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**The Nova Scotia - British West Indies Commercial
Experiment in the Aftermath of the American
Revolution, 1783 - 1802**

One of the major problems facing Britain at the end of the American War of Independence was whether she should continue to include the newly defected colonies in the old colonial system based upon the Navigation Laws. This issue was the subject of much political controversy at Westminster and after an acrimonious debate the Fox-North coalition decided against the liberal principles of Shelburne and his supporters. The new republic was to be excluded from the old colonial system, and beginning on July 2, 1783, a series of temporary Orders-in-Council gradually severed the age-old commercial connection between the United States and the British West Indies. Five years later the final blow was struck when the Limiting Act of 1788 made permanent the provisions hitherto laid down in the temporary Orders-in-Council.¹ Its principal provision was the rigid exclusion of American ships from the carrying trade to the British West Indies, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Cape Breton and Newfoundland: American produce was to enter the islands in British or colonial bottoms only. The only loophole provided in the Act was one by which the Governors in the British territories, with the advice and consent of their Councils, could authorize the admission of provisions in American vessels in times of extreme emergency.² Indeed the Limiting Act of 1788 became a major cornerstone of Britain's policy toward the United States for the rest of the century.

Essentially British policy decreed that the commercial connection between the United States and the British West Indies was to come to an end and that the commercial role played by the United States in relation to the British islands was now to be played by the remaining British continental colonies. In this revised arrangement, Nova Scotia was to be swiftly groomed to play the pivotal role, which was fully

endorsed by the large influx of loyalists who had settled in that province after the American Revolution.³

According to Imperial design the province was ideally situated between Britain and the West Indies to be the focal point of a triangular trade.⁴ In Halifax, it had one of the finest natural harbours in the world and the presumably abundant timber resources would be exploited to cater to the West Indian demand. Where shortfalls occurred, it was confidently expected that recourse to the resources of the Canadas and Cape Breton would be sufficient to alleviate them. One commodity which the province could produce in abundance was fish of all types. Thus, it was the confident boast of the Nova Scotians that within a few short years, the province would be sufficiently well developed to supply the British Caribbean with their every need, agricultural and otherwise. Nova Scotia was fully confident of her own ability to fulfill the role earmarked for her, that of developing, in quick time, into a 'new New England.'⁵ It is precisely this subject with which this paper is concerned in that it will focus upon the extent to which Nova Scotia was able to fulfil the role earmarked for her by British policy. In addition it will examine the fluctuating nature of the dynamics involved in Nova Scotia's attempt to replace the United States as the main source of essential supplies for the British West Indian plantation economy during the initial years 1788 to 1802.

Prior to 1776, trade between the North American colonies and the West Indies developed as a natural phenomenon. As Richard Pares observed, "North America and the West Indies were made for mutual trade and intercourse; each depended on the other from a very early date in the history of the colonies." The trade between the areas served to provide "food for the hungry and to furnish materials...for supplying the planters in two capital objects: their buildings and packages for their...sugar and rum." The commodities obtained from the American colonies included boards and timber, shingles, staves, hoops, corn, peas, beans, bread, flour, rice, fish, beef, pork, horses, oxen, pigs, fish oil, tar, turpentine, poultry, masts, spars, soap, candles, house frames, iron and even tobacco. In return the islands provided sugar, molasses, rum, cotton, coffee, pimento, cocoa, indigo and ginger.⁸ In addition the carrying trade between the United States and the West Indies was conducted mainly by American shipping interests.⁹ It is not surprising therefore that by 1770 the North American colonies had secured an established place in the Imperial hierarchy as the purveyors of the supplies needed by the West Indies.

The British Caribbean did not share this relationship with Canada prior to the American Revolution. Nova Scotian exports to the West Indies for instance were quite negligible.¹⁰ By the early eighteenth

century the province was at best an advanced base for fishermen of New England and as Brebner points out:

Even after 1760, Nova Scotia had neither the capital nor the population to imitate or challenge New England. She had to be content not only to produce fish for the West Indies...but also to allow the British and New Englanders to carry it from her shores...for Nova Scotia was a "colony" to both.¹¹

In addition to her underdeveloped status Nova Scotia faced other problems in the West India trade. She not only lacked the range of agricultural products consumed in the Caribbean but also faced environmental problems. The severity and frequency of storms off the northern shores were inimical to the development of a regular sailing traffic, especially since the New England colonies were in such a better position in relation to the British Caribbean. The only developed site of any consequence in Nova Scotia was Halifax, and this was mainly a naval base for the British squadrons and to a lesser extent, a base for the sporadic efforts to exploit the Atlantic fisheries. Thus even by the beginning of the final quarter of the eighteenth century Nova Scotia stood on the periphery of the Imperial system.

