European rivalry in the caribbean

The Spanish monopoly in the Americas was established the moment that Christopher Columbus made landfall in Bahamas, this was way back on his first voyage in 1492. Soon after, her monopoly increased in size, wealth and fame. This was brought about by way of her island and mainland territories; a few being Cuba, Puerto Rico, Hispaniola, Venezuela, Columbia and Peru. Her wealth soon aroused much jealousy amongst other European nations, who were anxious to expand and become rich. Realising that her monopoly was in danger she set out ' to nip in the bud' the plans of the other Europeans.

Some methods she put in place or referred to were:

Papal Edict & The Treaty of Tordesillas

The Caribbean also referred to as the New World was ' discovered' by Spain in 1492 on Christopher Columbus' first voyages from Spain. Immediately after his return Spain professed that this entire area was theirs, however it became effective in 1493 when Pope Alexander IVgave them his Papal Bulls.

Portugal was the first to protest the sole rights of claim to the New World by Spain as a result the Treaty of Tordesillas was signed between both nations: that treaty divided the non-christian world in two, half to Spain and the other half to Portugal.

The Casa de Contratacion (House of Trade)

In 1503 Ferdinand and Isabella created a state bureau called The Casa de Contratacion. It was set up in Seville under Juan de Fonseca, who was the Archdeacon of Seville's Cathedral; later the Minister of the Indies. The Casa de Contratacion had three royal officials: a treasurer, a comptroller and a

business manager. The treasurer was responsible for the registration of all the gold and the silver. In addition, the comptroller was in charge of all the crew and the emigrants. However, the business manager looked after the ships stating which was ready to sail, their supplies and the munitions they carried.

The functions of the Casa de Contratacion:-
* Handle goods to and from the new world.
* Despatch ships to the West Indies and to register and license them.
* Register all emigrants to the new world.
* Act as a maritime court in everything to do with navigation and commerce.
* To advise the Crown on political and economic matter in the West Indies.
* To collect duties on trade.

Other functions:-
* To organize and supervise the commercial and financial affairs of the empire.
* To issue asiento and other trade license.
* To legalize the trade of slaves

The Asiento

The Asiento was a license which the Casa de Contratacion issued to foreigners who wished to ship goods to the colonies. The African slave trade first began with an asiento granted to Portuguese merchants. The trade procedure was that the colonists were expected to buy only goods which came through Cartagena (city in Columbia). However, the Casa had difficulties controlling all the trade which took place in the New World.

Consequently, several measures were put in place to arrest illegal traders and protect Spanish ships returning to and leaving from Spain.

The Two Port System

The Casa de Contratacion operated a two port system to simplify the control of trade. Every ship bound for the New World had to leave from Seville, and had to call at Santo Domingo before proceeding anywhere else in the Caribbean. Until 1540 every ship bound for Spain from the New World had to call at Santa Domingo before crossing the Atlantic and could only discharge its cargo at Seville. Any ship that failed to check in at these ports of destination would be considered to be smuggling. It was a simple method of checking that no ship or cargo was lost. Nonetheless, the checking of ships made it easier for the ships to be seized by Spain's enemies or by pirates as their routes could be easily predicted. This method was replaced by the convoy system.

The Convoy system

The convoy system was established by Admiral Pedro Mendéndez de Avilés in about 1560. It lasted for 150 years. It consisted of two fleets which departed from Spain each year: these being the Flota and the Armada. * The Flota left May bound for Vera Cruz via the Greater Antilles, and the Armada sailed in August bound for Nombre de Dios (Porto Bello). * The Flota remained in Vera Cruz until February, when it sailed from Havana to await the Armada from the Isthmus of Panama. These two would sail for Europe in March. Routing the treasure fleets:-

* The Flota sailed from Seville to the Canary Islands and then across the Atlantic, to enter the Caribbean by means of one of the passages between the Lesser Antilles. * The Armada was routed to the Canary Islands but from there when by a more southerly course and entered the Caribbean from Galleon Passage between Trinidad and Tobago. * The fleet then sailed along the coast of South America to Cartagena, and then on to Nombre de Dios.

Protection of Towns and Ports

The Armadillas was another invention of Admiral Pedro Mendéndez de Avilés. They were squadrons of light, fast ships that could even be rowed, to protect the convoys and to patrol shipping lanes of the Caribbean. In addition he fortified key ports in the region: Cartagena, Santa Domingo, San Juan del Puerto Rico and Havana. To Mendéndez Havana was the most important port as it commanded the route from the Yucatan Channel to the exit through the Florida Strait as a result he made it into a fortress with a permanent garrison. Mendéndez also had a dockyard built there in which damaged ships could be repaired. Nonetheless, Mendéndez was resented by the colonists as they felt that he put the interest of the home government before their own. He had done little to protect the local shipping and small town which were at the mercy of the French and English sea rovers.

Bull: – Decree Bureau:- Agency Munitions:-Weapons Garrison:- Defence force Dockyard:- Harbour Bull: – Decree Bureau:- Agency Munitions:-Weapons Garrison:- Defence force Dockyard:- Harbour