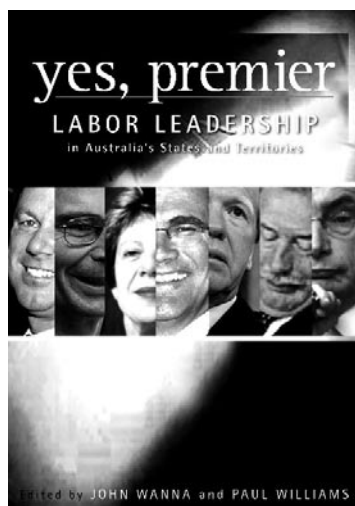


# How to win friends and influence people also be a premier

Margaret Fitzherbert reviews  
*Yes, Premier: Labor  
leadership in Australia's  
States and Territories*  
John Wanna & Paul Williams  
(eds.) UNSW Press, 2005,  
276pages



It was bound to happen. Although it must have been irresistible to publish an anthology about the royal flush of ALP State leaders, it's surely a book with a great chance of becoming very dated, very quickly. And so it was, for two of the premiers featured in *Yes, Premier* have already exited: Bob Carr and, far more unexpectedly, Geoff Gallop.

The essays in *Yes, Premier* focus on the leaders who have been at the helm in each Australian State and Territory since 2002 when, for the first time since Federation, each government has been held by the ALP. It examines how each premier or chief minister rose to power, and their political 'style'. It also provides personal details and biography.

Ironically, given his recent departure, the chapter on Geoff Gallop highlights the narrow professional experience of each office holder, before entering politics. This is most starkly drawn in one of the book's useful tables, which contrasts each premier's and chief minister's résumé. Here we see three journalists (Bob Carr, Mike Rann and Clare Martin) four unionists (Carr once again, along with Steve Bracks, Paul Lennon and Jim Bacon),

and three political staffers (Bracks and Rann, as well as Jon Stanhope). There's no significant business or private-sector experience, and minimal academic achievement. Geoff Gallop, whose qualifications include a D. Phil. from UWA and an MA from Oxford, is the one notable exception.

*Yes, Premier* has in several ways drawn out the similarities and differences between the premiers and chief ministers—such as the tendency of many to emerge after long periods in opposition, or initial terms of minority government. For example, despite the sometimes contrary tendencies of contemporary voters, many of the State and Territory Labor parties have transformed initial uncertainty into majority government and consecutive election wins. Usefully, Wanna and Williams continually ask to what extent Labor's good fortune in each State and Territory has been assisted by the Coalition's domination at federal level.

*Yes, Premier* is well researched using contemporary primary sources. It's not clear though that the conclusions reached in the final chapter, 'Leaders and the leadership challenge', are

supported by the preceding chapters. Certainly the featured leaders have similar trajectories, and the argument that crisis-management has become a political norm has merit. But it's less sustainable to argue that eight features, identified by Wanna and Williams, comprise a 'new form of state/territory leadership'. While some of these have clear application (such as 'embracing accountability', in part as a response to the cavalier approach to economic management that blighted many ALP governments of the 1980s), others are far less obvious.

Watching the current internal conflicts of the Victorian ALP as it administers State and Federal pre-selections, it is hard to argue that machine politics have declined, and that relative independence has been achieved from the traditional Labor power base, the union movement. This section of the book seems a long way removed from the reality of Labor politics that is being played out today in a relatively public fashion, for all to see.

In other ways, it's an idealized view of democratic processes as seen in State politics ('leaders have initiated and championed extensive processes of community consultation and participation, as part of the new politics of engagement more seriously with citizens'). Several of Wanna and Williams' eight features could equally apply to federal politics: it's arguable that John Howard shows 'cautious pragmatism', 'anticipatory and receptive leadership' and, most of all, 'the cultivation of ordinary populism'.

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