

John Turley-Ewart profiles
Michael Bliss, Canadian history's
traditionalist dissident

ISSUES &

THINK SMALL

PETER A. SINGER

The much-publicized plight of the northern Ontario community of Kashechewan, one of about 100 native reserves under a boil-water advisory, is the latest example highlighting the importance of safe drinking water. The same lesson became apparent in the aftermath of Pakistan's earthquake and last year's tsunamis in South Asia.

Less-publicized examples abound as well. In Bangladesh, for instance, arsenic in drinking water affects 50 million people. All told, about one billion people lack access to safe drinking water around the world, and two million children die each year from water-related diseases, such as diarrhea, cholera and typhoid.

Tragic as these facts are, they represent an opportunity for Canada to use its strength in science to help save lives. Just as Canada responded to the threat of SARS by sequencing the DNA of the SARS virus, we can respond to the challenge of safe drinking water using our expertise in the emerging field of nanotechnology.

Last year, the Canadian Program on Genomics and Global Health, based at the University of Toronto Joint Centre for Bioethics, surveyed 63 scientists from 26 countries about the applications of nanotechnology with the greatest potential to assist the developing world. Water treatment and remediation was the third top answer (after energy and agriculture).

Nanotechnology is the study, design, creation, synthesis and manipulation of matter at the nanometer scale — that is, at a billionth of a meter. When matter is manipulated at the level of atoms and molecules, it exhibits novel properties. Scientists are harnessing these properties to create new, inexpensive materials and devices.

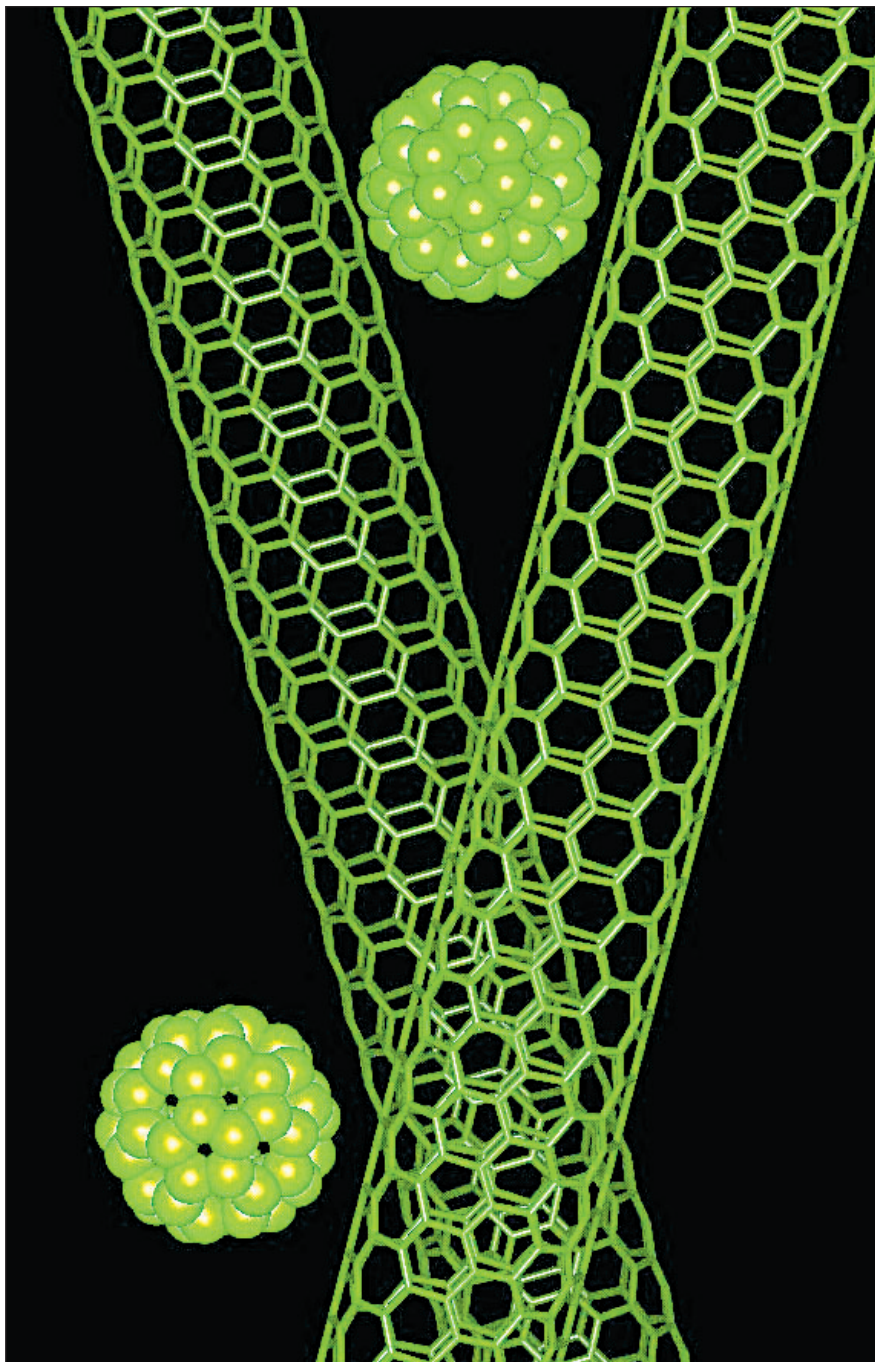
To understand the potential of nanotechnology, visualize a membrane used to filter water, with pores so small they can block bacteria (like the *E. coli* in the water at Kashechewan) or toxins (like the arsenic in the water in Bangladesh). Such "nanomembranes" would be inexpensive, portable and easily cleaned.

