This is where the contract worker could well benefit from the UIF. He must go back to his Homeland area to register as a workseeker, and there he could remain unemployed for some months, as is the case in Natal. The problem arises if he has not got his record card. He still has to go home, as it is illegal for him to remain in a prescribed area while unemployed. Consequently he returns continuously hoping to get his card which may by then have been applied for by his previous employer. This can, however, take up to 3 months to arrive from Pretoria. Meanwhile he should have been able to register for UIF benefits on the strength of a letter from his previous employer, stating that his contributor's card has in fact been applied for. This is another thing the employer does not do automatically.

In the case of a bona fide workseeker, i.e. someone who qualified under Section 10 (1) a, b, c, or d of the Urban Areas Act of 1945, he only has to apply to his local Bantu Affairs Commissioner for Unemployment benefits.

Now, should the contributor have a 6 week penalty imposed on him he does have 21 days in which to appeal. But as the penalty notice served on him is incomprehensible taking into account that a large number of Africans are unable to read English or Afrikaans or are illiterate, the chances of his taking action within the stated period are extremely remote. If a 6 week penalty is imposed on an urban worker, as he has to find employment within 30 days or lose his rights by endorsement out, he obviously cannot draw UIF benefits.

The U.I. Fund presently stands at over R190 million, and there are close on 2 million unemployed Africans in South Africa. 11 000 out of 39 000 employable in Edendale alone, and 7 000 a month in Durban. These figures are indicative of the critical unemployment situation facing South Africans, (the majority of whom are black workers) and employers should immediately take steps to openly recognize the needs of the majority of their labour force, as for example Black Trade Unions and equal pay for equal work etc. Like it or not we have an unemployment problem that is very definitely getting out of hand and unless we tackle it objectively and constructively, it can and will only worsen. Working conditions should improve in such circumstances and not stagnate or deteriorate in the knowledge that people will accept anything just to keep their jobs.

African contributors besides being subject to the UIF Act, are also subject to Influx Control, which makes the UIF Act inoperable. Furthermore there should be a nationwide campaign to educate both employers and employees regarding their rights and duties.

Failure to do this leaves the Act as it is now in practice, blatantly discriminatory on racial grounds. African Foreigners, Domestic and Farm Labourers especially, should be included. It is calculated, not to relieve pressure on unemployed Africans, but by its malfunctioning, precisely to maintain the pressure in order to maintain a vast reserve labour pool of Africans obliged to accept any job at all no matter how low the wage. The UIF Act, as it now operates is part and parcel of the low wages forced labour system peculiar to Africans in South Africa. □

# 3 Msinga

**by Creina Alcock**

It has been Christmas for eleven months now. Men along the footpaths. Men along the roads. Men in courtyards drinking beer. Men in circles under the trees. Men with a holiday look about them, with city shoes and bright shirts and expressions of nothing-to-do-all-day.

At Msinga men are strangers, Christmas visitors who once a year pour into the valleys in a flash flood of skidding taxis and buses that sway to the FM's jive. Overnight the men come in loaded with parcels and bags; presents and treats loaded with excitement. For a month thousands of happy parties chase the echoes from the hills. Then the drums are silent. The flood is over and the men are gone.

The seasons have always happened this way so nobody was prepared when last Christmas the flood fell away leaving men stranded at Msinga. Every month since there have been trickles towards the cities, but every month a stronger current brings streams of workless back to this arid, rocky country. "No work," say the homecomers. "There is no work anymore."

It is impossible to make a statement on unemployment at Msinga. It is an area out of sight of authority, out of reach of welfare agencies, too wild and inaccessible for census with its 1 847 km of broken cliffs and hidden valleys. There may be more than 100 000 people at Msinga but they are swallowed in the rough, bushy spaces. Without a town, without a railway, who is to count the jobless coming in?

You can guess there is something wrong by all the men at all the beerdrinks, all the men along the roads, all the men that knock for work; slickmen, city men. "Anything baas," says one. "Any work as long as it's work." He has a reference to say he is a qualified chef from a five star hotel and was only retrenched because of falling custom. What on earth can a chef do at Msinga?

"Sididile" says a man with a suit. "We are desperate. Work is finished in Goli. I'll have to start a garden though I haven't had a garden before. I bought this seed in town before I came back . . ." and out of the briefcase spills expensive small packets. Most will be useless at Msinga — asparagus, brussel sprouts, celery, kale. "What must I do to make them grow?" asks the man in the suit.

