In an era of globalisation, social work is increasingly being reshaped as part of a ‘third way’ project to modernise the welfare state. The objective of this article is to unravel the nature of the reforms and analyse the challenges facing social work in the Nordic countries as the ‘tough love’ discourse takes hold. The United Kingdom provides an important reference point because the modernisation of welfare has had a significant impact on practice and set the benchmark for reform elsewhere. In this article an interpretive approach to knowledge production is adopted drawing on documentary sources including personal narratives, case studies and empirical evidence. Analysis does not follow a strict comparative design, but reflects an exploratory essay. It was found that the impact of the ‘tough love’ agenda on practice remains contested. It takes many different forms and influences the interpretation of professional culture rather than determine the precise configuration of everyday practice.
Introduction

During the late 1990s, an era of economic globalisation and managerialism, a new ‘third way’ social policy discourse was formulated by governments in the United Kingdom (UK), United States of America (US) and Germany. This approach created conditions for a new form of social work to emerge: one which demanded more from those who received its services, including a requirement for better behaviour and greater contributions to the common good (Lorenz, 2001). This development owed much to the intellectual ideas of Giddens (2000) in the UK and Etzioni (1995) in the US. It provided a modernising policy agenda for Tony Blair’s New Labour government in the UK, Gerhard Schröder in Germany and Bill Clinton in the US (Blair und Schröder, 1999).

The ‘third way’ was essentially a neo-liberal project with social democratic traits concerned with finding ‘new ways to balance the freedom of the global market with a commitment to social justice’ (Stepney, 2000, p. 6). It offered both continuity as well as changes in policy from the previous New Right administrations of Thatcher in the UK and Reagan in the US. In particular a renewed emphasis on distributive justice informed by communitarian ideals, translated into policy initiatives to promote opportunity and inclusion – what might be termed ‘the incorporation of critical concepts into a hegemonic discourse’ (Lorenz, 2001, p. 606).

Initially the prospect of ‘third way’ reform was greeted with ambivalence by policy makers in Scandinavia, on the grounds that it might undermine commitments to equality and solidarity (Jackobsson, 1998). However, by the end of the 1990s reform of the Nordic model of welfare was well advanced as part of a project to lower redistribution costs without undermining universalism (Kautto et al., 1999). This offered an attractive way of ‘squaring the welfare circle’, by tackling unemployment through labour market activation, constraining costs, whilst stressing the need for solidarity. In other words it was skilfully designed to increase social obligations without reducing citizenship rights. Such reform also offered a response to criticism that Nordic welfare had become too expensive and bureaucratic (Jegermalm, 2004). Thus the import of a ‘third way’ discourse, although potentially a bitter policy pill to swallow – especially for those brought up on extensive universal services, was presented as being the progressive face of a more market orientated and efficient welfare state.

Social work in the Nordic welfare states, acknowledging the diversity of practice within the region (Perttula and Pösö, 1995) and municipal differences (Trydegård and Thorslund, 2001), is premised upon democratically organised and run services designed to prevent exclusion and polarisation. However, the response from practitioners to the prospect of practice being reshaped by ‘third way’ policy reform, noting that many social workers are employed by municipal authorities, has taken different forms. In this compliance has been balanced with strategies of resistance. Significantly, social workers continue to support marginalized groups, and attempt to enhance their skills
and coping strategies as part of an inter-locking network of rights and obligations (Lorenz, 2001).

The objective of this article is to unravel the nature of the ‘third way’ reform and analyse the challenges facing social work in the Nordic countries as the ‘tough love’ discourse takes hold. The UK provides an important reference point, because the modernisation of welfare has had a decisive impact on practice and set a benchmark for reform elsewhere. An interpretive approach to knowledge production is adopted drawing on documentary sources including personal narratives, case studies and empirical evidence. The impact of the ‘tough love’ agenda on practice is assessed – noting that judgement at this stage must necessarily be provisional. Finally, an alternative approach based upon critical practice is identified (Fook, 2002).

