write-ups;

91 reported net write-downs exceeding 10 per cent of the 1934 book value. Extreme net revaluations (greater than 30 per cent of book value) were made by 73 companies, 13 upward and 60 downward. The large scatter in the relative amounts of revaluation is characteristic of each industrial division.

Table 48
Revaluations of Property, Plant and Equipment, 1925-1934, as Percentages of the Net Book Values of the Corresponding Assets in 1934

Frequency distributions by sizes of percentages-Each corporation counts as one item

| PERCENTAGE | WRITE-UPS | WRITE-DOWNS |
| :---: | :---: | :---: |
| o.0 | 206 | $13^{2}$ |
| 0.1 to 9.9 | $3^{2}$ | $3^{6}$ |
| 10.0 to 19.9 | 5 | 18 |
| 20.0 to 29.9 | 5 | 13 |
| 30.0 to 39.9 | 6 | 16 |
| 40.0 to 49.9 | 4 | 6 |
| 50.0 to 59.9 | 2 | 4 |
| 60.0 to 69.9 | 3 | 10 |
| 70.0 to 79.9 | 1 | 8 |
| 80.0 to 89.9 | $\ldots$ | 3 |
| 90.0 to 99.9 | 1 | 5 |
| 100.0 and over | 7 | 21 |
| Total number | 272 | 272 |

In Table 48 we distinguish between gross write-ups and gross write-downs. This enables us to determine to what extent the net figures in Table 47 are the result of the balancing of writedowns against write-ups within individual companies. Of 66 companies reporting write-ups (Table 48), 33 also reported write-downs sufficient in size to balance or over-balance the write-ups, leaving only 33 with net write-ups (Table 47). Of 140 concerns that reported write-downs (Table 48), only 16 reported write-ups of sufficient amount to balance or overbalance their write-downs.

## REVALUATIONS OF FIXED ASSETS OF PUBLIC UTILITIES

A considerable body of data on revaluations of public utility property has been compiled by the Federal Trade Commission. ${ }^{12}$ These revaluations, as reported by the Commission, are huge. "Write-ups, improperly capitalized intangibles, and inflation" included in the capital assets of a sample of holding, subholding, and operating companies in the electric and gas fields totaled, gross, 1,491 million dollars on the final dates of examination. ${ }^{13}$ In relation to corresponding capital assets, write-ups were 9.6 per cent for the holding companies, 16.5 per cent for the subholding companies, and 22.1 per cent for the operating companies. ${ }^{14}$

The size of these figures prompts our interest. But it is impossible to make use of them for our present purpose. The most serious objection is to the indefinite time-span that they cover. The final dates of the examined records of the companies run from December 31, 1927 to December 31, 1933. ${ }^{15}$ Initial dates of the examined records are much more scattered. Some of the records covered begin in 1901; others as late as 1926 and $1929 .{ }^{16}$ The revaluations noted occurred during pre-War years, the World War and the last decade and a half. ${ }^{17}$ Still another difficulty lies in the scope of 'capital assets'. These include, among utilities, investments in securities of subsidiaries and in intangibles, as well as in tangible fixed plant and equipment. The capital assets of the holding and subholding companies are almost entirely securities. ${ }^{18}$ And among the operating companies an appreciable portion of capital assets consists of franchises, organization expense, services rendered by promoters,

[^4]bond discounts, premiums and expenses, etc. ${ }^{18}$ The revaluations mentioned, therefore, are often of intangibles, probably more than in proportion to their importance in capital assets. ${ }^{20}$ Finally, among the write-ups the Federal Trade Commission includes inter-company profits on the sale of fixed assets. These, however, we have classified among gains on the sale of capital assets. For these various reasons, the above body of data cannot be used here. ${ }^{21}$

19 For example, Report No. 46, p. 1519.
20 This is true of industrials (see Bulletin 62); but for this group the figures are available separately, with very few exceptions, and have been eliminated from tables in this chapter.
${ }^{21}$ These remarks apply, also, to the data on revaluations by natural gas utilities, Report No. $8_{4} A$.

## Note: SOURCES AND METHODS OF ESTIMATION

## RETIREMENTS AND ABANDONMENTS

The data on steam railway retirements and sales are taken from the annual Statistics of Railways published by the Interstate Commerce Commission.

## PROFITS AND LOSSES ON SALES OF CAPITAL ASSETS

Profits and losses for 1930-35 (and profits for 1929) are derived from Statistics of Income and from special tabulations prepared by the Treasury Department. The 1929 losses are Department of Commerce estimates based on the assumption that for most industrial groups $19^{29}$ losses equalled 0.53433 of 1930 losses.

## REVALUATIONS OF FIXED ASSETS OF LARGE CORPORATIONS

Our analysis is based on data derived from reports made by listed industrial corporations to the Securities and Exchange Commission. As sworn statements, certified by public accountants, and made in reply to a uniform and specific question, they lend themselves readily to summary.

