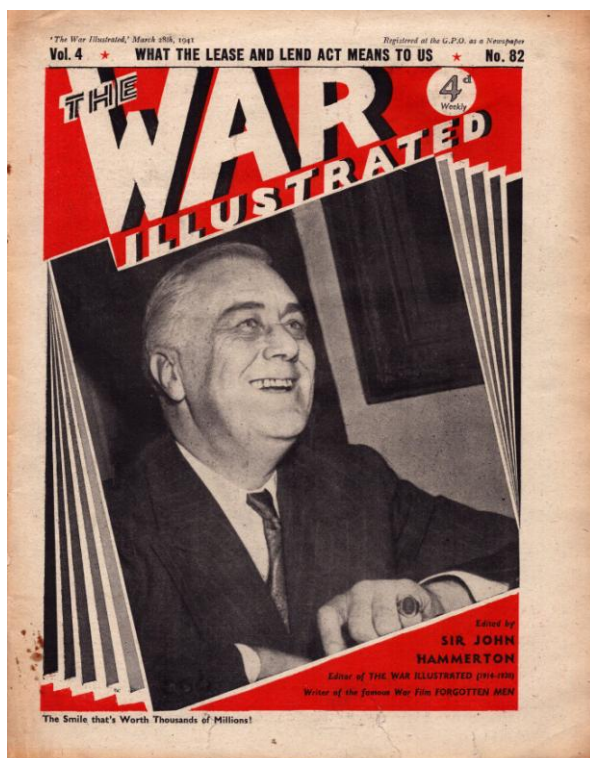


This webpage was intended for the publication of articles of new research or descriptions of newly acquired items, memorabilia, books etc., or places of interest visited. I wasn't going to reproduce work that was already accessible in printed media such as magazines. However, never say never, and I have just acquired a copy of 'The War Illustrated', published on **28th March 1941**, which carries a story regarding the paper shortage in WWII that encapsulates the whole problem extremely well and highlights the issue of supply and demand which I thought I understood, but puts a different slant on the story. Actually this wasn't an article as such, but an explanation from the editor, Sir John Hammerton:

The War Illustrated and the Paper Famine

'The need to increase the price of *'The War Illustrated'* has given my publishers much anxiety. Those of us whose work must be carried on in London or some of the great provincial cities are literally working on the battlefield. Especially to produce week by week an elaborate pictorial record amidst frequent bombing attacks which involve the destruction of buildings and machinery and the interruption of transport, is a condition of work never envisaged by editor, publisher or reader. During the war of 1914-18 the weekly production of *'The War Illustrated'* was maintained in circumstances approximating to those of the peaceful years. This, however, concerns only means and method of production, and I am happy to say that, despite numerous unforeseen and unrecorded difficulties, we have contrived to maintain our publication in almost every detail as originally planned.



But one great difficulty which cannot be completely surmounted by any ingenuity or devotion to the task in hand, is the securing of printing paper sufficient for our weekly needs. Increased costs of materials and labour can at least be met by readjusting the price of the article produced. But when it is impossible to secure adequate supplies of the basic material for multiplying any article for which the public is clamouring, no ingenuity can avail. That's what has happened in the case of our basic material – paper.

As *'The War Illustrated'* is one of the very few weekly periodicals which so far, have maintained a close approximation to the material value of their earliest issues without increasing their price, and at heavy loss of revenue to themselves, I can assure my readers that it is

with the greatest reluctance that the increased price now determined upon must be made.

It will be readily understood that so long as the publishers were able to secure sufficient paper to print a weekly issue which on many occasions exceeded one million copies, the economic condition of the publication made it possible to provide the fullest service of photographic and literary material, almost regardless of cost, and to offer each weekly issue to the public at a modest price

which was entirely economic. But as the Paper Controller's restrictions periodically tightened, first with the entire closure of the Swedish supply (the main source of wood pulp), and then with the increasing armaments demand upon British shipping, whereby the carrying capacity so long available for pulp and paper from Canada and Newfoundland continued to diminish alarmingly, and finally with the certainty of still less shipping space, due not only to the imperative need of bringing over America's 'overwhelming' munitions of war but to the very real threat of intensified U-boat destructiveness, the Paper Controller had no choice but to decree further restrictions on the use of paper for printing purposes.

