

Double standards blast for banker

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By Neil Gibson, The Journal

A union leader who fought Lloyds TSB's decision to move 960 Newcastle call centre jobs to India has accused the bank of double standards after it complained about "foreigners" being allowed to dominate British banking.

Lloyds' Newcastle call centre - which once employed 960 people - will close in November.

Despite fierce opposition from Lloyds TSB Group Union (LTU), the closure is going ahead and more than half of the workforce has already gone.

What infuriated the union was that against the backdrop of the "offshoring" of these Tyneside jobs, bank chairman Maarten van den Bergh objected to restrictions on UK banks bidding to take over Abbey, whose board is recommending a takeover by Spanish bank Santander Central Hispano.

Mr van den Bergh is reported to have asked: "Would British banking be best-served if it is dominated by foreigners?"

LTU assistant general secretary Steve Tatlow said: "The situation in Newcastle is the perfect example of the double standards that operate within Lloyds TSB. Here we have 960 jobs going to Mumbai in India for no other reason than the bank can get Indian labour for one-tenth of the cost.

"The jobs still exist and are needed but Lloyds have seen the saving in salary and moved the whole operation.

"Lloyds TSB's lack of interest in protecting those North-East jobs contrasts with its chairman talking about putting the UK first and not wanting foreign control of our banks.

"Perhaps the board should stop turning a deaf ear to the overwhelming opposition from customers to having their own bank accounts managed from abroad.

"Then its own legitimate concerns may be taken a little more seriously."

A group spokesman said: "Maarten van den Bergh's comments

questioned the wisdom behind preventing UK banks from bidding for each other, while allowing bids from foreign banks.

“He was suggesting that UK banks should be allowed to compete on a level playing field with overseas companies. The issue of offshoring is a completely separate one, which is ensuring we can provide the highest levels of customer service and run our business in the most effective way possible.”

Around 500 people have left Lloyds’ Newcastle Call Centre so far and 150 of those have been re-deployed within the group.

Of the 400 who remain, around 300 are resigned to accepting redundancy packages, while 100 are working on while looking for other jobs.

Mr Tatlow said: “If you leave now you miss out on the redundancy package, so that is why so many are staying to accept voluntary redundancy.

“The figures at the end will show relatively few compulsory redundancies but they will be a tad misleading.”

Lloyds TSB says it has offered employees the chance to be employed somewhere else within the organisation, a £2,000 training bond and training to improve their skills before the centre closes.