

SINGAPORE GOVERNMENT PRESS RELEASE

PUBLICITY DIVISION · MINISTRY OF CULTURE, CITY HALL SINGAPORE 6

National Archives and
Records Centre, Singapore.

10 MAR 1979

MC/MAR/4/79 (Labour)

Acc. No.	NARC
79 0068	15

SPYROS INQUIRY REPORT

The Committee of Inquiry into the explosion and fire on board the vessel "Spyros" in Jurong Shipyard on 12 Oct 78 has submitted its report to the Minister for Labour.

The Committee found that the explosion was caused by the heat and flame from a cutting torch used by a Jurong Shipyard fitter, Lim Hock Hoo, near the vent pipe of a bunker tank, an area not issued with any hot-work certificate. The torch ignited the flammable vapour present in the bunker tank. This flammable vapour was caused by contamination of the fuel oil by light crude oil from the cargo tank through an unauthorised connection. The Committee further found that this unauthorised connection contravened Lloyd's safety requirements and was fitted deliberately to divert crude oil from cargo tanks into bunker tanks.

The explosion and fire claimed 76 lives and injured another 69.

The "Spyros" is owned by Ulysses Tanker Corporation of Liberia. It flies the Liberian flag and has been registered with Lloyd's Register of Shipping, since its construction in 1964.

The Committee found the owners and the master of "Spyros" and Jurong Shipyard and some of its personnel jointly responsible for the explosion and fire.

The Committee has recommended a number of safety measures for Jurong Shipyard. The Ministry of Labour will ensure that all practical steps are taken by the shipyard to implement these recommendations as soon as possible. Other shipyards will also be requested to implement these recommendations where applicable. The implementation of these measures will also be closely monitored by the Ministry.

The Ministry has been advocating a self-regulating permit-to-work system to control hot work in shipyards. This system has so far not been effectively implemented by some shipyards. The Ministry will, therefore, introduce regulations to require all shipyards to have an effective permit-to-work system. In addition, the Ministry will review the safety administration of shipyards and make recommendations for their improvements. It also proposes to amend the Factories Act to provide heavier penalties for those responsible for industrial accidents which result in injury and/or death to workers.

The Government cannot but condemn in the severest possible terms the dangerous practice of some owners and operators of tankers of diverting crude oil from cargo tanks to bunker tanks. Such irresponsible practice contributed to the "Spyros" disaster. The Government will take the matter up with the Inter-Governmental Maritime Consultative Organisation (IMCO) with a view to getting the international community to take action to stop this dangerous practice. The Government has also decided that the Port of Singapore Authority will inspect bunker tanks of vessels bound for repairs in local shipyards.

A copy of the Report of the Committee was forwarded to the Public Prosecutor to consider whether criminal proceedings should be instituted against the Master of the Spyros, Captain Peroullis, and the fitter Lim Hook Hoe for the offence of causing death by doing a rash act under section 304(a) of the Penal Code.

Criminal proceedings will be instituted against persons and corporations who have contravened the provisions of the Factories Act and the PSA (Dangerous Goods, Petroleum and Explosives) Regulations, 1977.

Injured workers and the dependants of the deceased are entitled in law to institute proceedings in the High Court for damages against those responsible or claim compensation under the Workmen's Compensation Act. Those unable to afford the services of solicitors should apply for legal aid at the Legal Aid Bureau.

The vessel "Spyros" is the only asset in Singapore of Ulysses Tanker Corporation. Its value is estimated at about \$3 million.

The Director of the Legal Aid Bureau instituted proceedings in the High Court for the arrest of the vessel by filing an Admiralty Writ on the 22nd February 1979. The vessel was arrested at Jurong Shipyard on the 27th February 1979.

In addition to the damages or compensation that may be awarded, injured workers and the dependants of the deceased will be granted ex-gratia payments from the Industrial Accidents Relief Fund. The Fund consists of donations by members of the public and originally stood at about \$4 million. Of this amount \$675,900 has already been distributed. The remaining \$3.3 million will be distributed by a Committee which was specially set up to administer the Fund.

MINISTRY OF LABOUR

3 MARCH 1979