When, many months ago, the total that any publishing house was allowed to use had to be cut to one-third of its requirements at the beginning of the war, the situation seemed desperate enough. In order to maintain their publications of most value to the community either by way of social service, instruction, entertainment or war interest, the leading publishers had to sacrifice numerous periodicals which had long been valuable assets of their business.

In this way the total ration of paper was not exceeded, but that was done at heavy financial loss to the publishers. The final (at least the latest) blow has now limited them to a total of one quarter of their *existing* consumption!

It must be obvious, then, that not to be allowed, as is now the case, to use more than one fourth of the total quantity used at the beginning of the war, presents periodical publishers with a problem of supreme difficulty. To an editor it seems almost a sin that his publication cannot be made available to all the subscribers who are anxious to secure it. That instead of the old ambition to increase one's circulation, the one thought today should be how to keep it down is really a fantastic situation.

So far as '*The War Illustrated*' is concerned, its publishers have resolved that in the best interests of its hundreds of thousands of readers the uneconomic position consequent upon continued enforced reduction of circulation can be rectified only by a still further reduction accompanied by an increase in price. By this means it is hoped to continue, with all its familiar and popular features unimpaired, a publication the circulation of which, even after all the reductions which circumstances have involved, is largely in excess of the circulation of its forerunner at the same period of the First Great War.

Personally, I am extremely sorry that any reader anxious to continue with '*The War Illustrated*' should find it impossible to get a copy, but the measure of disappointment can, I think, be appreciably reduced if all who are prepared to continue subscribing at the increased price will at once confirm their orders to their newsagent. Especially to all who are binding their volumes I would urge that they give a long term order to their newsagents. The publishers are also taking measures to prevent any of their many thousands of binding subscribers from having incomplete sets when the time comes for binding Vol. 4.'

I always imagined that the simple rule of supply and demand meant that when items became scarce, which sometimes happens for various reasons even today (think that one toy all the children want for Christmas), retailers immediately put the price up because they know they can 'fleece' the desperate parents who have nowhere else to go for that product. In the case of '*The War Illustrated*'

though, and this went for other companies, they had to increase the cover price not because they wanted to rip off their customers, but because the raw material that they relied on was rationed, and they could not survive financially on sales of that limited allowance at the normal price. I am sure there were rogue traders, probably mostly at local level, who bumped up the prices of consumable items and held their customers hostage, but this simple equation regarding the government restricting manufacture which threatened the viability of a business was lost on me until now.

There was one other 'snippet' in the same magazine under the heading of **Items of War Interest** which dealt with Mercury, and puts an additional imperative on the subject of shipping.

'Mercury is to be sent from Spain to Britain as the result of an exchange agreement recently signed in Madrid. The agreement calls for Britain to buy from Spain 12,000 flasks of mercury as well as 800,000 half cases of sweet Spanish oranges. Proceeds will be used by Spain to import wheat and rubber from Britain.'

During WWII, mercury was primarily used in munitions, specifically as a key ingredient in mercury fulminate. This was a primary explosive used in various types of ammunition including detonators, anti-aircraft shells, mines and other explosives, which all contained mercury fulminate as an ignition source.

This story opens up a number of interesting questions, not least, what is fascist Spain, a supposed ally of the Nazis, doing supplying Britain with desperately needed, war critical materials? I don't think Hitler would have approved. That is surely something for another, more specific article. However, it does show that while the British government was turning the screw on businesses in Britain due in a very large part to lack of shipping, there appears to be sufficient ships to transport wheat and rubber to Spain. Of course this was in exchange for mercury, but surely that would have taken only one ship to bring to Britain (I don't think the oranges were war critical), how many ships would it take to deliver meaningful amounts of wheat and rubber to sustain the Spanish? Also, what route did they take, did the U-boats know, which ports did they unload at? The story of Britain's trade with Spain during WWII would be fascinating.