For this reason Nova Scotians entertained a fleeting moment of hope for rapid development when they learned in 1774 that the British Government intended to circumscribe the trade of the rebellious colonies as hostilities appeared imminent. This measure was expected to benefit Nova Scotia particularly since it would give a "Spur to the Industry and Activity of its Inhabitants, in a Vigorous Prosecution both of the Lumber Trade and the Fishery."¹² But Nova Scotia's expectations were not met, largely because of its deficiencies in capital, infra-structural development and ships, and its inability to produce a surplus of grain, flour and breadstuffs.¹³ Consequently its trade with the Caribbean from the outbreak of hostilities in 1776 through 1788 remained comparatively small while West Indians depended upon importations from Ireland and Britain, illegal trade with foreign possessions and the growth of subsistence agriculture to meet their dire economic needs.¹⁴ More important, after Paris, it was American products imported illegally from the foreign West Indies through devious means¹⁵ which helped in the attempt at Caribbean recovery.

After 1783 West Indian planters defied British policy over the exclusion of American vessels from the sugar islands. They were simply not prepared to lose more slaves from starvation and stall the recovery of the plantation economy because of Imperial self-interest. Colonial opposition assumed several forms. Violent demonstrations, riots and deaths occurred in Barbados.¹⁷ Public meetings were held in

Antigua denouncing British policy¹⁸ and in St. Kitts, Customs officers were prevented from implementing metropolitan directives.¹⁹

Reactions in Jamaica were stronger. Here the planters were more prepared to take bolder stands than the other colonists. In November 1783 the Assembly demanded the importation of provisions and lumber from the United States for a period of nine months.²⁰ The governor refused but applied to Quebec for "lumber, food and horses to relieve the shortages in Jamaica."²¹ It was this policy of relying upon British North America after 1783 which in the view of many planters led to the precarious conditions in the British Caribbean. As one planter put it: the shortages in all the islands were the result of a "mistaken Proclamation to prevent the Americans from trading with the colonies, and from an absurd idea that they can be supplied from Canada and Nova Scotia, where cultivation is not known, and where ports were shut up half the year or rendered nearly inaccessible from the Weather."²² The West India interest in London represented by such people as Bryan Edwards, Edward Long, Samuel Long, James Allen and Lord Penrhyn as well as Americans like Tench Coxe sympathised with this view and produced literature demonstrating conclusively the Canadian provinces' inability to supply West Indian needs.²³

Against this background the sugar planters warned that Imperial policy would lead to large scale smuggling in the British West Indies. Some even hinted that they themselves would "actively co-operate with the illicit traders".²⁴ Events proved their candour. The reality was that because of history and geography the sugar islands could not be prevented from drifting irresistibly into the economic orbit of their northern neighbour. The trade which British policy intended to stop was "ancient, firmly established, and enormous." In addition "the sheer physical problem of enforcement (of policy) was difficult under the best of circumstances."²⁵ As Ritcheson notes:

No manner of strict enforcement by naval authorities could prevail in the face of collusion between the islands and the Americans...for a considerable portion of the old pattern of commerce was kept alive by administrative confusion, clashing claims to authority, and collusion involving populace, civil officials and assemblies in the islands on the one hand, and the other, American interlopers.²⁶

By 1788 therefore a majority of American products still found its way illegally into the British sugar colonies (See Appendix 1). This was made possible by the thriving indirect trade which had developed between the United States and the islands via the foreign West Indies particularly Martinique, Curacao, St. Eustatius and the Turks Island the Bahamas during the period 1783 - 1787.²⁷ Thus the aim of the

British Government "to make the West Indies a satellite of Canada failed during this period, and the sugar colonies continued to rely on the United States for their economic survival."²⁸ Yet when the Limiting Act of 1788 was passed there was optimism among British decision-makers and Nova Scotians Thus the aim of the regarding the future role of that province in the 'new' Atlantic commercial system.²⁹ In contrast the West Indians felt gloomy forebodings.

