

Better skills will protect SA against globalisation

WHETHER we want to admit it or not, globalisation has caught up with South Africans. It has resulted in the massive movement of people across national boundaries. In countries like the US, Europe and others, skills are imported to support economic growth.

Skilled people from developing countries have targeted the developed world for better work opportunities. They have been readily absorbed, because they contribute positively and cost less.

We have seen the economies of countries such as India and China booming. This is attributed to high productivity and efficiency, as well as the low salaries and wages these countries pay their employees. Also, relatively more highly skilled people are employed compared with in South Africa.

Our country is not immune to the influence of globalisation. We have seen people from countries such as Ghana, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Kenya, Malawi, Zambia, Somalia, Congo, India, China and others play a significant

CAPE *Points*

122 St George's Mall
Cape Town 8001
Fax 021 488 4793
arglet@inl.co.za

A full address and daytime telephone number are required. The letter editor reserves the right to edit or reject.

and productive role in South Africa's economy. The arrival of foreigners here has given businesses the advantage of leverage. People from other African countries have at least some skills, and come across as able, willing to work and capable of providing a service. Often they are perceived as more hardworking, dedicated and loyal to their jobs than locals.

During holiday periods, South Africans like to go away or visit their families in other provinces. Yet, businesses often cannot afford to give their staff leave or close down. It is also the best time for willing workers to make money. There are opportunities to earn extra cash, especially by those in retail, as customers offer more tips.

But many South African employees go on leave over these periods. This creates an opportunity for people from other countries to be recommended for employment.

This access to foreign skills and foreigners' willingness to work longer hours gives businesses additional leverage – the ability to generate more income at lower costs. Profits are boosted since productivity is high. Salaries may, in some instances, be lower.

Employers argue employing foreigners means a lower risk to their businesses, since employees are not part of organised labour and therefore less likely to strike.

Of course, the net result could be

more unemployed South Africans and more poor people. This argument may be hard to swallow for South Africans who view foreign Africans as invaders of their territory. Yet it should serve as a wake-up call for every South African citizen, to realise we need to be serious about the job market. We need to be determined, show dedication and be good at what we do. Can we imagine a time when policies such as Broad Based Black Economic Empowerment, employment equity and affirmative action – or just being a member of the labour movement – would no longer protect locals?

We need to face reality and understand no government can stop globalisation and its casualisation effects.

Globalisation has intensified competitiveness across the world. This implies South Africans should work hard, be good at what they do and stay focused, particularly in these difficult times.

Sphetho Siyengo
Durbanville