In the wake of the tsunamis, the Pakistan earthquake and the crisis in Kashechewan, Canada responded the same way — by sending 10-tonne water desalination tanks to the affected region. These tanks had to be airlifted in enormous military airplanes. Imagine if instead we were able to send bottle-sized, portable water filtration systems able to decontaminate and desalinate an even higher volume of water.

Of course, nanotechnology is not a "silver bullet" that will solve all of the complex issues surrounding water purity. Longer term solutions using cutting-edge science need to be balanced with immediate interventions using existing technologies. (Moreover, no technology can address the socio-economic problems that typically underlie such crises as the one in Kashechewan.)

Despite the promise of nanotechnology in relation to global water problems, there is a shortage of effort to realize this promise. I suspect part of the reluctance stems from the idea that the problem of water quality affects only faraway lands. Sadly, Kashechewan illustrates how domestic and global challenges connect. Bangladesh's problem is our problem.

One model for how to stimulate ac-



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Two carbon nanotubes alongside two "buckyballs" — cage-like, hollow molecules composed of hexagonal and pentagonal groups of atoms. Nanotubes can be used to produce novel water filtration devices.

tion is the Grand Challenges in Global Health initiative, supported by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the foundation for the U.S. National Institutes of Health. This initiative has defined 14 "Grand Challenges" — those critical scientific bottlenecks blocking

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needed advances in global health. Recently, it provided 43 innovative projects with a total of US\$437-million.

Canada should build on this model and announce a Canadian Grand Challenges initiative — beginning with a Grand Challenge on the use of nanotechnology to address bacterial and toxic contamination of water.

Canada is a perfect country to lead this effort. Up to 20% of the world's fresh

water is in Canada. We host the UN University International Network on Water, Environment and Health. Furthermore, the National Research Council of Canada and the University of Alberta have recently opened a National Institute of Nanotechnology in Edmonton.

Compared to the \$1.8-billion that has been targeted for meeting safe drinking water needs in aboriginal communities using existing technologies, an additional \$30-million to finance a Grand Challenge to apply new technologies, as the first step in a broader Canadian Grand Challenges initiative, would be a tiny investment — and one that, in the long run, could do far more good.

Last year, the Prime Minister pledged to devote no less than 5% of our research-and-development investment to address developing world challenges, especially in relation to health, education and the environment.

This commitment has yet to be enacted in a budget. In the wake of the Kashechewan crisis, now would be the perfect time.

National Post

■ Peter A. Singer is director of the University of Toronto Joint Centre for Bioethics, professor of medicine at University of Toronto, and a Distinguished Investigator of the Canadian Institutes of Health Research.

