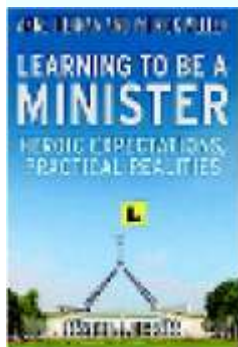




OFF THE SHELF

POLITICS



Learning to Be a Minister: Heroic Expectations, Practical Realities

Anne Tiernan & Patrick Weller, MUP, \$39.99
 Reviewer *Lorien Kaye*

THIS book was obviously written before the sudden demise of Kevin Rudd and published just before the election, but now it's impossible to read without being distracted by the ironies of what was written in what now seems another age. There are claims of unity in Rudd's gang of four (Rudd, Gillard, Swan and Tanner), talk about all the Rudd ministers having an appreciation of the need for accord and discipline, and a portrait of Rudd's cabinet as an important site for joint decision-making.

But one has to put these distractions aside to appreciate the serious analysis of the role of federal ministers. In this sequel to the 1981 book *Can Ministers Cope?* by academic Patrick Weller and *Age* journalist Michelle Grattan, Weller and new co-author Anne Tiernan cover subjects such as how ministers learn the job on the job, the media cycle and, related to that, the constant selling of the government, and relationships between ministers and the public service.

They have again interviewed ministers, staffers and public servants about their perspectives on ministerial matters. The direct quotations give a fascinating insight direct from the horses' mouths, anonymous horses from both the Rudd and Howard governments. If the surrounding text, in contrast, occasionally tends to be a little dry, that can be forgiven.