The adjusted policy pursued by Britain after 1788 was designed to reconstruct the old colonial system, tailored to suit the resources of her now reduced western Empire. In this reconstruction Nova Scotia was earmarked to play a significant role that would lead to her own economic development as well as to that of the British Caribbean territories.³⁰ After 1788 Nova Scotia set herself to the task.

From the outset however the province had a major challenge to face: she had to overcome the difficult task of fulfilling the expectations of British policy makers who had underestimated the problems involved in her development. In promulgating the revamped policy, British statesmen had ignored the problems of soil and weather which agriculture faced in Nova Scotia. They also ignored the fact that the average inhabitant of the province was not inclined to agricultural activity. Indeed as John Young was to observe thirty years later: "the cultivation of the earth...was accounted so despicable and vile as to be fit employment only of the unlettered and vulgar herd."³¹ British policy also ignored the demands of capital and manpower which were mandatory to facilitate growth with the rapidity envisaged by both the Imperial Government and the Nova Scotians themselves. Another complicating factor was the shortage of ships needed to embark upon successful commerce with the sugar islands.

The major thrust of Nova Scotians in 1788 was in the supply of fish and lumber to the Caribbean, as a matter of priority, while the provincial infra-structure was being prepared to produce livestock and agricultural commodities. At the same time considerable effort was spent in the shipbuilding industry to supplement the existing fleet, which was woefully inadequate for the new task. In addition Nova Scotian authorities temporarily relaxed trade restrictions with the United States for short periods of time in order to provide sustenance for the population of the province while she prepared herself to carry out the role earmarked in Imperial policy as well as to provide articles of export to the West Indies while the islands were deprived of direct contact with the United States.³²

One of the greatest difficulties encountered by the Nova Scotians was to obtain lumber in sufficient variety and quantity to supply the demands of the islands. In 1791, the merchants of Shelburne sent a

petition to Lord Grenville asking specifically for "permission to be granted by law for lumber cut in the late province of Main (sic) to be brought to the ports of entry in Nova Scotia...thence to be shipped in British bottoms to the West India market."³³ In the neighbouring province of New Brunswick the West Indian demand for lumber encouraged not only the emergence of a profitable timber industry, but also a profitable contraband trade in the commodity.³⁴

In these early years the trade between Nova Scotia and the West Indies got off to an encouraging start. From the figures that are available for 1790, some twenty-eight vessels paid duty at the Halifax lighthouse on their way out, bound for West Indian ports.³⁵ By 1792 the trade had spread to other ports. In that year six ships from Shelburne cleared for the West Indies while in the second and third quarter of 1792, twenty-six vessels cleared Halifax for the islands, while nineteen entered the port from the British West Indies.³⁶ In 1793 a total of fifty-six vessels arrived at Nova Scotia ports from the West Indies. Of this number twenty-seven entered at Halifax, fourteen at Liverpool and nine at Shelburne. The vessels from Halifax carried cargoes of fish, lumber, flour and other provisions to the islands and returned loaded with rum, sugar and molasses. Indeed in 1793, some 27,846 gallons of rum were imported in the port of Liverpool alone.³⁸ By 1794, Governor Wentworth was telling Colonial Secretary Henry Dundas that "the general commerce and navigation of the province is much improved; every vessel finds employment, commodities a ready sale."³⁹

But elsewhere other events were occurring which were to encroach upon the early successes. The first was the outbreak of war between Great Britain and France and the second was the signing of Jay's treaty of Amity and Commerce.

The Revolutionary Wars between Britain and France began in mid-1793. The effects of this war upon trade between Nova Scotia and the West Indies were cumulative and the full repercussions were not felt until the turn of the century. A more pressing matter however was the effort of the United States to re-enter the West Indian trade: the outbreak of war provided an opportunity. A British Order-in-Council of November 1793, empowered British squadrons in the West Indies and elsewhere to seize all vessels trading with France or French possessions.⁴⁰ Several American vessels were caught unawares and seized by the British. American indignation at this unilateral action led to the dispatch of John Jay to Britain to re-open negotiations for an Anglo-American commercial convention.

