

Schooling as an industry of economy¹

/critical reply-review/

Labor of learning: Market and the next generation of educational reform, by Alexander M. Sidorkin, Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2009, 202 pages, \$49.00 (paper).

Reviewed for *Power and Education* by

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In my judgment, the publication of this book “Labor of learning: Market and the next generation of educational reform” by Alexander Sidorkin is a big event for the field of education to celebrate. This book is revolutionary. I have read it several times and each time I get dizzy as, probably, people who originally read Copernicus’ revolutionary account of the Earth revolving around the Sun got dizzy from the imaginary rotation they felt they became part of. The comparison between Alexander Sidorkin and Copernicus does not stop there. In the long run, Copernicus’ account was wrong: both in details – the Earth does not rotate around the Sun in a perfect circle with the Sun being in the center, but rather in an ellipse -- and in the essence – the reason for the Earth’s rotation does not have much to do with theological justifications as Copernicus argued but rather with gravitational ones. Similarly, Alexander might be wrong in details or even in the essence, but, I would like to argue, similar to Copernicus, he has forever undermined the dominant perspective which places education at the center of the societal universe. Sidorkin’s word is penetrating (Bakhtin, 1999). Alexander Sidorkin must be replied to. I only hope that my reply-critique of Alexander’s arguments below is not entirely motivated by my Ptolemaic paradigmatic defensiveness (Zizek, 2008) and my misunderstanding of his intellectual brilliance.

Alexander Sidorkin takes a close look at the formal education of schooling from an economic perspective. No, he does not consider an economic aspect of the institutionalized educational practice of how education contributes to economy and the sociopolitical reproduction of the society – that has been done before him (e.g., Bowles & Gintis, 1976). No, he does not focus on the relationship between institutionalized education and the economy (e.g., Kerr, 1989). Rather, Sidorkin views schooling as one of many industries of the economy! Alexander argues that the mass schooling industry, as we know it, is not just an inefficient economic industry but also a very violent and abusive one because it is based not on market-regulated economic relations but on a peculiarly archaic economic set of relations: a hybrid

¹ Short version of this reply-review will be published in *Power and Education*. I am thankful to Ana Marjanovic-Shane, Katherine von Duyke, Mark Smith, and Bob Hampel for their feedback and discussion of earlier versions of the paper. I also want to thank the review editor of the *Power and Education*, Renee DePalma for invitation me to do this review.

of feudal, slavery, and reciprocity-based economies (common in family and village economies). His main argument is that students' school learning is a special labor. By "labor" he refers to an economic category -- recognizing that students' learning as unpaid labor that, in his final analysis, must be paid. Yes, at the end of his book Sidorkin argues that students have to be paid for their accomplished school learning.

The organization of the book follows Alexander's argument. He starts with an explanation of why school learning is labor and why it is unpaid labor. Then he criticizes modern mass compulsory comprehensive schooling and considers its emerging crisis. He criticizes the solutions provided by the Education Left (Progressive educators like Dewey and those who argue for intrinsic motivation) and by the Education Right (the notion of Human Capital, education as consumer good, accountability). Finally, he offers his own two solutions: "sensible" and "radical". His sensible solution calls for an intensification of the reciprocity-based economy of schooling where students are involved in what I would term an exchange of favors with their teachers, parents, and school administrators: the latter group of adults provides social services and goodies that the students want and in exchange, the students willingly become engaged in the boring, meaningless, and alienated labor of schooling, namely school learning. Sidorkin's radical solution involves paying money to students that will make the students unconditionally cooperate with the teachers' demands and learn the curriculum that the society thinks is important for the students to learn. Below, I provide my brief review and critical response to Sidorkin's argument and their consequences.

School learning as labor

Auto workers produce cars. They might not need these cars themselves but other people do need them as becomes evident in a transaction of a car sale. Barbers provide haircut services to their customers. The barbers might not need this service by themselves, but their customers who pay for the haircut surely do. By contrast, school students usually do not produce anything that other people need: their essays, term papers, accomplished assignments, classroom notes, tests, and so on are not usually needed by other people and not even by their teachers, by their parents, or by the students themselves. As Sidorkin pointed out, the products of students' school labor are pure waste despite occasional aesthetic or nostalgic value of students' work for themselves, for their parents, or for their teachers. On a systematic basis, the students' school work goes into garbage.

However, as Alexander Sidorkin points out, and as many of us educators concur, many students often experience their school studies as tiresome labor that is done for others and has to be compensated. They feel that schoolwork is done for the teachers (and, sometimes, for the parents), their study efforts having to determine their grades and credential awards (e.g., diploma, certificates). In addition, many students feel that their teachers' work and study demands have to be limited by the rewards they expect to get from their efforts. We, teachers, often mock these students' demands as false perceptions because we, teachers, believe that our students should study in school for themselves, and/or for their own current and future well-being. We as teachers believe that our students' study efforts and cooperation with the teacher are based on their self-interest (even though we find that they

seem frequently not to be aware of this fact here-and-now) and not labor, in an economic sense of this term.

Alexander argues that, from an economic perspective, self-interest is an interest that drives people – it almost sounds like a self-evident tautology but somehow it escapes educators and adults when thinking about schooling. Self-interest might have beneficial or harmful effects on a person's future (like smoking, for example), but it has to be perceived as an intrinsic drive by the person. It is rather unlikely that a majority of students in mass compulsory comprehensive schools perceive their studies as an interest that drives them. The teachers, parents, and politicians might tell students that they are wrong, that they must have this drive, but it does not change the reality that the students do not feel this drive and do not perceive schoolwork as self-interest. From an economic point of view, something has a *use value* only when a person is interested in consuming this something. When an interest is not perceived by a person, it simply does not exist – it is not an interest at all for the person. Similarly, a barber might try to convince a pedestrian on the street that she needs a haircut for her own current and future well-being, but until the pedestrian is convinced, her haircut is not in her self-interest.

So, does Alexander call for more educative propaganda among students about the benefits of their schoolwork for themselves? No. Instead, Sidorkin breaks with adults – teachers, parents, taxpayers, politicians -- and aligns himself more closely with students' perceptions. If schoolwork does not feel like self-interest to the students, it might not be self-interest.