The rise of the ‘third way’

The new ‘third way’ policy discourse has been characterised as being:

– pro-global market, where capital remains unrestricted and able to move freely throughout the globe;
– pro-a modernised state, cast in an image for new and vibrant economies (new Europe) and free from excessive bureaucratic regulation (old Europe);
– pro-welfare, once it has been successfully reformed and modernised. (Stepney, 2005)

Giddens placed an emphasis on the integration of such factors as ‘equal opportunities, personal responsibility and the mobilising of citizens and communities’ (Giddens, 2000, p.2). These were important communitarian themes that struck a resonant chord with Tony Blair and convinced him that the broader aim was to ‘accelerate the move from a welfare state that primarily provides passive support to one that provides active support to help people become independent’ (Blair, 2000). This meant that as a policy formula the ‘third way’ quickly reminded citizens of the need to balance rights with social obligations (Cox, 1998), and confirmed that the state would now demand more from those who received its services (Jordan, 2001). Thus, it is argued that such a policy discourse was attractive to other European governments, including those in the Nordic countries.

In terms of practical policy three elements can be identified: a moral-political communitarian crusade against irresponsibility and deviance; the creation of a strongly conditional welfare state geared towards inclusion through labour market activation and US style enforcement (‘zero tolerance’ towards ‘cheats, yobs, bullies and deviants of all kinds’ revealed in the policing of inner city areas and tough responses to problems, such as, benefit dependency, street begging, drug abuse, crime and truanting from school).
According to Jordan (2001) Tony Blair ‘tried to tell UK citizens a new story about themselves, one that turned their frustrations and resentments into positive action’ (p. 530). The UK government sought to renegotiate a new social contract with ‘middle England’ (hardcore supporters of previous conservative administrations of Margaret Thatcher and John Major) telling them that their hard earned taxes would be put to good use in a modernised and improved range of public services. In return the individual must become an active and responsible citizen. Hence, the ‘third way’ discourse tries to capture the moral high ground by combining fiscal prudence in economic policy with tough social policies. Both are designed to appease the political right, whilst the left are won over through initiatives to tackle exclusion.

‘Third Way’ social policy in the Nordic welfare states

Before discussing the absorption of ‘third way’ principles from the UK, it should be acknowledged that there is some argument as to whether the long established Nordic approach to labour market activation, which was adopted by the EU Commission in 1997, influenced UK policy rather than the other way round. In reviewing the evidence Daguerre and Taylor-Gooby (2004) conclude that ‘despite some influence from Scandinavia ... the US remain the continuing source of ideas for Britain’ (p. 29).

The application of a ‘third way’ discourse to welfare states in Europe requires very careful analysis (Lorenz, 2001). Whilst there are undoubtedly divergent responses to a range of common problems, such as unemployment, long term care of older citizens and so on, paradoxically such responses may result in quite similar policy outcomes (Stepney, 2000). This is certainly the case in the Nordic countries where their distinct welfare traditions and political orientations act as a bulwark against the wholesale adoption of Anglo-US style prescriptions. However, the Nordic welfare states have attempted to improve life chances through redistributing resources and regulating risks, and this has led to different national policies and class related outcomes (Svallfors, 2004). Similarly the transition towards gender equality also reveals some important differences (Ellingsæter, 1998).

Nonetheless, a certain underlying policy consensus exists reflecting key features of the Nordic model:

- extensive range of democratically organised and run public services decentralised to municipal authorities;
- commitment to universalism despite increasing marketisation and the growth of New Public Management;
- relatively generous social benefits targeted at individuals rather than families or households;
- high social insurance contributions and direct taxation progressively organised for redistribution;
In the UK and USA the state is often seen as an imposition, a negative force signifying surveillance or control, exercised on behalf of powerful elites. However, in the Nordic countries there is a much greater degree of consensus that the state acts more constructively on behalf of all citizens. In Britain social policy is individualistic but targeted at families or households, whereas in the Nordic model, taxes and benefits are individually assessed and a much more collectivist approach to social planning can be found.