Jay succeeded where his predecessors had failed. But the treaty known to history as Jay's Treaty of Amity and Commerce was not

easily won. Predictably, the most problematic area was the West India trade. Article xii of the Treaty provided that: "West Indian productions or manufactures shall not be transported in American vessels, either from His Majesty's islands or from the United States, to any part of the world, except the United States."⁴¹ Furthermore the article limited the size of American vessels to be involved in the trade to a maximum of seventy tons burden. The restrictions were obviously designed to protect British control of the European sugar market. Jay clearly recognized the implications of the article but agreed to it since it represented a wedge in a door which had been tightly shut previously. Having made this breakthrough, he confidently forecast that, "the public mind in Britain shall gradually become more reconciled to this and other departures from their favourite Navigation Acts."⁴²

Contrary to the expectations of Jay, however, the article dealing with the West India trade raised a furor in the United States among the shipping interests of that country who saw the restrictions on re-export and on size of vessels as infringements upon their freedom. In the ratification of the Treaty, Article xii was deleted. American trade with the British West Indies reverted to the terms established in 1788. Furthermore Jay's calculation that the article dealing with the West India trade was a forerunner to future relaxation of the Imperial policy proved to be incorrect. Britain was not to be weaned away from her policy of mercantilist orthodoxy for a long time.

The outbreak of war, however, had created supply shortages that persuaded the West Indian governors to open ports to American vessels by 1794. What Jay could not achieve through negotiation, the United States had obtained because of the war's disruption of trade relations within the Empire.

Meanwhile events in the British sugar islands were combining to make them a more attractive market. In the sugar islands the type of cane planted had been changed to a variety which was less susceptible to disease and also provided a greater yield. In addition, the price of muscovado sugar rose from 54s 3d per cwt. in 1792 to 69s 2d in 1796.⁴³ The latter development was a direct result of the deterioration of Saint Domingue which by the 1780s had been producing as much sugar as the whole of the British West Indies combined, and was seriously hampering British efforts to control the sugar supply to Europe.⁴⁴ The Haitian Revolution during the last decade of the eighteenth century therefore proved to be a blessing for British planters for in quick time they were able to acquire dominion over the European sugar market and dictate prices.

Another factor was the increasing opposition in Britain to the slave trade. Planters, anxious to secure an adequate stock of labour as an

insurance against the evil day, began to increase their importation of slaves. Thus, by the mid 1790s the British West Indies had become a very extensive and lucrative market for the staples of British North America.

The entrepreneurs of Nova Scotia moved to take advantage of the great opportunity. The diary of Simeon Perkins is replete with entries indicating the Nova Scotian merchants interest in the West India trade. He owned various vessels, singly and in partnership with others and was involved in the carrying trade not only to the West Indies, but also to Quebec, the Mediterranean and the United States. Some of his vessels even participated in the contraband trade which developed in the area around Passamaquoddy Bay.⁴⁵ He also controlled extensive lumber and fishing enterprises in and around Liverpool and was constantly in contact with other merchants at Halifax. On January 27, 1793, obviously a glorious day for the port of Liverpool, Perkins records: "the *Union, Minerva, Arora* and *Industry* sail together for the West Indies. These make fifteen West Indiamen out at this time."⁴⁶

The Nova Scotian vessels carried dried fish, pickled fish, fish oil, lumber and provisions to the islands and the return cargoes consisted primarily of rum, sugar, molasses and salt.⁴⁷ Liverpool was not unique in its efforts. At Halifax William Sabatier and Tim Folger two prominent Haligonian merchants involved in the trade with the West Indies petitioned the House of Assembly for concessions in respect of their factory which manufactured "spermacetti candles" which were "exported in large measure to the West Indies."⁴⁸