If students' schoolwork is not needed by students, then to whom is it needed? Teachers? Of course, teachers definitely have a vested interest in schooling and students' schoolwork because it is the primary source of their own income and practice (i.e., teaching). However, Alexander Sidorkin argues, mass schools would not have become compulsory nor would so much be invested by the society in schooling to satisfy these needs of the teachers – the teachers are not that powerful in our society. So, Sidorkin comes to a conclusion that students' schoolwork is needed for the broader society and, specifically, for the modern economy.

Using Marx's analysis of labor, Alexander shows that in labor, not only the object of labor is transformed -- material things and other people (in a case of services) -- but also the subject of labor, the laborer him or herself, is transformed. If the latter transformation of the subject of labor leads to more productivity and a better product, then this transformation of the laborer is associated with the laborer's learning and growing experience, which can lead to more profit for the enterprise and more compensation for the worker. In the mainstream industries of the economy, the laborers' learning usually remains in the background of the labor. Although it might be appreciated and even encouraged there, the main focus of labor is on transformation of material objects and people. Self-transformation, learning, is *by-productive* and is important only because it can lead to future higher productivity and better and new products.

In the school economy, the background of the other industries, i.e., learning, becomes its foreground and the foreground of the other industries, i.e., transformation of things, becomes its

background. School students transform themselves to produce skills, attitudes, and knowledge in themselves that are needed for other people while teachers help them in this labor process. These new skills-, attitudes-, and knowledge- in-the-students are needed by future employers for successfully running their businesses, by citizens for civic engagement and democratic participation, by institutions for successful functioning of modern bureaucracies, by doctors for maintaining public health, and so on. The students' school learning will be *consumed by other people*² and, hence, it is needed by other people. Yes, it is true that students themselves might benefit from their school learning in their future but, as Alexander Sidorkin argues, it is only small part of the use value of their school labor that goes directly to the students themselves. Rather, what is probably even more important for calculating the use value of students' labor is that students as future adults are not the same as students as actual children. Sidorkin also argues that in the economy, potential and future interest is an empty abstraction that does not generate economic reality unless it is somehow present in the actuality. For example, I might not want to eat or be hungry now, but I might WANT *now* to have food for my future. Only when I have this actual want, food has use value for me and it can become a commodity. Many school students, argues Sidorkin, do not have this want in their actuality. But even when some students might have this want to secure their future with their current schoolwork, their private benefits are not comparable with benefits of the broader society. The broader society needs students' labor in the form of their schoolwork but it wants it for free without any compensation.

Of course, teachers and school administrators also contribute to the labor of the students' transformation. But as Sidorkin argues, the lion share of this labor is accomplished by the student him or herself. In the final analysis, students' learning occurs through students' efforts that are often, but not always, facilitated by the teacher in school. Public expenditure on schooling includes teacher's salaries and benefits but not compensation of students' labor for their own school studies.

My critical stance

1. I think Alexander's overall argument might have been clearer if he had compared mass compulsory comprehensive schooling and market-based schools. By the latter I mean formal education that people might buy for their leisure (e.g., a ceramic class), personal enhancement (e.g., a class on meditation), professional development and training (e.g., a class on Java for programmers), credentials to get a job (e.g., getting the Microsoft Network certification), and so on. In the former case of compulsory education, courses are required by others, while in the latter case of market-based schools, courses are chosen by the student him or herself. In the former case, there is a relationship of imposition; while in the latter case, there is a relationship of free transaction. In my view, these facts have deep consequences for educational practices. In the former case, both the course curriculum and instruction are unilaterally designed by those

² I italicized this because I think it's important for the reader to reflect upon this. Alexander Sidorkin turns the common notion of consumption of learning on its head here. It is an interesting response to the notion of the learning as container metaphor, implying that students consume knowledge to become filled with it, in order to be better people/citizens/prepared for their future, etc. (see my discussion below).

who require the students to take the school course. In the latter case, both the course curriculum and instruction have to be negotiated by the students and the course designers. The student perceives studying as being for him or herself and not for the teacher. I called the latter case “market-based schools” not only or even necessarily because adult students buy their education but because they are engaged in market-based relations of supply and demand. When this relationship is broken because, for example, the course does not satisfy the student, the student can freely withdraw from the course both physically and financially. Research on voluntary learning activities and self-initiated learning is needed to explore these issues.

Sidorkin’s argument stirs up for me an interesting relationship between the compulsory and comprehensive nature of mass schooling which is worthy of future research exploration. I wonder how possible voluntary nature of education can jump-start self-organizing and self-improving processes in education: self-improvements in school instruction and school curriculum. It seems to me that Alexander believes in the instructional self-improvement in voluntary education and, as I will discuss further does not care about the curricular self-improvement because he seems to believe that the school curriculum has to be unilaterally defined by the society in a top-down manner.

I also wonder how much compulsory, i.e., forced participation schooling, necessarily shapes itself into of *comprehensive*, based on its constructs of isolated disciplines and self-contained sums of decontextualized knowledge and skills, rather than being practice-oriented as voluntary participation schooling usually is³. And vice versa, how much does practice-based education, with its emergent and collaborative aspects of the curriculum and instruction, disrupt compulsory education and make it difficult? (further research of this is needed). I did not find any explicit comparisons like that but in my view, that can be important for Sidorkin’s argument.

I wonder if this comparison might upset Alexander’s argumentation. Indeed, a person who voluntarily buys his or her education for its use value apparently benefits from this education as a future consumer of its fruits more than the society. It seems to me that the proportion between the use values of the fruits of education for the future consumer of his or her own education and the society remains the same regardless of the compulsive or voluntary nature of this education (if we bracket the issue of the effectiveness of these two types of education). Sidorkin might tacitly recognize this critical point in his radical proposal as he wants to pay

³ See discussion of this interesting phenomenon in Tolstoy’s (1967) accounts of his innovative educational practices based on students’ voluntary participation in his school. The famous Russian writer Leo Tolstoy organized “Yasnaya Polyana” school (actually a set of schools) for his peasants’ children (some adults attended it as well) around the time of abolishing serfdom by Russian Tsar in 1861. His school project’s main principle was students’ freedom to come, not to come, or to leave any class at any moment. Tolstoy argued that teachers’ instruction and curriculum can be guided by the students’ (dis)engagement, attendance, absence, avoidance, and escape from the instruction. His other principle was avoidance of any pedagogical violence.

students not to compensate for their unpaid labor but to motivate them to learn the curriculum set by the society as important for it and cooperate with their teachers.