The Nordic countries have been referred to as ‘social insurance welfare states’ but this does not recognise the extent to which they have become ‘social services states’ (Anttonen et al., 2003), constructed on the basis of municipal diversity (Trydegård and Thorslund, 2001). These social services are now under threat as globalisation increases the pressure on all nation states to reduce costs, creating a climate of welfare retrenchment. With generous living standards and high social costs the Nordic countries cannot compete (on costs alone) with the low wage economies of Central and Eastern Europe. They therefore see it as essential to upgrade skills to compete in the global knowledge-based economy to maintain their reputation for producing high quality products. Investment in welfare has traditionally been seen as contributing to this and job activation combined with employment protection is seen as mutually compatible, provided the programmes are positively organised without the stigma associated with residual UK/US schemes. One crucial difference is that in the Nordic countries social workers are directly involved in supporting job activation.

In Finland the recession of the early 1990’s led to a decentralisation of responsibility down to each municipal authority. According to Anttonen (1998) the notion of ‘active citizenship’, a necessary ingredient in the development of ‘third way’ thinking, gained ground during the 1990s and received support across the political spectrum. However, it was incorporated into a strong civil society and not allowed to weaken social citizenship. Whilst globalisation has undermined the consensus elsewhere in Europe conferring more limited social rights, in Finland there was an effort to ensure that ‘welfare, democracy and social integration remain connected, no matter what form the delivery of services may take’ (Lorenz, 2001, p. 603–604).

In Sweden institutional reform of the welfare state, to combat unemployment and improve efficiency, occurred during the 1990s influenced by the twin policies of市场化 and managerialisation. There has also been increasing decentralisation, outsourcing and higher levels of user-financed services even though the majority of social workers remain ambivalent about privatisation (Dellgran and Höjer, 2005). However, the overall effect has been a change from a public to a more pluralist welfare model.

- substantial investment in education and training;
- extensive system of social transfers.

(Kautto et al., 1999)
This has resulted in the incorporation of voluntary organisations, family and community networks into Swedish policy making, without any ostensible recognition at the formal policy level (Petersson, 2005). Services for older persons and growing inequality in access to primary care reveal these trends (Whitehead et al., 1997).

Central to Swedish welfare reform has been the growth of managerialism, which has altered thinking about rights and circumscribed access to public health care (Petersson, 2005). Attitudes to welfare have been found to be multidimensional, although class differences remain significant (Svallfors, 2003). There is also concern that ideological fragmentation and recommodification (increasing use of the market) will produce more inequalities, reduce middle class support for the welfare state and undermine the case for reform (Svallfors, 2004). Pension reform has moved from a defined benefits to a defined contributions scheme reflecting ‘third way’ moves to increase work incentives (Anderson and Meyer, 2003). In Sweden it would seem that the day of the managerial welfare state may have finally arrived, with social workers locked into a system where they are required to act more as care brokers than offering direct forms of support. However, they still exercise discretion in the area of social assistance although this may lead to variation in the treatment of similar cases (Minas, 2005).

In Denmark labour market activation has been a central and indeed leading component of welfare reform. According to Torfing (1999), Denmark has achieved something of a ‘miracle’ in reducing unemployment through adopting an offensive workfare activation policy whilst keeping inflation low. However, as employment levels increase, the pool of unemployed workers becomes less skilled and hence there is ‘a greater use of workfare for social assistance’ (Handler, 2003, p. 236). This has meant welfare being used as a work-test and that anyone applying for social assistance must show that they do not have a ‘suitable offer of work’. Research suggests that enforced participation with sanctions does have a motivational effect on participants to seek employment, but did not increase re-employment rates and may even ‘impair the positive mental health effects of the programme’ (Malmberg-Heimonen and Vuori, 2005, p 463).

As in Sweden, the Danish approach creates something of a dilemma for social workers who are directly involved in supporting people through skill enhancement programmes where this may no longer be feasible. Hence, the quality of the activation for those groups with few job skills, such as refugees, has been criticised (Torfing, 1999), alongside a worrying rise in the level of anti-immigration rhetoric in public debate about state welfare.

A more US style approach has been evident in Norway where workfare is officially for social assistance claimants but used as a policy of last resort (Handler, 2003). However, municipal authorities have considerable discretion and, as Handler (2003) notes, can either use workfare to fill municipal authority jobs at about one third the normal wage, or as a means to discourage the ‘undeserving’. According to Lødemel and Trickey (2001), Norway has a two tier ‘social division of activation’ – the majority are in ac-
tive labour market programmes with regular wages, training and social work support, whilst a minority of residual groups are subject to harsher US style workfare.