The question concerning write-ups and write-downs, which appears in 'Form 10, Application for Registration Pursuant to Section 12 (b) and (c) of the Securities Exchange Act of 1934', is as follows:
"If, since January 1, 1925, there have been any increases or decreases in investments, in property, plant and equipment or in intangible assets, resulting from substantially revaluing such assets, state:
(1) In what year or years such revaluations were made.
(2) The amounts of such write-ups or write-downs, and the accounts affected, including the contra entry or entries.
(3) If, in connection with such revaluations, any adjustments were made in related reserve accounts, state the accounts and amounts, with explanations."
The 'Instruction Book for Form 10 for Corporations', in explanation of this question, states:
"These items do not refer to adjustments made in the ordinary course of business, but only to major revaluations made
for the purpose of entering in the books current values, reproduction costs, or any values other than original cost."

Our study is confined to an examination of reports of large industrial concerns (mining and manufacturing chiefly, with a few from trade, construction, and service) covering 1925-34, inclusive. The companies were chosen at random from the file of S.E.C. reports of the New York Stock Exchange, New York Curb Exchange, and Chicago Stock Exchange, and therefore include only corporations listed on these. Consolidated reports, rather than the individual reports of related companies, were used wherever possible. The sample is essentially one of large companies only, since most listed corporations are big.

The data are further limited in that only solvent companies in existence in 1934 are included. Revaluations of assets made by corporations prior to consolidation or liquidation are omitted. While they may reach large amounts per company, the number of concerns is small. Still another qualification, related to the preceding, is that only the history of the existing legal entity is fully covered. ${ }^{22}$ In our analysis corporations coming into existence after 1925 were singled out from those incorporated prior to 1925 and eliminated from the sample to avoid the statistical errors that might otherwise arise.

The size of the sample may be judged by a comparison of the assets of the sample corporations with the assets of all corporations, in the comparable industrial groups, in the United States (Table 49). An important reason for the variation in the percentages in the last column is the variation in average size of companies from industry to industry.

[^5]Table 49
Relative Importance of Sample used in studying Revaluations, as measured by Book Value of Property, Plant, and Equipment, 1934



[^0]:    1 Statistics of Railways, 1933, p. S61.

[^1]:    2 See the balance sheet aggregates published in Statistics of Income.
    ${ }^{3}$ Sec. 117 (d). This limitation is qualified in the case of certain securities sold by certain banks or trust companies.
    4 Separate figures are available on net gains of companies reporting net gains, and net losses of companies reporting net losses. We have confined our attention to the net difference between these because the figures for both profits and losses are themselves net.

[^2]:    ${ }^{7}$ If it were possible to separate out write-downs of intangibles from the 1929 and 1995 figures for U.S. Steel the magnitude of the erratic movements mentioned would be reduced greatly.
    ${ }^{8}$ The group of 153 corporations is that examined in National Bureau Bulletin 62 (Revaluations of Fixed Assets, 1925-1934). The other 119 companies have been added to the sample since the publication of this Bulletin.

[^3]:    ${ }^{9}$ The importance of the revaluations is judged here in relation to the net book value of the corresponding assets at the end of 1934. Since some of the revaluations consisted of writing-off a large portion of the property account, the ratios derived may sometimes be very large. (When an asset is entirely written-off, as intangible assets often are, the ratio will be infinity; see Bulletin 62.) It would perhaps have been preferable to compare the amount of revaluations with the book value of the corresponding asset before revaluation. But the ratios used here are adequate for our purpose, and were considerably less difficult to obtain.
    ${ }^{10}$ Any inclusion of land values in the property account tends to be balanced by a corresponding inclusion of revaluations of land.
    ${ }^{11}$ The totals are not exact measures of the cumulative effects, for depreciation and depletion charges eventually wipe out the book value of the particular asset affected and thus render revaluations of merely passing influence on book values. (For such tangible property as land the situation is otherwise.) But most of the revaluations occurred during the second five years of the decade under inspection.

[^4]:    12 Senate Document 92, 70th Cong., ist Sess.
    ${ }^{13}$ Op. cit., Report No. 72A, p. 302.
    14 Ibid., pp. 185, 189.
    ${ }^{15}$ Ibid., pp. 181-3, 187-8.
    ${ }^{16}$ Ibid., p. 193.
    ${ }_{17}$ Examples: 1913 write-up (Report No. 45, pp. 1902, 1897); 1916 write-up (Report No. 35, pp. 232-4); 1930 write-up (Report No. 29, pp. 92, 96). 18 Report No. 72A, pp. 189-4.

[^5]:    22 According to an amendment to the instruction book (Release No. 191, Securities Exchange Act of 1934, April 24, 1935) revaluation by predecessor companies must be included in Form 10 only if: " (1) The registrant is the successor to a predecessor and at the time of such succession continued under substantially the same ownership and control as such predecessor; and (2) the registrant succeeded to: either (a) substantially all the assets of such predecessor; or (b) a substantial portion thereof and such portion was segregated on the books of such predecessor." It seems that before the date of this amendment there was no requirement that entries in the books of predecessors should be reported, and in fact they were omitted from most reports.