2. Based on this comparison of compulsory, forced-participation schooling and free-choice participation schooling, I wonder how much compulsory schoolwork is actual labor. Specifically, I question Alexander Sidorkin's assumption of use value of schoolwork. From the fact that the society claims that school learning is helpful for it, it does not mean that it is actually true. I think Sidorkin confuses ideological claims with reality, in his argument. By saying that, I do not mean to say that Sidorkin's overall argument is necessarily wrong – I am just saying that he did not consider in his book whether ideological claims about school learning's high utilitarian value for the society and/or economy is true.

There is anecdotal evidence that on average, students in mass compulsory schools learn very little beyond simple literacy and numeracy⁴, if at all. Not only do students often and quickly forget what they learned in school, but in addition, they often develop a wrong perception that they have learned and understood something when they actually have not. For example, in my class of 25 undergraduate preservice teachers, when I asked what scientific facts they had learned and understood well in their K-12 school, they pointed at the moon phases and the seasons. When I asked them to explain and model the moon phases and seasons, they provided self-contradictory misconceptions. Based on their (wrong) models, they could not explain the difference between the solar eclipse and the full moon phase (in both cases they placed the Moon between the Sun and the Earth on a two dimensional diagram or even in three dimensional simulation). They explained the seasons by the Earth's proximity to the Sun and could not explain how winter and summer can be on different parts of the Earth – on the north and the southern hemispheres, -- at the same time. My findings were consistent with the results of interviews that were made among the Harvard University graduates and faculty (non-physics majors) (Schneps, Sadler, & Crouse, 2003). But even when graduates can produce the correct answer, often their correct answers reveal "conventional knowledge" (Matusov, 2009) or "science talk" (Lemke, 1990) or "authoritative discourse" (Bakhtin, 1991) rather than understanding of the material. For example, when I asked my undergraduate students, preservice teachers, why fractions with different denominators are added in such a complex way as they added and not in a simple way, the high majority of my students told me that it is a rule, as if it is a social convention rather than a fact established through mathematical reasoning.

Sidorkin agrees that learning in the contemporary mass compulsory school is ineffective but this does not upset his argument, he thinks. He points out that mass compulsory schooling can produce waste, like any industry. Schools can make a lot of waste and even a lot of unnecessary

⁴ Even that is questionable. For example, based on my recollection, I can say that I, as a dyslectic, have learned to read despite my teachers' efforts, extremely painful and counterproductive to me, and outside of school curriculum. I have learned writing mechanics in school (mainly), but writing craft outside of school. I have learned numeracy in and out of school. Systematic research on in- and out-of- school learning is needed.

waste, but as long as the mass compulsory school produces use value for the society, students' schoolwork retains the status of labor, argues Sidorkin. However, I have an alternative hypothesis that school learning is more or less disconnected with anything outside of school. In short, it is useless. It might not have any use value for the society and for graduates themselves. Alexander makes a very good but unexplained point, "Lack of proven effectiveness has never been an obstacle to the use of an educational method [in mass compulsory schools, I would add – EM]" (Sidorkin, 2009, p. 97). I wish Alexander asked himself why schools and the society can afford such a breakdown in the practice. In my view, the issue is not that the school performs poorly or that students do not know much but that school performance does not affect the well-being of the society. Despite several past drum beats of school-caused national crises (e.g., "Sputnik era", "Nation at risk"), there is no correlation between national test scores and the performance of the national economy (Zhao, 2009). Similarly, as Alexander Sidorkin nicely pointed out, schools are one of the most undemocratic institutions in democratic societies -- this fact, however, does not preclude the societies to be democratic. The issue is not that school graduates do not know or do not remember algebra, but that the society can function rather well without a high majority of its citizens knowing algebra. I wonder why compulsory school insists on all of its students learning algebra, or anything else for that matter?! Can we think of learning in mass compulsory comprehensive school as ritualistic or serving for some other purpose (e.g., arbitrary sorting of people⁵ or baby-sitting young people excluded from economy) rather than for labor?

Sidorkin might argue that school learning is labor regardless of its actual usefulness for the society because in the economy, the most important thing is perception of usefulness. It does not matter how much offered goods and services might be actually useful for the customers or even if they actually do what is claimed they do. What is only important is customers' perception of their usefulness. Palm reading of the future can be charlatanism, but as soon as a customer wants to pay for it, palm reading is a commodity. As long as the society (i.e., employers, politicians, taxpayers, parents, future adults) believes that school learning is useful, schoolwork is labor. My counter-argument is that false use value is a distortion of the economy rather than an instance of economic activity. It can be compared with extortion or thievery that is often corrected through regulation and legal means rather than with an economic transaction, on which the economy is based. For example, selling indulgencies for past, current, and futures

⁵ For example, in ancient and medieval China, administrative positions in the Empire were filled according to poetry analysis exams. Functionally, of course, analysis of poetry had nothing to do with the job of regional administration but it provided meritocracy-based sorting of people that ensured both systematic social stability (mostly rich people could afford hiring private tutors to teach their children poetry analysis) and occasional social mobility (there were cases of poor peasants breaking into regional administration through their talent, perspiration, and auspicious local circumstances) that probably promoted an illusion of social justice in the Chinese Empire (Beck, 2007).

sins by the Catholic Church arguably undermined the institute of the Church (it is spiritual credibility) and corrupted legal, moral, ethic, and even economic foundations of the society.

Crisis of mass compulsory comprehensive school

Alexander Sidorkin asks a very good question of why students put their efforts into school studies. He approaches this question historically. In what he calls “classic schooling” for the elite that still exists in some private and public schools, students put in their efforts because schools can promise maintenance of their privileged status. It can also threaten students (and their parents) with expulsion and physical punishment (in past) and can deliver this threat. In mass schooling, this promise of maintaining privileges might work for the upper and middle class, but it has very little appeal for working class and minority students and parents despite its meritocratic ideology of social mobility. Sidorkin compares the latter with winning a lottery with very little odds and not a very big jackpot. The threat of expulsion is not very threatening for this population either because of the low promise of school rewards and the compulsory nature of mass schooling. The instances of corporal punishment are de jure and de facto down due to cultural value changes in the American society. Non-physical pedagogical violence provided by teachers and school administrators become less and less effective, costly, and risky as student-initiated resistance and counter-violence (including physical violence) against teachers and peers grow (Sidorkin, 2002).

As a result, Sidorkin claims that schools become less and less orderly and functional in extracting school labor from the students. Students’ unconditional cooperation with the teachers’ demands and motivation to do schoolwork is, in turn, diminishing. The amounts of efforts that the students are willing and able to contribute to their studies have been decreasing across the total school population, argues Sidorkin, but not to the same degree in different populations of the students and different schools.