This raises ethical and moral issues for social workers concerning whether the obligation to follow administrative gate-keeping rules compromises their professional freedom to act in the best interests of their clients. Empirical research suggests that professional autonomy is valued by workers and helps them find solutions that do not undermine ethical norms (Kjørstad, 2005). At a time when a neo-liberal and managerial discourse is gaining ground in Norway the ‘third way’ may help to institutionalise such dilemmas.

The ‘third way’ and the paradox of reshaping social work as ‘tough love’

A number of questions can be raised about the extent to which social work has been reshaped by the ‘third way’ discourse. One approach is to recognise a central paradox at the heart of the ‘third way’ – how to balance measures for inclusion, through activation programmes, with those for enforcement (to raise standards), social protection and control.

This paradox points to a more fundamental reworking of the relationship between the state and its citizens in the new ‘third way’ welfare state, with social workers in the front line. According to Jordan (2001), the old UK welfare state was ‘bureaucratic, regulated and rule bound, whilst New Labour’s modernised welfare state is concerned with throughput, achievement and change. The old relied on control to restrain class conflicts, the new is built on motivation. The old claimed but failed to treat everyone equally, the new is premised upon opportunity, responsibility and diversity’ (adapted from Jordan, 2001: 540).

The paradox highlights an Achilles heel in the ‘third way’ discourse and one that could have serious consequences for Nordic social workers. For example, in the UK, the government soon found that it could not trust public sector professionals. Many social workers were sceptical about the reforms, and seen to be too closely associated with the old order (commitment to old Labour style socialism), and thus prone to question and challenge the new neo-liberal/social democratic orthodoxy. In the event, the problem of professional resistance was overcome by the introduction of performance targets, national service standards and a league table culture. Municipal social services departments, where the majority of UK social workers are employed, were subject to periodic appraisal and awarded star ratings. Failure, signified by a zero star rating, could ultimately result in state services being taken over and run by a private company. This not unnaturally created tensions and further resistance from staff, resulting in variable compliance.

This produces yet another paradox where partial compliance creates an ‘implemen-
tation gap’ in ‘third way’ welfare policy (Jordan, 2001). At the heart of this gap is a more fundamental crisis of solidarity in the welfare state, which expresses itself as an identity crisis amongst front line staff. Social work traditionally promoted ‘the moral message of adjustment and integration ... upon which the stability of society depended (Lorenz, 2001, p. 606). However, that moral message has now been weakened, paradoxically by the very methods used to promote it. Under a marketised and managerial system the capacity for professional discretion and judgement is replaced by routinised procedures, dominated by business plans and budgets.

The following represents the views of a UK social services manager: ‘the person I need to see most is the Finance Officer. As the culture of my work has changed, so “my speak’, my attitude has changed. At the end of the day the last thing I want on my epitaph is “he filed the last invoice’, because that is what it feels like. Before you could measure a team leader’s worth by the quality of supervision… now you feel that you are your own kind of business unit’ (cited in Harris, 2005). The reconstruction of social work in the mould of being more demanding and coercive, the parameters of ‘tough love’ practice, became a necessary part of the reforms.

Tough Love Social Work

‘Tough love’ social work as a prescription for a new style of practice reflects a slogan that derives from ‘third way’ social policy. However, it is not as clear-cut as its name might suggest. The ‘tough’ element requires social workers to be challenging, assertive and more demanding of those that seek their help. But this is not something new. In fact practitioners have always balanced their caring and support role with the need for monitoring, protection and control. What has changed is the extent to which centrally determined targets now influence practice objectives and the style of intervention.

