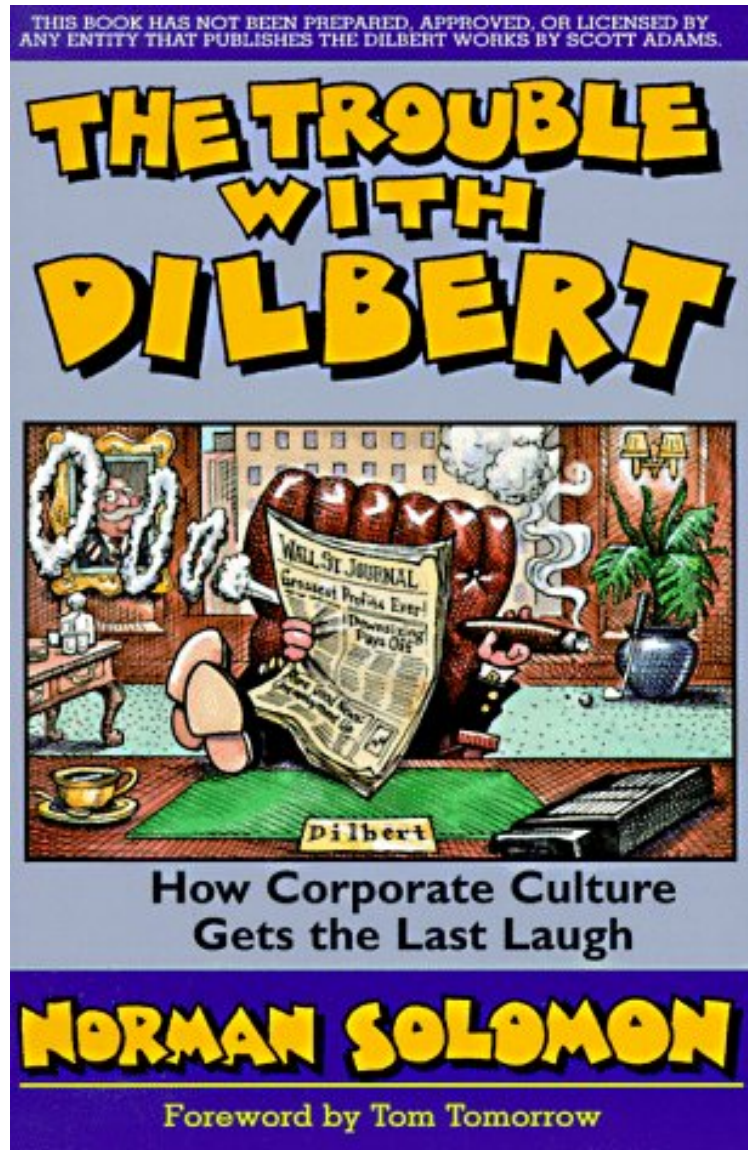


The Trouble with Dilbert: How Corporate Culture Gets the Last Laugh

Norman Solomon

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#3948758 in Books Common Courage Press 1997-09 Original language: English PDF # 1 .32 x 4.92 x 7.56l,
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Norman Solomon : The Trouble with Dilbert: How Corporate Culture Gets the Last Laugh before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Trouble with Dilbert: How Corporate Culture Gets the Last Laugh:

4 of 9 people found the following review helpful. Silly Marxist analysis not worth reading By J. Davis This book is