Alexander Sidorkin insists that since students’ schoolwork is unpaid labor, it is often extorted from the students using extra-economic means. He makes an excursion into history to show how children were losing their legal rights with the emergence of schooling. Society has also developed a body of paternalistic ideology that turns upside-down the fact of school labor extortion into the idea that schoolwork primarily benefits the students themselves. Using Lenin’s definition of a socio-political economic class, Alexander argues students in mass compulsory comprehensive schools constitute a special economic class. Based on the analysis of economic relations, Sidorkin compares modern mass compulsory comprehensive schooling with the ancient institution of mild slavery.

When mass compulsory comprehensive schools do their best, Sidorkin claims that their success is based on a relational reciprocal economy (Alexander makes a very interesting tour into anthropological economy studies in his book). In our review of his previous book (Sidorkin, 2002), Smith and I characterized this reciprocal economy proposed by Sidorkin as an “exchange of favors” (Smith & Matusov, 2009, in press). According to this model, teachers and school administrators provide some favors to students – activities and relations that are socially valuable for the students -- and in exchange the students do their alienated schoolwork (which can be boring and meaningless for them). The

relational reciprocal economy of exchange of favors requires cultural understanding of its value and financial resources to support it. However, with increasing calls for school accountability and budget cuts – intensification of schoolwork while cutting teachers’ resources for exchange of favors -- this relational economy is currently getting approaching breakdown.

My critical stance

1. I think that Alexander Sidorkin’s description of mass compulsory schooling’s main vices -- teachers’ pedagogical violence, students’ non-cooperation with teachers’ demands, and their lack of motivation to do schoolwork -- and their connection to the economy of unpaid labor of school learning is the most interesting, radical, and original critique of mass schooling. Alexander’s critique is different from both individualistic critiques of school vices as having a few “bad apples” (i.e., bad teachers and bad students) and the Marxist sociological critical claims that the school’s main function is to reproduce a society (and that mass school’s vices are vices embedded in this reproduction). Sidorkin seems to argue that the mass compulsory school is exploitative for all kind of students, although this exploitation may take different forms and have different consequences for students of different social groups. Even if one does not accept Sidorkin’s main economic premises that schoolwork is unpaid labor, the fact that mass schooling has a compulsory legal nature means that schooling is not based on students’ consent and it is forced and violent by its nature.
2. Alexander’s claim of things getting worse for the relational economy of schooling in his new book is very sketchy, although he tried to provide an argument and evidence for that in his previous book (Sidorkin, 2002). I think more empirical research has to be done to check Sidorkin’s claim of a growing school crisis. “School crisis” is a popular genre (Hampel, 1986, pp. 148-149), and a suspicious eye on such discourse might recognize it as a mythology to mobilize the public for certain reforms and actions. We should go beyond plausible speculations with regard to arguments for “school crises.”
3. Alexander Sidorkin’s hypotheses that students do their school work mainly because of students’ “exchange of favors” with their teachers and good teaching based on a reciprocal relational economy is very interesting (see also, Powell, Farrar, & Cohen, 1985). But, in my view, it is just a hypothesis, a plausible and promising speculation. I could not find much evidence in both of Sidorkin’s books beyond anecdotes and fictional stories. More empirical research is needed. But, we should credit Alexander for generating these interesting hypotheses and need for their empirical testing. Also, the question that he has raised of why some students (and not others) put their efforts into the schoolwork demanded by teachers is very important and has to be addressed by educationalists from now on. He is right to point out that such a question is routinely ignored under the guise of deeply entrenched notions such as motivation.

Critique of Progressives

Alexander Sidorkin makes a frontal attack on Progressive Education. In my judgment, his critique of the Right in education is not as devastating as is his critique of Progressive educationists because, in the latter case, he undermines the core principle of Progressivism that school learning can and must be non-alienated from the students. He has not undermined the core of the Educational Right that students can and must be economic agents of their education in a capitalist economy, but only its particulars. Even more, his economic approach is arguably a part of the Educational Right paradigm⁶. Since I see myself as unapologetically belonging to the Progressivist educational paradigm (to one of its diverse versions), I hope my judgments of Sidorkin's critique of Educational Progressivism is not entirely Ptolemaicly defensive⁷.

I see two main blows to Progressive Education in Alexander Sidorkin's arguments. The main blow – the primary argument by Alexander – is that school learning cannot be non-alienated for the students on a systematic basis: for all students all the time. The second blow – the secondary argument by importance -- is that good, innovative teaching tacitly exploits bad teaching and cannot be successful without being contrasted with it. Sidorkin charges Progressivism for its utopian, non-economic approach that ironically can and, actually, does lead to more violence, false ideology, and exploitation.

Sidorkin chooses Dewey and the concept of intrinsic motivation in psychology and education as the Progressivist targets of his critique. He faults Dewey for his misunderstanding of the history, functions, and purpose of schooling. According to Sidorkin, Dewey viewed schooling as a qualitatively new form of guidance demanding new, complex practices that require lengthy and deliberate teaching. Alexander challenges this view by citing anthropological accounts. According to these accounts, predictably successful hunting requires decades of experiences and it is no less complex (but maybe even more) than many modern industrial practices. Alexander argues that schooling emerges as a result of the intensification of the division of labor in the society. These practices extract common fundamental learning that can be done outside of the unavoidable apprenticeship and participatory nature of learning-in-practice. In this vision, teaching is not inherent in or exclusive to schooling as Dewey erroneously thought. In comprehensive schooling, learning of basic skills and fundamental knowledge becomes separated and alienated from the practices. Learning in school becomes economically unproductive in contrast to learning in practice. Sidorkin argues that school learning cannot and should not embed itself in the practices, from which it is extracted (especially on a systematic basis), as Dewey called for. It is because in the practices learning is by-productive and in background, while in school learning is the main product of the activity and it is in foreground. Even

⁶ This is not a charge in Sidorkin's some wrongdoing, but just an observation.

⁷ "When a discipline is in crisis, attempts are made to change or supplement its theses within the terms of its basic framework - a procedure one might call 'Ptolemization' (since when data poured in which clashed with Ptolemy's earth-centred astronomy, his partisans introduced additional complications to account for the anomalies)" (Zizek, 2008, p. vii).

more, practices by themselves often do not need academic learning: one can be a successful gardener without knowing chemistry. Sidorkin shows that with the rapid development of information technology, new media, and, especially, the Internet, Dewey's claims that schooling is *the* remedy against communal localism, societal homogeneity, and authoritative discourse become less and less plausible (see, Gee, 2003, for more discussion of effect of technology on the society).