Parish's reflexive hostility to Hillier's personal manliness is, unfortunately, emblematic of the anti-male attitude behind the transformation of our combat forces into the integrated, "sensitive" New Military. Women have served in the CF since 1951, and today represent up to 14% of the CF. They were deployed in support roles until a Human Rights tribunal in 1989 struck down barriers to all service options, including combat.

This meant integrated training with men. Since then, it's goodbye testosterone, hello estrogen, PMS, pregnancy — and lower, gentler criteria. The single-standard Old Military shaped recruits to meet fixed benchmarks. The double-standard New Military fixes benchmarks to meet enlistees' shapes.

To maintain the fiction of gender neutrality insisted upon by the social engineers who pressed for integration, and produce the appearance of equality of outcomes, co-ed physical training has been dumbed down to accommodate women's lesser strength and ability, an insulting disservice to male recruits. But women also have female reproductive issues that can't be similarly obscured, and that receive special treatment. Pregnancy, for example, allows women to withdraw from combat duty with hon-

our, while men have no such combat escape hatch. Some "equity."

Feminists perceive the military as simply one more government or social institution in need of accelerated PC behaviour modification to ensure functional and numerical parity for women. Manliness as a virtue has already been eradicated from scholarship, early education, child psychology, family law, and social work. Now it is the military's turn.

But combat troops aren't like teachers or postal workers or bus drivers. The military is — was — a unique, genetics-dependent culture, as specific to males as midwifery is to females. Men don't fight for the feminist ideal of androgyny, but to protect the women they love — wives, daughters, mothers, sisters — and the values they represent — normalcy, freedom and peace. Former U.S. infantry officer Brian Mitchell, author of *Women in the Military: Flirting with Disaster*, points out that rather than shortfalls being a reason to recruit women, recruiting women causes shortfalls: "The more attractive you make the military look to women, the less attractive you make it look to men."

In spite of the military's ardent courtship, women leave the CF for domestic obligations or greener career

pastures at double to triple the rate for men. Add extra expense for female-specific injury and medical needs, double those of men's, not to mention costly flights of PC-induced idiocy (our Forces once commissioned a pregnancy combat uniform), and you have an institution in denial. Sadly, according to Granatstein, "It will take a large number of dead female soldiers before we snap back to reality."

Rick Hillier's comments have been labelled "controversial." Nonsense. He's a breath of fresh air, a role model for young men seeking purpose and self-realization through the ultimate male bonding experience.

Apart from rear-service, medical and administrative functions, where they shine, women don't belong in the CF. Hillier would do well to take a leaf from the Jarheads' copybook. Unlike the other Services, the U.S. Marines enlisted women, but successfully resisted integrated training. Consequently, they are the only U.S. Service to have easily met their recruitment goals, ensuring their continuing capability to field the world's most motivated, cohesive and effective combat units. More power to them.

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BEAUTIFUL MINDS

Preaching the gospel of Canadian history

The National Post is conducting a search to find Canada's most important "public intellectual." In today's instalment, John Turley-Ewart profiles historian Michael Bliss. Other profiles, as well as contest rules, appear at www.nationalpost.com/beautifulminds.

JOHN TURLEY-EWART

Michael Bliss's University of Toronto office is tucked into the rafters of a red brick church, his windows breached by sounds of street cars and the occasional public protest. There resides the life's work of a scholar who's charted undiscovered territory in Canadian social, business, political and medical history; a historian who has shaped the political debates of our times, reminding us of the meaning of our shared experience — our national history. In so doing, Michael Bliss has become Canada's leading public intellectual.

The titles of Bliss's books ring familiar to anyone with even a passing interest in Canada's history: *A Canadian Millionaire: The Life and Business Times of Sir Joseph Flavelle* (1978); *The Discovery of Insulin* (1982); *Northern Enterprise: Five Centuries of Canadian Business* (1987); and *William Osler: A Life in Medicine* (1999), to name a few. His awards, including the Order of Canada, run as long as the list of his books. The number of people he draws to his classes is a testament to his skill as an educator. In the 1990s, when I worked as his teaching assistant, it was not unusual to see 300 people from all walks of life — full-time students, business people, civil servants, journalists — packed into his evening lectures.