Another leading Haligonian merchant, William Forsyth, traded extensively with the West Indies. Forsyth operated a large trading business encompassing the West Indies, Britain, Ireland, Madeira, the Mediterranean and the United States. Forsyth's letters reveal his constant efforts to increase his West India trade. In 1796, in a letter to his associates, Bogle and Jopps in Kingston, Jamaica, he states, "we have some thought of sending...to your address, a small cargo of Madeira wine...Please favour us with your opinion of such a speculation".⁴⁹ Forsyth also had associates and contacts in Grenada, Barbados and Montego Bay, Jamaica, all of whom kept him informed of the state of the markets in their localities and even introduced new customers into the chain. Forsyth reciprocated their services with respect to Nova Scotia for his associates. For example, in 1797 he wrote to Messrs. Cruder, Pollard and Stewart in Grenada, informing them that "so much rum has been lately brought here from the West Indies...that the price is almost reduced to a level with yours."⁵⁰ In spite of the efforts of the Nova Scotian traders, however, they were unequal to the task of adequately catering for the West Indian demand. In this respect

they were battling not only their own inadequacies, but also the American efforts to infiltrate the West India trade: efforts assisted by the notorious West Indian sympathy for the Americans.

The restrictions placed on the trade of the West Indies in 1788 had left a loophole which provided that in case of emergency the island ports could be opened to American products carried in British vessels. Promptly on the outbreak of war the West Indians opened their ports not only to British, but also to American vessels. Grenada led the way in 1793. Barbados and Jamaica followed in 1794 and by 1795 the ports of Tobago, Nevis, St. Vincent and Dominica had all been opened to the Americans.⁵¹ Britain was, in fact, forced to accept a *fait accompli*, and the opening of the ports was subsequently sanctioned by a series of Indemnity Acts, passed annually for the duration of the war.⁵² American shipping proceeded to take over the market gradually. "The tonnage of American ships entering British West Indian ports increased from a total of 4,461 in the three years ending September 30th, 1792, to 58,989 in the year ending October 1st, 1794."⁵³ In monetary terms the value of American exports direct to the West Indies increased from \$2,144,638 in 1792 to \$9,699,722 in 1801.⁵⁴

At this time the Americans enjoyed several advantages over the Nova Scotians. These included proximity to the West Indies, a greater cross section of goods for trade, duty-free admission to the ports and neutrality. This neutrality meant that the Americans were spared the rapid increases in insurance which began to plague Nova Scotian shipping. Rates in Nova Scotia were between 10 and 12½ per cent higher than those for American vessels. This difference proved to be so decisive that Nova Scotians were able to sell their fish to the Americans who transported it to the islands where they could still dispose of it at profitable prices.⁵⁵ But this was not the only hindrance to the trade of the northern colony. Another influence had begun to make its presence felt.

All sources attest to the high incidence of privateering in West Indian waters during the late 1790s. Beamish Murdoch in his *History of Nova Scotia* observes that in 1795 "private cruisers sailing under French colours were now making havoc of the merchant vessels of Nova Scotia."⁵⁶ Thomas Southey in his *Chronological History of the West Indies* reports that in 1798, "privateering was much increased. Ninety-nine privateers were taken in the West Indies this year."⁵⁷ He further comments that "French deprivations had by 1800 adversely affected trade."⁵⁸ These opinions are substantiated by the experiences of Perkins and Forsyth in the period. Perkins found his trade so affected that he began to reroute his ships away from the West India route. For example, the schooner *Hope*, a regular on the West Indies

run, was sailing to Fayal in 1796.⁵⁹ Forsyth's letters also reveal the depredations of the privateers. He records the capture of his ship, the *Brunswick*, on its way home from Antigua and he comments that, "the capture of this ship tho (sic) insured, is a heavy disappointment."⁶⁰ Later in the year the ship sent to Jamaica with the Madeira wine was captured by the French.⁶¹ In addition, the overzealous efforts of the British squadrons were causes of great concern. Indeed as early as 1794, Perkins wrote a letter to the Chief Justice of Bermuda complaining that British privateers had been capturing Nova Scotian vessels. That activity, he submitted, "has caused a great alarm among our trading people" and should the vessels be condemned as prizes, "it will in a great measure ruin this industrious settlement."⁶² Accordingly, Perkins asked the Judge to expedite the matter favourably. The damage to trade was indeed heavy. In 1793, fifty-six vessels had entered Nova Scotian ports from the West Indies. In 1795, the figure was of forty-six; in 1797 it was twenty-one and in 1799, twenty-nine vessels entered the ports from the islands.⁶³ New Brunswick also suffered; her shipping to the West Indies dropped from 3,854 tons in 1792 to 658 tons for the period March 6, 1798 to January 1, 1799.⁶⁴