In a similar vein and passion, Alexander attacks psychological and educational proponents of the concept of intrinsic motivation in education as well as the concept itself. Sidorkin argues that the calls for intrinsic motivation as the driving force for students' engagement in schoolwork is unrealistic, at its best, and an ideological cover up of the unpaid labor of school learning, at its worst. In contrast to Progressive educationalists, Alexander Sidorkin argues that human curiosity is limited, human interest is situational, individualistic, and capricious. Students cannot be driven by their interests in an academic subject all at once, all in the same academic theme, all the time. Educators frequently address this problem by trying to make school learning fun. However, fun learning has an entertaining basis and its educational potential is limited. Sidorkin convincingly shows through his analysis of some specific Progressivist instructional proposals that not all academic themes can be made fun without either making academic learning superficial or effectively manipulating students to have fun (i.e., it is actually not fun for students but is an ideological cover up of the teacher's imposition of the curriculum).

In another blow to Progressivist educators, Alexander specifically attacks psychological research on intrinsic motivation that shows how extrinsic motivation undermines intrinsic motivation. He argues that in essence, the notion of intrinsic motivation is an ideological, narrative, and discursive construct hiding the participant's venal, mercantile interests in an activity from others and, sometimes, from the person him or herself. He reinterpreted Deci's famous 1970s experiments on corruption of intrinsic motivation by reference to the relational economy between the experimenter, a college professor, and the participants, undergraduate college students, and to the discursive and narrative nature of motivation. In this experiment, college students were invited to play with puzzle: the group who was offered money for this play continued working on it less likely than the group that was not. Sidorkin reinterpreted this finding using his relational reciprocal economy suggesting that the students from the second group might argue to them that they helped the professor-experimenter as their gift to him, "A silence about rewards triggers powerful mechanics of self-justification [in the research participants of the second group – EM]: I am not getting paid therefore this must be interesting; otherwise I am a dupe" (p. 98). Thus, intrinsic motivation is not a theoretical concept but rather a culturally specific ideological and discursive strategy of power negotiation.

Finally, Alexander Sidorkin insists that local cases of successful teaching are to be explained not so much by innovative Progressivist instruction and curriculum based on students' intrinsic motivation (although they might contribute in some local successes and gain some capital for the teacher in relational economy) but primarily by the relational reciprocal economy based on its contrast with poor teaching that the students experience. It is not by chance that majority of movies about heroic teachers portray them in doubles with contrasting bad teachers – it is not just dramatization but the essence of being a good teacher. Good teachers manage to gain a surplus of motivational capital for their students

through better satisfying their students' non-academic needs. On the average, students might provide the same schoolwork, unpaid labor of learning, but they can work more for a good teacher and less for a bad teacher while remaining at the same level of school labor for the total of their school efforts. The initial gap of favor capital available for good and bad teachers is increased by students moving their labor efforts from a bad teacher to a good one – for example, the students gain extra social status by performing better in the good teacher's classroom and by performing worse in the bad teachers' classroom.

My critical stance

1. I do not even know where to start! I found Alexander's explanation of the origin of schooling as intensification of division of labor interesting but extremely problematic. First of all, it is a reductionist account (like Dewey's one). I think schooling has not one but many origins and functions. These are based on synergy, alliances, and even controversies of its functions, other practices, and other institutions. Schooling can benefit these synergies, alliances, and contradictions that by themselves are changing with the historical and dynamic time and the locals (Cuban, 1984). Second, based on the existence of a huge disconnect, as I have described above, between the learning outcomes of school graduates and the practices that the school is supposed to serve, and on the peculiar societal tolerance of this huge disconnect, I doubt that increasing division of labor in industries has been the leading force for the origin of schooling (Kaestle & Foner, 1983). As my mantra goes, "More empirical and historical research is needed."
2. Alexander raises an excellent question: Can learning in a mass school be non-alienated from the students' agency on a systematic basis? His answer is no. I think that school learning is non-alienated on systematic basis in some innovative schools (e.g., Neill, 1960; Rogoff, Bartlett, & Goodman Turkanis, 2001); however, it is still an open question whether non-alienated learning can be unfolded on the mass scale. I agree with Alexander that we have not seen this case yet.
3. In arguing with Dewey, I think that Alexander Sidorkin is right that school learning cannot always be usefully productive and school learning cannot compete with utilitarian production (i.e., if one needs a product or a service, one should better go to a professional rather than to a student, although students can probably provide products or service cheaper). School learning can be productive from the utilitarian point of view only occasionally (e.g., students writing a letter to a politician that leads to a successful action useful for a community). In a similar vein, I agree with Alexander's criticism of schooling as knowledge production. Knowledge production occurs in universities, research institutes, businesses, and practices and not usually in K-12. It is more realistic for school learning to be a part of knowledge consumption (e.g., critical consumption of science or of advertisement or of entertainment) rather than knowledge production.

4. I respectfully disagree with Alexander Sidorkin that economically unproductive learning is inherently alienated for its participants. I disagree with Alexander's reductionism of human activity to (economic) production, the point that he borrowed from Marx. People are engaged in many process- rather than product-oriented activities (and their mixture). Non-alienated learning can be both process- and product-oriented. Of course, it is possible to say that in such process-oriented activities "process is product" and return back to productive activities but this claim diffuses important differences and is purely metaphorical rather than conceptual.

I propose that learning can be a hybrid of non-alienated activities listed above with non-alienated process-oriented activity being the primary learning activity. For example, my colleagues and I studied a complex robot-building Lego-Logo activity in an afterschool multiage program (Matusov, 2009, chapter 10). Our interviews with children and observations of their activities showed that their complex practice was a case of an academically and socially eventful non-alienated activity. It challenges Sidorkin's claim that academic learning cannot be eventful and has to be alienated. The issue, raised by Alexander, remains, however, open: whether or not it is possible to build a mass institution of learning based on hybrids of non-alienated academic learning activities dominated by process-oriented activities.