both unfair and irrelevant. The author is disappointed that Dilbert isn't the Communist Manifesto in cartoon form. The fact is that people like myself who work for a living like Dilbert because the stupidity the people show is similar to life in a big, inefficient corporation. The real world isn't like Solomon's neo-Marxist view, where the workers slave and are exploited by their corporate masters, women and blacks are kept under a glass ceiling, etc. Some of the author's claims are simply false: he incorrectly states that "Dilbert" never criticizes upper management; when in fact I saw a Dilbert cartoon recently where the top executives lock themselves in a room and starve to death because they are too stupid to dial out for help (and there are many other strips where top executives are ridiculed). Part of the book consists of irrelevant personal attacks on Scott Adams which do nothing to support the author's theory; we are supposed to be stunned that Adams wants to make money off the strip. I will continue to enjoy Dilbert, whose creator understands corporate life a lot better than a leftist critic writing from the sidelines. Having just purchased and read it, I must declaim: Workers of the world unite, save your money and don't buy the "Trouble with Dilbert!" 7 of 10 people found the following review helpful. Less Than Zero Stars By A Customer I would have rated this less than one star if I could. The book comes across like a bad term paper written by a student who's picked the wrong hypothesis and now grasping at threads and straws to support his theory, quoting everyone from Ralph Nader to Jimi Hendrix. Portions of the book take perfectly logical comments made by Scott Adams in the course of interviews and try to sensationalize them. For example if a group of corporate employees is no longer needed or doing unnecessary tasks Scott Adams would support "downsizing" in that case. It would appear that the authors believe that in this case the employees should still be kept on and probably in the same (unnecessary) capacity too. Sensational heading for this topic "Dilbert's creator, Scott Adams, actually favors downsizing." At other times the author takes tongue and cheek comments made by Adams way too seriously. In other sections of the book the author comes across as jealous and whiny. It would appear that the author believes that cartoonists shouldn't license their work to appear on magnets, mugs or the like, nor horror of horrors corporate handbooks (Xerox). Corporations should allow their employees to read anti-company material on company time and if they don't Dilbert should take up the worker's cause (I refer here to the fact that Intel blocked access to an anti-Intel web site on their corporate network - page 32-33). I'm reminded of a story told by author Wayne Dyer: when he was in college as part of a test he was asked to read and interpret a poem. He did so, but his professor told him his interpretation was incorrect. Later that semester Dyer had the good fortune to run into the poet who had written that poem a decade or two ago. Dyer told him what had happened and the poet in turn told Dyer that his interpretation was right on the mark. Dyer, all excited went to see the professor and mentioned meeting the poet and what the poet had said. The professor's comment? "He's wrong. He doesn't know how to interpret his own poetry either." I guess if you become successful enough you'll be hit by a frivolous lawsuit or in this case a frivolous book. It's very rare that I feel like purchasing a book was a waste of my money - but I feel this book was both a waste of my time and my money. 4 of 8 people found the following review helpful. The work of a guy who spends too much time reading funnies By A Customer The Trouble with Dilbert as simply the work of a guy who spends too much time reading the funny pages. Sure, Adams never presents a broad critique of capitalism, but Peanuts never really developed its critique of Freud much past mocking Lucy's penchant for curbside counseling. One can only assume Solomon's already hard at work on The Trouble with Blondie, in which he'll blast that strip's creators for going soft on Mr. Dithers and accuse them of oversimplifying the class mobility issues involved in Blondie's transition from oppressed housewife to catering business capitalist. One can also assume that Solomon and Tomorrow - who contributed the Forward to The Trouble - are unfamiliar with the history of American humor, in which the robber barons and the lunch-pail set often get tarred with the same brush. Adams has never been as interested in sending up either side of the class struggle - we'll assume, for a moment, that an appetizing option package hasn't muddied Marxism more in this particular case - as he is in lampooning the managerial excess and employee inefficiency that prevents any actual work from getting done. In the strip, as in life, consultants aren't on anyone's side except their own. And, in any case, capitalism is hardly the only economic system that dehumanizes workers in the name of systemic efficiency. Or hasn't Comrade Tomorrow heard anything about the latest grain harvest? In the tradition of harping purists, the Dilbert meme team obsesses over Adams' business activities. It's a given that the master's staple remover will never dismantle the master's cubicles, but Office Depot's willingness to spend US\$30 million to align its products with the least accomplishment-oriented imagery imaginable is insidious evidence of Adams' idea that nothing in the American office ever happens for the right reasons. His decision to let Xerox use the Dilbert crew in a training manual certainly seems like co-optation, but it could also be seen as further proof that corporate communications is an oxymoron and that propaganda has finally become more important than profits to the American corporation. Granted, making a point about a corporation's infantilization of its employees by selling them one's cartoon characters to use in training exercises is a bit more complex than most of the gags in Andy Capp, but one would think Tomorrow would get the joke. Unless, of course, the real joke is The Trouble with Dilbert. Sick of mocking employee-empowerment manuals and management handbooks, perhaps Adams himself started the Dump Dilbert movement in order to take shots at the sacred texts of liberalism - too-thin op-eds and too-thick cultural studies treatises. It would be quite a switch for him to hit one to the left, but after wading knee-deep in the jargon of modern management, what else is left but the semiotic swamp of the academy? Only this would explain the politically erect standards to which Solomon

holds Dilbert. Among the issues he faults the strip for ignoring are union-busting, corporate welfare, and pension-fund fraud. For that matter, why must the child-care workers who care for the Peanuts gang be blocked out of history? If those who criticize Dilbert are earnest, they would do well to remember that engineers are hardly assembly-line workers and that Dilbert mostly speaks to knowledge workers who don't have it so bad anyway. Sure, techie types are subjected to an endless stream of management doublespeak, but the risk they run of being bored to death sure beats a metal press accident. Then again, it's a lot easier to analyze the comic's page than it is to man the barricades. Courtesy of Dr. Dreidel

Cracks the code of Corporate America's Funniest Double Agent. Most readers assume Dilbert is on their side in a tough workaday world. But Dilbert is a fraud. Are you surprised that Dilbert's creator, Scott Adams, actually favors downsizing? Are you suspicious when Xerox uses Dilbert in its employee handbook as an offbeat sugary coating to help the corporate medicine go down? Are you tired of the sweeping portrayal of office workers as lazy idiots? Of the running gags that stay inside the moat of the corporate castle? Do you worry when "rebellion" and "revolution" are redefined as the ability to overcome corporate bureaucracy to make more money for your boss? Do you wonder why Dilbert avoids tackling so many real problems at work? If you answered yes to any of the above, you'll find Norman Solomon's funny and brazen attack more refreshing than a trip to the water cooler.

About the Author Norman Solomon's nationally syndicated column "Media Beat" is distributed to daily newspapers by Creators Syndicate and to weeklies by AlterNet. His books include "The Wizards of Media Oz: Behind the Curtain of Mainstream News," "False Hope: The Politics of Illusion in the Clinton Era," "Unreliable Sources: A Guide to Detecting Bias in the News Media" and "The Power of Babble."