The ‘love’ dimension is associated with social work’s historical befriending tradition, captured beautifully by the notion of social work as ‘the comfort of strangers’ (Clarke and Cochrane, 1998). This reminds me of a story about a young hospital social worker who was called down to a ward where an elderly gentleman, a vagrant or rough sleeper, had come in out of the cold, found an empty bed, climbed in and fell asleep. He was later discovered by a nurse and a doctor was summoned ... fearing that he may prove troublesome the duty social worker was called. The social worker went down and attempted to gently wake the man. He eventually opened his eyes, smiled and asked what the young man’s profession was. On hearing that he was a social worker he took his hand and whispered “I can remember a time when social work was called the comfort of strangers’, and promptly went back to sleep (The young hospital social worker was of course, the author).

The befriending role has become a casualty of the developments referred to above. Part of the problem may be the limited number of examples of befriending practice in municipal authorities, although this may be found in the voluntary sector in the UK.
and third or community sector in the Nordic countries. Combining toughness with compassion, street credibility with social concern and integrating different methods to achieve negotiated change are fast becoming qualities that are in rather short supply – in social work as in many other professions.

In her research Metteri (1999) outlines how institutional practices shape human experience in the cases of clients denied assistance from the Finnish social insurance system. ‘The problems of social deprivation, the phenomenon of falling between the cracks and inequity have become more acute than ever in Finland’ (p. 269). What is commonly at stake in complex denial cases are not only matters of individual livelihood but issues of human rights. And in a climate of ‘tough love’, where justice has been recast in terms of opportunity and inclusion, social workers will find it difficult to advocate a more enabling interpretation of assessment protocols. Those who claim that their incapacity prevents active citizenship are subject to harsher assessment (Metteri, 2005).

Hospital discharge planning provides a good test of whether the quality of care for older people and extent of user involvement in care planning has been affected by these policy trends. In Sweden a rapid throughput of patients has occurred, as in the UK, that has put intense pressure on practitioners to see ‘discharge as a continuum, part of a patient’s career in health care’ (Lundh and Williams, 1997). The study concluded that nurses and social workers can play a key role in mobilising resources, such as home helps and community members, but that this remains undeveloped in Sweden – a preventive process that as in the UK will not be helped by recent policy change (Ford and Stepney, 2003).

It is impossible at this juncture to assess the extent to which the ‘tough love’ agenda may be impacting on service user/social worker interactions. One area where the ‘third way’ discourse might be expected to bite is in work with immigrant families. As Anis (2005) notes conflicts about child care in family interactions may be explained by pointing to “cultural differences’ between the client and the expectations of social workers. However, what is less acknowledged is the extent to which indigenous Nordic culture may be influenced by ‘third way’ values, and in turn shape practice expectations. ‘Cultural differences’ may then offer an important but misleading explanation for conflict. As Anis (2005) notes, ‘it is the interpretation of culture rather than culture itself which is significant’ (Anis, 2005, p. 14) and that interpretation is now influenced by the ‘tough love’ agenda. Similarly, a caring and person-centred approach, highlighted by research as the most effective (Jonsson, 1998), is also under threat from the same forces.

These are difficult and challenging times for social work. Many practitioners find it difficult to do ‘traditional social work’ in their role as care managers, paradoxically due to excessive bureaucracy and what might be termed the ’McDonaldisation of practice’. This viewpoint surfaced at a recent conference on the changing face of municipal so-
cial work in Finland, ‘if you want to become a counsellor don’t come into social services. If you want to be an assessor, a purchaser of services and a care manager, which is a more managerial, monitoring and reviewing... then these are the skills needed by today’s social worker’ (cited by Harris, 2005).

Social work as ‘tough love’ has therefore not only arrived, but is beginning to shape its professional culture. It is influencing the view practitioners have of themselves and how they make sense of their work – with services, measured by outputs and ranked by efficiency targets. Support is increasingly available to those clients who have tried to be self sufficient and failed (Jordan, 2004). These are the elements of ‘tough love’ practice, that are no longer involved in the more enabling and preventive work in the community contributing to cultural processes of inclusion. Community social work has migrated to the voluntary sector in the UK, but continues to flourish in the third sector in the Nordic countries (Roivainen, 2004).