5. In his critique of the concept of intrinsic motivation, in my view, Alexander Sidorkin presents for his critique an ascetic, purified version of this concept and application to education, without any venal or mercantile interest. I am not saying necessarily that Sidorkin targets a strawman for his critique – such psychologists and educators might exist. However, I think Sidorkin goes too far in ignoring, if not actively denying, such two distinct families of human experiences as: 1) ownership for our activities, a sense of flow, authorship, pleasure, meaningfulness, autonomy, irreducibility that are often heuristically referred as "intrinsic motivation" *versus* 2) imposition, tiresome, boredom, meaninglessness, instrumentality, reducibility and so on that often heuristically referred as "extrinsic motivation." Since, probably, Aristotle, with his distinction between the final and the instrumental causes, there have been historical discussions of these two diverse experiences. I wonder if such experiences are universal rather than culturally or institutionally specific (although, different cultures might put different values on these experiential differences). Actual human experiences can be complex and usually present with some combination of both of these tendencies but one of these tendencies can be more dominant than the other and this dominance can be dynamic in time.
6. I think that Alexander is definitely up to something very important and promising when he offers a relational, narrative, and discursive view on motivation. I think that this is his important contribution to the field of motivation studies. However, I argue that like Voloshinov's (1976) critical view on psychoanalysis and Foucault's (1995) critical view on power, Sidorkin's critical views on motivation represent discursive and narrative

reductionism. In my view, it is safe to say that motivation has a relational, narrative, and discursive aspect rather than to claim that it is what motivation actually is. I respectfully disagree with Alexander that, “there is no access to motive without language” (p. 99). Motivation is given to us not only in language (i.e., discourse) but also in our experience, observation, and, probably, even in physiology. For example, Sidorkin provides an alternative, discursively relational explanation of Deci’s experiments that extrinsic motivation undermines intrinsic motivation. Sidorkin’s alternative hypothesis sounds plausible except it seems to be wrong because there are other experiments on extrinsic-intrinsic motivation that do not use any discourse of motivation with the research participants but their findings support Deci’s conclusion. Thus, Subbotsky (1995) reports that kindergarten children who spent their free time on extensive drawing pictures every day at expense of other available activities, when given toys as extrinsic rewards for each drawn picture, stop drawing in their free time when rewards were withdrawn from them, in comparison with a control group of children who like to draw who were not given the reward (these two groups of children did not know each other). It is rather implausible for me that the kindergarten children in these experiments might be involved in a complex internal dialogue about their motives for drawing as Alexander Sidorkin suggests for the college students, the participants of Deci’s experiments on motivation.

Critique of the Right

I think I am not the best person to review and criticize Alexander Sidorkin’s critique of the Right in education because I am not very knowledgeable about that. I wonder what specialists on and proponents of these views would say about Sidorkin’s critique.

Sidorkin’s critique of the Educational Right assumes that students are free economic agents in an educational marketplace. Sidorkin argues that it is not the case in mass compulsory comprehensive schooling. He considers two major versions of the Educational Right: 1) students as consumers in a voucher initiative; and 2) school education as human capital.

Proponents of a marketplace solution of problems with mass education argue that problems with education are rooted in the absence of market competition among schools for consumers, namely school students. If instead of giving public educational funds directly to schools and school districts, these funds were given directly to students’ parents in the form of vouchers, parents could initiate marketplace competition among schools for these vouchers. As in the case of the marketplace, not only the best schools and educational practices would flourish but the worse would naturally die and, on the average, education would be improved. Instead of administrative (usually top-down) reforms that usually do not work, mass schooling could be improved by consumers’ pressure for better education through their bringing or not bringing vouchers to schools. Schools’ marketplace competition for students’ vouchers creates a feedback loop for improvement of educational practice that is currently absent in public mass compulsory schooling.

Alexander Sidorkin argues that this solution would not work for at least two reasons. The main reason is that students in mass compulsory schooling are not consumers of some goods or service. What makes a person a consumer is his or her desire to have something that she or he does not have yet. On the average, school students do not have this desire. That is precisely why mass schooling is compulsory and not voluntary. *Consumerity*, an ability to be a consumer in a marketplace, is based, at least, on two important conditions: 1) to have an unfulfilled desire (an interest), and 2) to have freedom to pursue or not to pursue this desire. Neither are conditions for school students of mass compulsory schools. Using examples of peasant reforms in Tsarist Russia (Russian peasants were in somewhat similar position as school students), Sidorkin shows that given a choice, school students would probably try to minimize efforts while maximizing their outcome rather than intensify their school labor. Second, vouchers and school choice decision making will be controlled by the parents and not students whose cooperation in school learning is crucial. In a similar vein, from the fact that slave-owners might have choices where to employ their slaves, it does not necessary lead to more productive and intensive slave labor.

Not knowing much about this economic theory, I found Alexander's criticism very powerful. I could not find any counterarguments or doubts (which does not mean that more knowledgeable people might not have them).

It is difficult for me to present Sidorkin's critique of the Human Capital Theory – the theory argues that education can be student's investment into their future labor, -- because, I admit, I did not get his critique despite re-reading it and consulting with a few economists. Sorry. Mainly, I could not understand Alexander's argument for why students' school learning cannot be viewed as an investment in their future labor, "The worker's brain and body are the tools that first require construction, mainly at the worker's expense. Can one call this investment? Being paid later may be a form of simple (interest-free) savings, but not an investment" (p. 114). I still do not understand why not. If a person wants to become a taxi driver and for that learns how to drive a car and navigate in a city and then buys a car for her work, I would consider both learning to drive/navigate and buying a car as the person's investment in her future taxi driving business.

I suspect that Alexander Sidorkin might confuse (or not clarify enough) here mass compulsory comprehensive education and market-based education, I defined above. In my uneducated judgment, Human Capital Theory works well only when a person wants to invest in his or her learning to develop marketable labor power. Learning as self-investment in future labor is true in my would-be taxi driver example, but it is not true for a school student in mass compulsory comprehensive schooling. In the former case, learning is desired and study is initiated by the learner while in the latter case, school learning and study are imposed on the student. I wonder if Alexander Sidorkin agrees with my clarification of his argument.

