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*The Office of Price Administration and the War at Home*

From an administrative perspective, the wartime years had much in common with the previous ones; from the late 1930s through the middle of the 1940s, criticism of the departments, agencies, boards, and commissions was at a fever pitch. In response to these attacks, agency officials and other supporters of the administrative state offered an alternative narrative about the inherent legality of administrative operations. Against claims of administrative lawlessness and “absolutism,” agency officials demonstrated that their operations were in fact shot through with rules and procedures which reviewing courts had repeatedly endorsed. Indeed, the struggle for legitimacy in the courts had already ended, as judges routinely rejected arguments that administrators were inherently biased or inappropriately zealous. This tension between legal and political legitimacy in the administrative state only intensified during wartime, as reviewing courts repeatedly approved the actions of the Price Administrator at the same time that hostile congressional committees portrayed the OPA as aggressive and lawless in its actions and its definition of its own authority. In doing so, Congress offered its own definition of administrative due process, based not in strict adherence to common law definitions but instead in members’ own ideas of how government officials should behave. Americans’ displeasure with the OPA’s strict limits on consumer behavior and its novel procedures for enforcing them gave such charges plausibility and allowed them to stand as representative of the administrative state.