Although traditional social work was undoubtedly paternalistic and controlling, and failed to treat diverse groups equally, it did have distinct strengths. A particular strength was the capacity to go where other professionals fear to tread, into hostile territory in the dark side of town, trying to find solutions to a client’s complex and difficult problems. The range of methods it used, and efforts to humanise the bland face of municipal bureaucracy, all cut across the administrative boundaries of the state. These attributes once acknowledged as a strength are now seen by government as a weakness (Jordan, 2004). Hence, UK social work has been accorded a restricted role within the parameters of ‘third way’ welfare – used as a means of enforcing and regulating high risk clients and problematic communities. Here the profession is being used not so much ‘for the achievement of inclusion but in the management of exclusion’, specifically of those considered to be ‘unintegratable’ (Scherr, 1999, p. 21). This clearly has important consequences for the road social work in the Nordic countries may find itself travelling down.

Conclusions
Judgement about the precise impact of the ‘tough love’ agenda on practice in the Nordic countries must necessarily be tentative and provisional. It is likely to take different forms and influence the interpretation of professional culture rather than determine the precise configuration of everyday practice – a practice characterised by considerable diversity constructed on a foundation of solidarity. Social work remains an interpretive activity with strong collective norms, probably more so in the Nordic countries than in many other European welfare states. Hence it would be wrong to suggest that ‘tough love’ policy simply creates ‘tough love’ practice. The situation is more complex than this and the argument here is that the new policy discourse is reshaping professional culture, but not in any routine way. In everyday practice encounters new interpretations are actively constructed but alongside established principles – so ‘tough
"tough love" might paradoxically appear to support rather than replace the culture of solidarity and equality.

In this article it has been argued that the global economy has intensified market competition and is exerting strong downward pressure on all Nordic welfare states to reduce costs. Social work has become caught up in this policy shift and in the UK reshaped into a more enforcing and regulatory profession assessing and managing marginalised groups. But 'tough love' practice is not confined to the margins, it is now reordering work with mainstream clients and citizens with potentially damaging results.

The challenge facing social work in the Nordic welfare states, as elsewhere, is the need to develop a more caring, critical and person–centred approach informed by research and practice theory. Further, the efficacy of critical practice is based upon mutual respect and empowerment. The challenge for social work is to find ways of demonstrating how this can be more effective than targeted welfare and the current ‘modernise or be damned’ mentality. In the Nordic countries social workers have the benefit of learning from the mistakes made elsewhere and could try to reduce the impact of such policies before they become established practice.

The choice is a familiar one between consumerism and transformation and the need to enhance what Fook (2002) refers to as the critical tradition in social work. A more critical stance might enable social work to recapture its soul, stripped out as unhelpful in the ‘third way’ discourse, but crucial for reasserting the more emancipatory traditions of the profession (Stepney, 2005). Critical practice must be relevant to the problems service users face, demanding of itself, sensitive to cultural contexts and critical of injustice in all its forms. The Nordic countries may be where the practitioner, subdued by a diet of 'tough love', finds the inspiration to engage in a process of more emancipatory change. And like the traveller in the Robert Frost poem (Frost, 1915), who took the less travelled road, this could make all the difference.

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Sosiaalityö 'ankarana rakkautena': sosiaalityön uudelleen määrittelyyn paratiisirakenne

Globalisoituvissa yhteiskunnissa sosiaalityön uudistus on ollut muokkaamassa uudelleen osana 'kolmanen tien' projektia uudistamaan sosiaalityön kohtaamia haasteita, kun 'ankarana rakkauden' diskurssin vaikutus on muistettu yleisesti. Iso-Britannia tarjoaa keskeisen vertailukohdan, koska siellä hyvinvointipalvelujen uudistukset ovat muuttaneet merkittävästi työelämän käytäntöjä ja koska ne ovat toiminut tärkeänä kriteerinä muiden maiden uudistuksille. Tämän artikkelin lähestymistapana on tulkinnallinen näkökulma tiedon tuottamiseen. Artikkelissä käytetään erityisesti lähestymistapanaan ja vertailuun dokumenttia, kuten lähetystöaineistoa ja tapaustutkimuksia. Analysi on noudattaessa tukea vastaavia otteita ja saa vaikuttaa ennen ja äänestämistä, kun koko yhteiskunnan käytäntööitä on keskusteltava ja otettava huomioon.