Sensible solution

Alexander Sidorkin's sensible solution to mass compulsory schooling – with its pedagogical violence, students' disengagement, non-cooperation with the teacher's demands, lack of motivation,

low schoolwork intensity, and learning inefficiency – is to focus on and expand what works well in current schools. Since, according to Sidorkin, what works well in mass school is the relational reciprocal economy, this relational economy has to be strengthened and promoted. In essence, Alexander calls for a two-component school: academic learning and social service. The academic component of mass compulsory school can remain as it is: the same alienated instruction and curricula that might not and does not need to make sense to the students. It is simply public labor that the society wants the students to do for the society's sake. Thus, the academic component should remain (necessarily, according to Sidorkin) alienated and uneventful. The social service component must involve social services provided by the teachers and school administrators that students really want. The social services may involve special social relations with teachers, exciting fieldtrips, proms, homecoming, student theater, arts, exciting afterschool activities (not homework-like!), clubs, athletic games, and so on. This social service component is eventful and non-alienated for the students, although essentially non-academic in its nature. It occurs in many well-to-do high schools but the social service component is not always understood as the key for the academic component success in the exchange of favors relational economy of schooling. Both components coordinate each other through a reciprocal economy of an exchange of favors: the teachers need from the students their learning labor in a form of school studies, willing efforts, and unconditional cooperation with their demands; while the students need from the teachers social services and resources that only school can provide to them. More and better student school labor gives them more social services they want from the teachers; while less and worse student labor might cause the teachers to withdraw these services needed by the students. Sidorkin argues that the society must recognize the need for social service as an important function of schools and provide additional resources for it (including financial).

This sensible solution of reforming mass compulsory schooling has been provided in his previous book (Sidorkin, 2002). In this current book, Alexander does not insist that this is the best solution anymore because in his new view, the relational reciprocal economy has limits for improvement of efficiency. In the relational reciprocal economy, students are not agents for improvement of their labor of learning and they are not interested in intensification of their labor on their own.

My critical stance

I agree with Alexander that his sensible solution for mass compulsory schooling is probably a step forward to decrease school violence and students' non-cooperation. I also agree with Sidorkin's own later criticism of his solution. However, as I pointed earlier, I disagree with Alexander's claim about the unavoidability of academic learning alienation and its essential uneventfulness for the students (see more of our critique in, Smith & Matusov, 2009, in press). In general, I think that the reciprocal economy, described and proposed by Sidorkin, is a good component to a hybridity of the mass school relational system.

Radical solution

In my judgment, Alexander Sidorkin's radical solution to mass schooling's problems is radical indeed because in this solution, mass compulsory schooling will end as we know it. His radical solution is

two-fold: 1) economic and 2) legal. In sum, Alexander wants the society: 1) to pay students for their compulsory comprehensive education learning outcomes and 2) to equalize children and adults in their legal rights. This is pretty radical!

Alexander Sidorkin wants to turn school students into free consumer agents in the educational marketplace. For that, students are promised pay for the acquired skills, knowledge, and attitudes (but not for the students' efforts!) that the society finds important: economically, civically, bureaucratically, medically, and so on. However, this is not a compensation for the students' accomplished learning but a motivation reward for the learning outcomes: the pay has to be enough to motivate and prioritize the socially desired learning. Testing agencies can find out whether students possess these socially valuable skills, knowledge, and/or attitudes and only if so, the students will be paid. It does not matter how the students will achieve the mastery of their expertise and performance: through private tutors, though their own self-studies, through attendance of (multiage) schools (private or public), online learning and so on. The amount of pay for learning to the students will be defined, according to Sidorkin, by importance of this learning for the society (not all learning might be equally important), by importance of the pay for students' motivation, and by societal concerns of equality of the students' access to learning (especially, in a case of special needs students and students from poor families). Credited learning can be codified and placed on a special card that each individual might carry with them.

Legally, students have to be free from slavery-like bondage of compulsory education where they do not have legal, economic, and political rights. They must have legal rights to vote, work, drive, drink, stay or not to stay with parents, and so on. Their (and adults) level of reasonability (that was previously known as "maturity") has to be established not by age or any other arbitrary criterion but by a test of competence like a driving test (though use of the same testing agencies).

Alexander admits that his capitalistic marketplace solution of transforming students into free consumers might not be without problems associated with inequality and negative consequences of consumers' poor decision making embedded in free choice. However, he calls for evaluation of his radical model not by these problems on their own but by comparison of the problems in the current mass compulsory schooling and problems in his radical solution (or any other solution for that matter). After reviewing this comparison, he concluded that his radical solution is better and, probably, represents the future as problems with the current mass schooling will intensify and deepen in their pains for the students and the society.

My critical stance

- 1) There are several aspects of Alexander's radical proposal that are very attractive to me. First is the strong separation of summative assessment from education. Summative assessment, which has an important function to sort people into the inept and the capable ones, and to distribute "social goodies" accordingly, is not anymore a part of instruction. In Sidorkin's radical model, before testing, students' learning mistakes remain learning-teaching opportunities (i.e., formative assessment) and not a part of their punishment as it is currently in mass schooling. Teachers do not need to betray students' trust with grade

marks or any other summative assessment. Meanwhile, summative assessment remains important and uncorrupt outside of pedagogical processes (Matusov, 2008).

Another attractive aspect is that in Alexander Sidorkin's model students become active in decision making about their own education – they can choose where and how to study. It makes students more active learners. But, not active enough, as they cannot define what to study beyond choices provided by the society, which limits students' agency as learners and pedagogical innovations by teachers (see my critique below).

Finally, I am very attracted to Alexander's legal proposal of emancipation of children into citizenship by giving them equal rights as adults based on their competence rather than age. I agree with Sidorkin that activity of students' agency and protection from pedagogical (and parental and societal) violence cannot be reached without children's equal rights.

- 2) Since students' study work level will be intensified by monetary rewards in his radical marketplace solution (what about kids from wealthy families or who are ascetic and because of that who might not need money?), Sidorkin argues that there will be less need for teachers to produce the same or better learning. Somehow (and I admit that I could not follow his argument well) he argues that the societal expenditure for students' education will be the same if not lower as it is now. I think that Sidorkin's financial calculation of the monetary costs of his radical solution is guilty of "double-dipping," if not even "triple-dipping." First, it is unclear why Sidorkin uses current expenditure for public education (what about students who are currently in private schools and for whose education the society currently does not pay?!) for considering whether this publically spent money would be enough to pay students for their "learning labor". My understanding is that in Sidorkin's radical model, there are two major expenses for education: a) to pay students for their "learning labor" and 2) to pay teachers, tutors, testers, educational consultants, curriculum and instruction designers, financial officers and so on for their labor of providing guidance, curriculum, assessment, and managing education. Not only it is unclear whether the current level of public expenditure is enough to cover the first expense, but it is also unclear how much the second expense would be. I expect them to grow because Sidorkin's radical model leads not only to intensification of students' labor but also to higher accountability and criteria for success resulting, probably, in more guidance. This issue requires more financial analysis, in my view, than Alexander provides.
- 3) I have two major, but related, paradigmatic problems with Sidorkin's radical economic approach to education. First, we apparently disagree about the main purpose of education. Alexander Sidorkin seems to define the purpose of school education narrowly in what can be called "training" or "apprenticeship to a practice" – as partial mastery and partial competence to an existing practice that helps the students to enter the society and job market. The level and success of this mastery is judged by the practice of oldtimers through their proxy of the educational testers.

