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THE GLOW FROM A FIRE

(By Steve Wulf)

Methuen, Massachusetts, is a small city not unlike the Bedford Falls of *It's a Wonderful Life*. Over the years, the working-class town on the border of New Hampshire and Massachusetts has come to rely on the good heart of one man. While Aaron Feuerstein may not look much like Jimmy Stewart, he is the protagonist of a Christmas story every bit as warming as the Frank Capra movie—or the Polartec fabric made at his Malden Mills.

On the night of Dec. 11, just as Feuerstein was being thrown a surprise 70th birthday party, a boiler at Malden Mills exploded, setting off a fire that injured 27 people and destroyed three of the factory's century-old buildings. Because Malden Mills employs 2,400 people in an economically depressed area, the news was as devastating as the fire. According to Paul Coorey, the president of Local 311 of the Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees, "I was standing there seeing the mill burn with my son, who also works there, and he looked at me and said, 'Dad, we just lost our jobs.' Years of our lives seemed gone."

When Feuerstein arrived to assess the damage to a business his grandfather had started 90 years ago, he kept himself from crying by thinking back to the passage from *King Lear* in which Lear promises not to weep even though his heart would "break into a hundred thousand flaws." I was telling myself I have to be creative," Feuerstein later told the *New York Times*. "Maybe there's some way to get out of it." Feuerstein, who reads from both his beloved Shakespeare and the Talmud almost every night, has never been one to run away. When many other textile manufacturers in New England fled to the South and to foreign countries, Malden Mills stayed put. When a reliance on fake fur bankrupted the company for a brief period in the early '80s, Feuerstein sought out alternatives.

What brought Malden Mills out of bankruptcy was its research-and-development team, which came up with a revolutionary fabric that was extremely warm, extremely light, quick to dry and easy to dye. Polartec is also ecologically correct because it is made from recycled plastic bottles. Clothing made with Polartec or a fraternal brand name, Synchronia, is sold by such major outdoors clothiers as L.L. Bean, Patagonia, Eastern Mountain Sports and Eddie Bauer, and it accounts for half of Malden's \$400 million-plus in 1995 sales.

Even though the stock of a rival textile manufacturer in Tennessee, the Dyersburg Corp., rose sharply the day after the fire, L.L. Bean and many of Malden's other customers pledged their support. Another apparel company, Dakotah, sent Feuerstein a \$30,000 check. The Bank of Boston sent \$50,000, the union \$100,000, the Chamber of Commerce in the surrounding Merrimack Valley \$150,000. "The money is not for Malden Mills," says Feuerstein. "It is for the Malden Mills employees. It makes me feel wonderful. I have hundreds of letters at home from ordinary people, beautiful letters with dollar bills, \$10 bills."

The money was nothing to the workers compared to what Feuerstein gave them three days later. On the night of Dec. 14, more than 1,000 employees gathered in the gym of Central Catholic High School to learn the fate of their jobs and of the cities of Methuen and Lawrence. Feuerstein entered the gym from the back, and as he shook the snow off his coat, the murmurs turned to cheers. The factory owner, who had already given out \$275 Christmas bonuses and

pledged to rebuild, walked to the podium. "I will get right to my announcement," he said. "For the next 30 days—and it might be more—all our employees will be paid their full salaries. But over and above the money, the most important thing Malden Mills can do for our workers is to get you back to work. By Jan. 2, we will restart operations, and within 90 days we will be fully operational." What followed, after a moment of awe, was a scene of hugging and cheering that would have trumped the cinematic celebration for *Wonderful Life's* George Bailey.

True to his word, Feuerstein has continued to pay his employees in full, at a cost of some \$1.5 million a week and at an average of \$12.50 an hour—already one of the highest textile wages in the world. And even better than his word, Malden Mills was up and running last week at 80% of its Polartec capacity, thanks to round-the-clock salvage work and the purchase of 15 new machines. "I haven't really done anything," says Feuerstein. "I don't deserve credit. Corporate America has made it so that when you behave the way I did, it's abnormal."

Union chief Coorey begs to differ. Says he: "Thank God we got Aaron."

DAW AUNG SAN SUU KYI

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, the January 7, 1996 *New York Times Magazine* contains an interview with the leader of Burma's democracy movement, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi.

Many of us have followed her situation, during six years of house arrest, and her recent release by the Burmese authorities. She is a woman of remarkable courage, honesty and clarity of purpose. She wants to do whatever she can to improve the lives of her people, and she has devoted her life to that goal. She believes unequivocally that democracy is the only way, and she has the trust and support of the overwhelming majority of Burmese citizens.

As she says in the interview, the Burmese authorities continue to refuse to even discuss a process for instituting democracy, because they are too fond of their power and privileges. But Suu Kyi knows that eventually the SLORC will have to sit down and negotiate with her. As she points out, that is what happened in South Africa, and even in the former Yugoslavia although there only after the slaughter of a quarter of a million people and the destruction of much of Bosnia. Those two examples represent the SLORC's options. Either a peaceful way out, or mass demonstrations and an explosion of violence that will make them wish they had listened to her.

Mr. President, I am pleased to be an original cosponsor of Senator MCCONNELL's legislation to impose sanctions on the Burmese government. Senator MCCONNELL has been a strong advocate for human rights and democracy in Burma, and I applaud him for it. It is important that the United States have a consistent policy, and I believe that until the SLORC demonstrates a genuine willingness to negotiate the transition to democracy with Suu Kyi, our policy should be to isolate the SLORC from the world community it yearns to

be part of. In that regard, I would note that the SLORC has named 1996 "Visit Myanmar Year." I hope that anyone considering accepting the SLORC's invitation will read the interview with Suu Kyi, and be aware that they may find themselves staying in hotels and traveling on roads that were built with forced labor.

Mr. President, I am not going to ask that the entire interview be printed in the RECORD, but I urge all Senators to read it. I do ask unanimous consent that Suu Kyi's response to the question "What do you want people in the United States to know about you?" be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

EXCERPT FROM INTERVIEW WITH SUU KYI

Q: What do you want people in the United States to know about you?

A: That we are not near democracy yet and that there are, so far, no signs that we are progressing toward democratization. The National Convention [that Slorc was holding to draft a constitution], as it stands, is not a step toward democratization at all.

I think a lot of Americans very much take their rights for granted. And I think many of them do not know what life is like for those of us whose security is not guaranteed by a democratic constitution. So I would like to ask them to try to put themselves in our shoes, and ask how they would feel if they were deprived of all rights. I would like them to see us not as a country rather far away whose sufferings do not matter, but as fellow human beings in need of human rights and who could do so much for the world, if we were allowed.

EXPANDED IRA'S

Mr. LOTT. Mr. President, as we continue to debate the budget, I think it's interesting to note that the United States now has the lowest savings rate of any industrialized nation in the world.

If the situation does not change quickly, many Americans may have no choice but to live below the poverty level during their retirement years.

Retirees can no longer depend solely on their Social Security and pensions to support them in retirement. I believe it is our responsibility to give the American people, not only an alternative, but in reality, a life preserver for their retirement years.

We must encourage people to save for their own retirement. For that reason, I believe it is critical that we expand the current IRA's, allowing more people to use them for savings and investment. We should do this as a part of any budget package which is agreed upon or as stand-alone legislation.

With that in mind, I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the RECORD a wonderful example of how the private sector is trying to deal with this growing threat to our Nation's future well-being. This is an open letter from Mr. Charles R. Schwab to the President and Members of Congress.

There being no objection, the letter was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows: