

Research for whom? Labour sociology between observation, co-management and social critique*

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What is the relationship between labour sociologists and the workers they examine, and what function do researchers acquire within the complex field of force that is the workplace? These questions are addressed, mainly drawing upon the author's personal research experiences as a labour sociologist at one of the leading German institutes of labour research (SOFI, at University of Göttingen). After discussing in how far the social divide between researchers and their objects of research impede or rather support a thorough analysis of work organisation, and how labour sociologists can resist the tendency to be turned into (cheap) corporate consultants, the question will be tackled whether labour sociology can still claim political relevance today. The article ends with some reflections on how new strategies of research could possibly pave the way for politics of emancipation, on the shop-floor and beyond.

Key words: labour sociology, sociological case study, IT-work, work organisation, tripartist labour regulation

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