In contrast, I see the purpose of school education more broadly, as not only and not even so much to conform to the existing practices, but to critique and to transcend them as well. The education based on Sidorkin's goal (training and apprenticeship for reproduction of known activities and knowledge) has been referred in the field of organizational learning as Learning#1, while the latter (learning to transcend the existing knowledge and practices) is Learning#2 (Argyris & Schön, 1978). Learning#1 is about accomplishing somebody else's assignments; solving somebody else's problems; providing the correct answers as demanded, set, and judged by other, more powerful, people; fulfilling other people's preset, given standards; conforming for the existing practices; and unconditional cooperation with the demands of powerful others, – an academically uneventful assignment-based chronotope of conventional mass schooling (Matusov, 2009).

Learning#2 is about setting one's own and negotiating assignments; goal- and problem-defining processes; defining new contextual and social criteria for correctness and success; critiquing the existing practices; promoting students' creativity, originality, agency, ownership, and authorship – an academically eventful self-authorship chronotope of the Progressive Education. Learning#2 is what, probably, Bakhtin referred as "internally persuasive discourse" or "dialogue about final questions" (Bakhtin, 1991, 1993, 1999). There is a controversial claim that the modern economy and the modern society is shifting from demanding Learning#1 to Learning#2 from its workers and citizens (Gee, 2004; Toffler, 1980; Zhao, 2009). But even if it is not true, there is a humanist argument for Learning#2 type of education (Rogers & Freiberg, 1994).

My second paradigmatic disagreement with Sidorkin's radical economic approach is that even uncritical mastery of an existing practice cannot be achieved (or even to be prepared for) through decontextualized unilateral curriculum of pre-set, given, self-contained individualistic skills, knowledge, and attitudes set by the society and tested by testing agencies. I do not have space here to build this argument but, fortunately, it has been rather fully developed in the fields of situated cognition (Hutchins, 1995; Lave, 1988, 1991, 1992; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998), sociology of science practice and education (Latour, 1987; Latour & Woolgar, 1979; Lemke, 1990), the sociocultural approach (Cole, 1996; Rogoff, 2003; Wertsch, 1991, 1998), and activity theory (Engeström, 1987, 1990; Engeström & Middleton, 1996; Engeström, Miettinen, & Punamèaki-Gitai, 1999).

- 4) Using Alexander's own criterion for the evaluation of a proposal for practice reform, I want to conclude that his radical solution can be a step forward for my dialogic ideal of the Progressive Education that I sketched above. I think Sidorkin's radical market-based approach would dramatically reduce pedagogical violence but not eliminate it completely because of its unilateral curriculum imposition. It provides more instructional autonomy for good teachers to experiment with the practice and less intrusion by the state, parents, school board, and school administrators. I think it would be easier to be and become a progressive educator under Sidorkin's marketplace regime than under more totalitarian

current regime of mass compulsory schooling. It seems to me it would empower parents and practitioners to develop more experimental schools.

My conclusions

Alexander Sidorkin's book is extremely rich with new ideas, approaches, concepts, hypotheses, and, what, probably is even more important, new questions. It asks for honest justifications of the students' cooperation with the teacher's demands and of the students' motivation for their own study efforts. These justifications are important because they define social relations in schooling. Sidorkin warns us against uncritical acceptance of the easily available societal answers for these important questions because these easily available justifications can be ideological tools for student exploitation.

I think that Alexander Sidorkin's encyclopedic perspective on schooling as a branch of economy is very fresh, original, thought-provoking and, I would argue, necessary. Marxist and feminist perspectives on the family as an economic unit have been proven useful. For some reason, until Sidorkin's book, schooling has escaped this analysis. Up to Sidorkin's book, schooling has been analyzed as a contributor to the economy (e.g., in a reproduction theory) rather than economy itself. One might disagree with Sidorkin's version of economic analysis of schooling, but I think he has challenged all of us to keep this perspective in our analysis of schooling from now on.

My biggest challenge to Sidorkin's economic approach to schooling comes from his economic totalizing and reductionism (along with relational and discursive reductionisms and totalizing). In my view, economy, like discourse, power, social relations, and so on, present a *partial*, rather than totalizing view on the human reality. It is true that any human phenomenon can be considered from economic, discursive, power, and relational perspectives, but these perspectives are limited in their nature and require correction by alternative perspectives. Like for family, for schooling to be a part of economy is only one (but surely important) of many aspects. Throughout the book, Sidorkin (deliberately) avoids non-economic discussions of education (e.g., pedagogies, curricula, motivation, authentic learning). However, the fact that economic aspects have been neglected in previous analyses cannot justify a new negligence of non-economic (hugely important) aspects of education. In my view, economic totalizing reductionism is as similarly unproductive as ignoring economic aspects of school education. There can be several diverse and well- (or ill-) defined practice spheres and their interactions that shape the institute of mass schooling (Blacker, 1998, October).

It is very difficult to pinpoint Alexander Sidorkin on the political spectrum. His analysis employs Marx, Foucault, and Bakhtin. He utilizes leftist values of equity, non-violence, and non-alienation. He presents the Right marketplace radical solution to mass schooling. He provides libertarian ideas for the children's rights. It makes him complex and interesting. I feel that with this book, he has become a very important part of my internal and external professional dialogue and I hope many readers will share this sentiment with me. I admire Alexander's thinking out of box and boldness in bringing fresh solutions to problems of mass compulsory comprehensive schooling.

I encourage the reader to read and re-read Sidorkin's book because it is full of many exciting ideas, insights, speculations, and hypotheses that I did not review here due to the limited space of my review (but not because of their unimportance). For example, he provided a very interesting comparative analysis with the collapse of the Soviet economy and current policies on accountability. The book is directed to a broader audience interested in education, politics, economy, and philosophy.

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