What else is there to do at Msinga but try to grow things in among the rocks, in the hot stony fields far from water? Some black youths fool about as they plant a hedge of aloes to enclose a garden on a windy plateau. "Kom, kom, kom, kaffirs!" bellows the leader. ("We learnt something in town," he grins). "Kaffir wat maak jy daar? Kom, kaffir,

hardloop!" The boys pause from their work, laughing at the mimic. "Any chance of a job?" they ask. Only a year ago they swaggered with the shine of their city experience. "You wouldn't work on a farm!" "Wouldn't we? Times have changed. Why do you think we are making this garden. We are desperate. Sididigile."

Our farm adjoins Msinga and for the purpose of this aritcle we attempted a census of a valley community with 70 homes — 1 000 people. Thirty householders had answered questions before doors were shut against us. "Questions are dangerous," somebody told somebody. "Whenever the government is going to throw people off the land it first asks questions. Who's the kraalhead? How many in the family? Who is away working? Answer questions like that and the next thing you know the lorries will be here to take us away."

Ten of the 30 kraals which answered our questions had unemployed men sitting at home. There were some odd discrepancies in the information they offered. "You say there has been no money since you were sacked last December but every month you go to the store to buy mieliemeal? How do you pay for it?"
"That's none of your business."
"I don't know."
"There are ways."
"We just had the money."
Which means dagga of course. Msinga is subsidized by dagga, a high-risk but high paying crop that thrives in the nooks and crannies of the steep, hot slopes.

While we could not offer jobs to all the jobless, we made an offer instead to help them grow food. Were there any volunteers to dig communal water furrows? There could be no payment for the work. Now **that** is the way to assess the unemployment problem. Twenty men came from one community. Thirty from another. Forty . . . Young men, middle-aged men, and a few who had been forced to retire early. They were neatly dressed, with city skills, and looked oddly out of place now that they were home. Yet for weeks they have been wielding picks and spades chipping hollows in the rocky earth.

One man on a dig asked for help with his unemployment insurance. "When I left, my company told me I must take this letter to my Bantu Affairs Commissioner to get my insurance but although I have been every month there has been no money yet." Soon we had a book of similar complaints. It is a one rand busride to the Commissioner's office and men have run out of busfare money. We got on the telephone on their behalf to an official who assured us that all the men had to do was come in with the letter from their previous employers and the insurance would be paid out. "Have there been more claims than usual lately," we asked. "Well yes," said the official cautiously. "Why do you want to know? Anyway we can't give you any figures."

Nobody will ever have figures for rural areas like Msinga. You are easily forgotten when you live among the hills. □

# KEEP ON KEEPING ON

**A Review of A SOUTH AFRICAN PILGRIMAGE, by Edgar Brookes (Ravan Press)**

**by Colin Gardner**

I

This is a fine autobiography by a very distinguished man. It is, in several senses of the word, a modest book: it is fairly short (150 pages); it is consciously limited in its scope and aims; and the author's attitude is throughout humble and self-questioning. But it contains a wealth of human truth and some profound and moving meditations on society and politics.

There are different sorts of autobiography. At the one extreme, there is the book which attempts to give a full account of an era, almost a work of history; at the other extreme, there is the one which attempts to analyse many of the complex workings of the subject's mind and heart, almost a work of psychology. Edgar Brookes's book is both historical and psychological, as well as theological and to some extent philosophical; but essentially it focusses upon the evolution of the author's political views and upon his not inconsiderable contributions (the judgment is mine) to the life of South African society. From first to last Edgar Brookes has been a dedicated searcher: the title — **A South African Pilgrimage** — is exactly right.

II

The journey begins just after the turn of the century (Brookes was born in 1897). The picture that is given of Edwardian white Natal is quietly devastating, and yet one can't help wondering whether the attitudes to be found in Pietermaritzburg today are always so very different from those that are evoked. Of his schooling, for example, we read this:

> At no time can I remember any study of African or Indian languages or customs, or of our relationship to the African or Indian races, nor even our relationship to our fellow white man of Afrikaans speech. We were not particularly anti-Afrikaans, anti-Indian or anti-African. It was just that all this was irrelevant to Cicero, England and real life. (p. 5)

There are differences now, of course: Cicero and England have have largely disappeared. But what has taken their place?

Brookes's criticism of the world of his childhood is not bitter or 'superior', however; he is too good an historian and too compassionate a man to indulge in the simpler