In spite of this decline the commercial performance of the provinces gave some cause for satisfaction to the officials; expansions in military spending masked disruptions in Nova Scotia's West India trade. There were, however portents of difficulties to come. In 1795 Governor Wentworth was forced to prohibit "the exportation out of this province of all wheat and other grain, flour, peas, beef, pork and other provisions."⁶⁵ This proclamation was only temporary, however; by 1796 matters had recovered such that Wentworth was able to recommend to the Assembly that they grant "some relief to His Majesty's subjects from such of the existing taxes as may be judiciously dispensed with."⁶⁶ By 1798 Wentworth was again commenting that "the crops have been abundant, commerce greatly and profitably increasing."⁶⁷ These statements conveniently ignored the fact that in the last three quarters of 1797 Nova Scotia had legally imported American goods to the value of £3,972 6s 3d.⁶⁸ The goods imported included meat, pitch, bread, salt, tar, fruits, corn, livestock and grain. By 1801, the Governor, Council and Assembly were satisfied with "the tranquility and prosperity that prevails throughout the province."⁶⁹

One area of constant problems during the 1790s was the fishery. The performance of the fisheries had been steadily declining in the face of American competition, and as Stokes observes "in the fishing industry, retrogression is the Keynote during the years 1792 to 1802."⁷⁰ Generally, however, matters seemed to be improving and the Rev. Robert Stanser seemed to express the prevailing conviction in the

province when he delivered a sermon to the Governor, Council and Assembly in 1800. In his address, Rev. Stanser likened Nova Scotia to the land described in his text, Deuteronomy 11: 12-15; "I will give you the rain of your land in due season...that thou mayest gather in thy corn and thy wine and their oil. And I will send grass into the fields for thy cattle, that thou mayest eat and be full."⁷¹

While Nova Scotia was thus enjoying the bounty of the Lord, the West Indies, apparently, had begun to experience reverses. The Parliamentary committee appointed to investigate the commercial state of the islands in 1806 commented that, "since 1799 there has taken place a progressive deterioration in the situation of the planters."⁷² Prices for goods imported into the islands increased tremendously, and shortages prevailed. With military demand consuming the bulk of any available surplus of food and timber, Nova Scotia proved to be woefully inadequate as a supplier to the islands. Thus the opening of the British Caribbean ports to American vessels was in response to a real emergency. In 1801, Lord Lavington, Governor of the Leeward Islands, was commenting upon "the enormous and frightful price of all the necessaries of life."⁷³ The restrictions of the Indemnity Acts served to aggravate the situation. Sugar was not only the main product of the islands, it was also an item very much in demand in the United States and even more so in Great Britain. "In order to maintain the British sugar monopoly, payments to the Americans were to be made either in rum, molasses or specie, not sugar."⁷⁴ The protests of the Jamaican Assembly over this restriction were dismissed by Parliament. Indeed, in 1800 when the Earl of Balcarres, Governor of Jamaica, allowed some sugar to be exchanged for American provisions, he was immediately censured by the British Government, and threatened with a fine and removal from office.⁷⁵

Despite an improvement in Nova Scotia's West Indian trade by 1802, the province was still incapable of meeting the needs of the sugar islands. In 1801 some fifty-five vessels entered Nova Scotian ports from the British West Indies, compared with the 1799 figure of twenty-nine vessels. This increase of twenty-six vessels represented an improvement of 89.7 per cent over 1799.⁷⁶ At this period peace was imminent and the Nova Scotians looked forward eagerly to the return of peace, when they expected to dominate the market, free of American competition. This however did not happen.

