

Mutualisation and The John Lewis state | Editorial | ☐☐...

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[Mutualisation: The John Lewis state | Editorial | ☐☐☐☐Comment is free | ☐☐☐☐The Guardian](#)

The Guardian, in an editorial, notes:

One can see the politicians' train of thought: John Lewis is popular; [it's a mutual entity] therefore this policy will be popular. But even if we overlook the vague announcements (teachers having more say over their workplaces, which is what is sometimes talked about, is a great idea, but it is not mutualism), there are big problems with the very idea of a John Lewis state. Even nice bourgeois retail chains are in the business of making a profit; the NHS is not. Public sector organisations should be accountable to the taxpayer; an architects' firm need not be.

Turning public services into co-operatives opens them up to the risk of being run by profit-seeking companies. Having more mutuals in the private sector would be a fine thing, but before politicians import the John Lewis principle into the public sector they should probably shop around a bit more.

The Guardian is right: I am a big fan of mutuals and cooperatives. But corporate models of management and organisation simply don't belong in the state sector. The ethos is different.

The result of corporatism has been only too apparent: bullying, inefficiency and disaster in the NHS - entirely as a result of using the foundation and trust model; the disaster of PFI for the tube and the crazy economics of sacking staff at HMRC when we badly need more tax revenue.

Mutuals are good.

But let's be clear - the public sector is different. The sooner we realise that, applaud that, embrace it and encourage it the better.