



## Information for Social Change

"an activist organisation that examines issues of censorship, freedom and ethics amongst library and information workers..."

### **The Constant Gardener by John Le Carré**

**Published by Viking, 2000**

**\$37.99, 509 pages**

### **Book Review by Julian Samuel**

John Le Carré's *The Constant Gardener* details, in minutiae, how British diplomats while away the hours in Africa. We meet the pharmaceutical giants and their kissing cousins: the Foreign Office, British Intelligence; scientists-with-objective-scientific-opinions-for-sale; Third World dictators; UN-look-the-other-way-types; arms merchants wearing lacquered shoes, champagne flutes in hand; British Parliament; snowy Canadian Universities; whore journalists salivating for a story-with-photographs of a British blonde with a slashed throat. Drugs made by white men in white coats in labs are being tested on Africans. Drugs you wouldn't test on your sick dog. The tests on black people, "who are going to die anyway", help to perfect drugs for the Western markets.

The dramas rehearsed in *The Constant Gardener* are nothing new. For eons, the left-wing press has been humming with reports on pharma tests in the Third World. With the publication of this book, Le Carré becomes, very surprisingly, an anti-imperialist par excellence. It is open-minded of him to look at his own backyard, finally. Dr Noam Chomsky, Critic Supreme of The Western Press, move over.

Why do our national news (sic) papers -- The Globe and Mail, The National Post, Saturday Night, The Montreal Gazette et al., and our state-run CBC remain so silent on this pillage? Why can't they be as uncompromising as Robert Fisk is on the Middle East? Why does not our ideology-free literary hero Mordecai Richler write anything of this magnitude? Why do not Quebec film-makers like Pierre Falardeau (tsé-mon-pays) or culturalists like Robert Lepage ever create works which deal with these matters? Why do not journalists name names more often? Are they on Sleepomicine or are they simply scared?

Lawyers are the ultimate silencers. They silence the critics because silence means more profit for British diplomats, the Foreign Office, British Intelligence, dubious or sincere scientists, African dictators bursting with high cholesterol, well-dressed UN brats, august British Parliamentarians addicted to the truth or something near the truth, and the wretched arms merchants to whom the world truly belongs.

*The Constant Gardener*, with its deft ability to mock accents and voices and to reproduce mingled, angular personalities with quantum precision, is too little, too late. Who is going to stop the pharma circus now? Will Mr Le Carré stop them? Yes, of course.

Film-maker and writer Julian Samuel has made a four-hour documentary on Orientalism and has published a novel, *Passage to Lahore*, [De Lahore à Montréal]. You may contact him at [jjsamuel@vif.com](mailto:jjsamuel@vif.com)