The peace of Amiens in 1802 brought a temporary respite from physical hostilities in Europe. But while the European nations were preparing for the era of Napoleon Bonaparte, it was an era of bitter disappointment for both Nova Scotia and the West Indies. The full reality of the artificial edifice propped up by war was revealed in all its

nakedness. The price of sugar fell to 25s 6d per cwt.⁷⁷ The Americans were still attempting to infiltrate into West Indian ports. Smuggling had become so established, in both regions, that the inhabitants of Nova Scotia had come to regard it as "a natural part of commerce,"⁷⁸ while in Barbados, it became necessary "for an armed brig to cruise round the island for the purpose of preventing all illicit or contraband trade."⁷⁹ By 1803, Wentworth was recommending "the establishment of a Customs House at Passamaquoddy" to "cure the evil and prevent its future growth."⁸⁰

In terms of their economy Nova Scotians faced other setbacks. In the fisheries, for instance, they found themselves outnumbered by the Americans, for attractive bounties offered by the New England states served to induce Nova Scotian fisherman to migrate to the United States.⁸¹ In addition the fisheries also suffered shortages of two essential items, salt and molasses, both obtained principally through the West India trade. Indeed great distress was experienced in the province by the "total want of molasses, an article of great and salutary use...by almost every family...and an essential provision in the fishery."⁸² There was adversity in trade as well. Nova Scotian merchants found themselves in desperate straits. Simeon Perkins, commenting on the period observed that:

Our West India trade is so embarrassed by the great risk and high premium and the dull and low markets for fish and lumber, occasioned by the United States having, in a manner, a free trade to the West Indies, that we cannot carry out the business without great loss.⁸³

There was agricultural depression as well. Fish and fish oil were being exchanged for "bread, corn and flour, necessary to this country."⁸⁴ The effect as Wentworth observed early in 1804, was that "the trade of Nova Scotia has been unprosperous during the last six months...In the West Indies they found the Americans underselling them, even in fish purchased from Nova Scotia." He continued: "the expected remittance of money and of West India produce being frustrated, very considerable embarrassments are experienced."⁸⁵ Indeed the prevailing attitude in the province during the period of 1880 to 1803 was summarized by Richard Uniacke, Attorney General of Nova Scotia. In a letter to the provincial agent Scrope Bernard, he observed that:

The affairs of this province are every day assuming a more serious aspect. The ancient colonial system is only put in force against the colonies of North America. The attention of the Government (British) will not be turned to this country until it is too late. Our capital stock is wasting, our merchants removing as fast as they can.⁸⁶

Uniacke's fear proved correct. For as the years unfolded it became apparent that the United States would continue to dominate commodity trade with the West Indies.

In terms of Nova Scotian trade to the West Indies and the United States, shipping and tonnage figures reveal that in 1801, some 35.1 per cent of the total number of vessels entering Nova Scotian ports came from the United States, while those coming from the West Indies accounted for 21.8 per cent of the total. In terms of tonnage the United States accounted for 25.8 per cent of the total tonnage of vessels entering the ports during the year, while that coming from the West Indies accounted for 23.8 per cent.

In the figures for outgoing vessels, those bound for the United States accounted for 20.7 per cent of the vessels and 24.7 per cent of the tonnage clearing from Nova Scotian ports.⁸⁷ The following table gives some indication of the comparative importance of the trade with both the West Indies and the United States.⁸⁸

**NOVA SCOTIAN TRADE WITH B.W.I. AND U.S.A.
1802-1805**

WEST INDIA TRADE

YEAR	INCOMING				OUTGOING			
	Vessels	% of Total	Tonnage	% of Total	Vessels	% of Total	Tonnage	% of Total
1802	55	24.1	6,357	28.4	59	24.3	7,094	26.2
1803	51	26.2	5,679	28.6	59	27.6	6,949	25.0
1804	38	15.6	4,504	19.0	43	20.5	4,920	23.2
1805	41	18.4	4,561	20.9	44	22.0	4,853	11.6

UNITED STATES TRADE

YEAR	INCOMING				OUTGOING			
	Vessels	% of Total	Tonnage	% of Total	Vessels	% of Total	Tonnage	% of Total
1802	74	32.5	5,162	22.9	68	27.9	5,157	19.0
1803	83	42.6	6,115	30.8	69	32.2	4,910	17.7
1804	89	36.6	6,416	27.0	74	35.2	5,436	25.7
1805	60	26.9	4,442	20.4	57	28.8	4,290	10.2