Bliss teaches that Canadian history is important; indeed, that it is the key to creating a responsible and politically literate citizenry. His views on the subject are controversial. In a paper that startled Canada's historians in 1991, he warned that "from the 1970s on, Canadian history ... turned inward, becoming personalized, privatized, and solipsistic." Rather than speaking to Canadians about the grand sweep of their nation's past, he charged, his colleagues were focusing on esoteric, politically fashionable niches — the history of cleaning women, of sex, of discrimination.

Bliss's reproach inspired a heated response from some academics whose own self-importance, career aspirations and dogmas outweighed any claims society might make on their talents. As a result, his traditionalism has made him something of a dissident.

The historian is at his best in the public square when offering needed perspective on modern debates. Michael Bliss has excelled in this regard, appearing on TV and radio and writing commentaries for newspapers across Canada, including this one.

Bliss made some mistakes along the way. Opposing the Charter of Rights and Freedoms was one of them — an error he now gracefully admits. But he is more often right than wrong, which is why his opinion matters to policy makers and the public.

When the Meech Lake Accord was presented in the late 1980s, it was Bliss who criticized political elites for arrogantly imposing an artificial consensus. Canadians deserved their say,



PETER REDMAN / NATIONAL POST
Michael Bliss

and they got it when the same elites tried again to reopen the constitution in the early 1990s. On the night of the 1992 Charlottetown referendum, when it was clear the no side would prevail, Bliss predicted "All the politicians who painted apocalyptic scenarios will quickly reverse themselves." And they did.

Bliss was also an early advocate of free trade with the United States, reminding us that this country was built on trade. And as early as 1994, Bliss was calling on conservatives to unite the right and avoid a one-party state under Liberal rule. (He achieved the first a decade later, but is still waiting on the second.)

Yet, parties and politics don't sum up Bliss's contribution over the last three decades. He has looked into the soul of Canada with eyes wide open. When the Robert Latimer case was all Canadians were talking about in 1994, Bliss pointedly asked: "What are we coming to in Canada? We used to believe in the sanctity of human life. Now many [Canadians] appear to believe that parents ought to be able to kill their handicapped children." He bears

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witness to what ails us as a culture — what he calls our "appalling selfishness and communal disintegration."

The great Canadian historian Ramsay Cook, Bliss's PhD supervisor in the 1960s, recently told me that "Michael wanted to be a United Church minister when he was younger. He gave up on that idea, but he has been preaching to us ever since." Few listen to ministers these days. But people do listen to Michael Bliss and Canada is the better for it.

National Post

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Fighting is for men



BARBARA KAY

As soon as Remembrance Day lapel poppies make their annual appearance, wars, old and new, occupy my thoughts. I am especially keen to see the film *Jarhead*, which tells the story of a U.S. Marine who fought in the first Gulf War. By all accounts, *Jarhead* follows on other classics of the war-movie genre by answering the timeless question of why young males are willing to face torturous training, brutal hazing, long-term celibacy, excruciating tedium, dust, mud and the risk of death (or worse) in war. *Jarhead* will no doubt be seen as hate

propaganda in peace-loving Canada, where pacifism is in vogue, and traditional military values are viewed with suspicion. Not coincidentally, our Canadian Forces (CF) are deeply demoralized; military historian Jack Granatstein predicts a mass exodus of 20% over the next few years.

Reviving a military with cruelly degraded mechanical resources — with virtually no significant new funds available for use until 2009-10 — will be a difficult job for recently appointed Chief of Defence Staff Rick Hillier. His most pressing task is to stem rampant attrition — in 1993, enlistment stood at 80,000; in 2005, at 58,000. Re-masculating the Forces would be a good place to start.

Nothing better illustrates Hillier's uphill battle than political termergant Carolyn Parrish's reaction to his perfectly reasonable assertion, in July, that terrorists are "scumbags ... who detest our freedoms" and that it is the Forces' job "to be able to kill people." She declared Hillier "dangerous" and "testosterone-fuelled."