A scrutiny of the figures reveals firstly that although vessels arriving from the United States outnumbered those arriving from the West Indies, the latter group of vessels were generally of a larger capacity than those involved in the American trade. Secondly, the figures indicate that the West India trade was especially important as an export trade. In 1802, for example, the total export trade of the province occupied 27,101 tons of which the West Indies accounted for 7,094 tons or 26.2%; in 1803 out of a total of 27,779 tons the islands accounted for 6,949, or 25% of the trade.⁸⁹

The years from 1783 to the Treaty of Amiens in 1802 represented an era of fluctuation in the commercial relationship between Nova Scotia and the West Indies. From the tentative beginnings, consequent upon the re-affirmation of orthodox mercantilist policy after the defection of the Americans from the Empire, the trade had established itself as one the fulcrums of the Nova Scotian existence. The early years had also clearly indicated that the United States were not going to relinquish easily a profitable relationship, which they considered to be theirs by right.

However, encouraged by British policy of 1788 Nova Scotians were more determined than ever to make the British West Indies their sphere of commercial influence. But there were obstacles. The first was the French Revolutionary War which broke out in mid-1793. Though it did not affect the growth of commercial relations initially, it led to a disruption in trade later. Clearly, by late years of the century, in spite of Nova Scotian satisfaction with its general condition, the trade was coming under increased pressure. Competition between military and civil consumers, the ravages of the privateers and the poor performance of the fisheries had continued to make the trade unstable and to intensify West Indian dissatisfaction with existing imperial commercial policy. Furthermore, the fond expectations of Nova Scotian agricultural self-sufficiency held out in 1788 were coming to be seen as mere visions. Nova Scotian dependence upon the United States for provisions had not lessened since 1788. As late as 1802 both Nova Scotia and the West Indies remained 'colonies' of the United States. Indeed it was this dependence of the Nova Scotians and West Indians upon the American trade which led to the failure of Nova Scotia-British West Indian experiment after 1783.

NOTES

1. Ritcheson, Charles R., *Aftermath of Revolution: British Policy Toward the United States, 1783-1795*, (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1969), pp. viii - ix.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 223.
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9. Carrington, Selwyn H. H., "The British West Indies during the American Revolution: A Study in Colonial Economy And Politics", Unpublished Manuscript p. 367.
10. Ragatz, *The Fall of the Planter Class*, p. 89.
11. Brebner, *Neutral Yankees*, p. 126 and p. 292.
12. Darmouth to Legge, February 22, 1775, in Brebner, *Neutral Yankees*, p. 304.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 303.
14. Ritcheson, *Aftermath of Revolution*, pp. 218-21.
15. For an enlightening discussion of the methods resorted to by planters, *Ibid.*, pp. 219-24.
16. See Edwards, *The History of the British Colonies in the West Indies*, Vol. 2, p. 515 where he points out that between 1780 and 1787 some 15,000 people "perished of famine or of disease contracted by scarcity and unwholesome diet." Slaves also perished in the Leeward islands and Barbados though not in such large numbers. See also Carrington, "The British West Indies during the American Revolution," p. 384; and Sheridan, R. B., "The Crisis of Slave Subsistence in the British West Indies During and After the American Revolution," *William and Mary Quarterly*, Ser. 3, Vol. 33, pp. 615-41.
17. Carrington, "The British West Indies during the American Revolution", p. 371.
18. Great Britain, Public Record office, C.O. 152/63, Shirley to North, November 19, 1783; See also C.O. 152/63, Petition of Assembly of Antigua to Shirley, October 9, 1783; See also Wise, John Philip, "British Commercial Policy 1783-1794: The Aftermath of American Independence", (Unpublished Ph.D dissertation, London University, 1972). p. 63.
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20. C.O. 137/84, Address of Assembly of Jamaica to Campbell, November 20, 1783.
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28. Carrington, "The British West Indies During the American Revolution," p. 392.
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30. Graham, G. S., *British Policy and Canada, 1774-1791*. (Longmans, Green and Co. Ltd., 1930), p. ix.
31. Quoted in Graham, G. S., *Sea Power and British North America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1941), p. 53.
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33. C.O. 217/63/39, Petition of merchants of Shelburne to Lord Grenville, June 16, 1791.
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50. *Ibid.*, Forsyth to Cruden, Pollard and Stewart, August 5, 1797.
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