

# Challenging and potentially dangerous times

(an NCTE news release)

Members of the National Council of Teachers of English have elected Sheridan Blau, professor of English and education at the University of California at Santa Barbara, to serve as vice president. (Blau, who also directs the South Coast Writing Project and who serves on the National Writing Project Advisory Board, will take office during NCTE's 85th Annual Convention in San Diego, California, will become president-elect a year later, and will assume the presidency at the 1997 Annual Convention.)

A former high school English teacher in Trenton, New Jersey, Blau is the author of numerous articles on composition theory and the teaching of composition and literature, and on professional development for teachers. He is a senior research associate with the National Research Center on Literature Teaching and Learning and is the director of the National Literature Project Network. Within NCTE, Blau is a member of the Standing Committee on Testing and Evaluation and serves on the executive committee of NCTE's Conference on English Education.

*Blau believes humanities educators are facing challenging and potentially dangerous times, with what he terms the traditional goals and content of literary study being hotly debated within both political and educational circles. At the same time, he says, individual parents and watchdog groups are attempting to control what children are reading and writing in schools based on their own views about what is ideologically*

*acceptable, rather than what is educationally sound.*

"Much of the current debate represents much-desired parental involvement in education and overdue public disgust at scenarios of gross bureaucratic mismanagement of educational resources," Blau says, adding that the threat to English education does not come from the debate itself or from possible reallocations of public resources that result from thoughtful deliberations. "The danger lies not in dissent but in a descent from reasoned civil discourse to propagandistic bullying. Policy decisions shaped by the rhetoric of self-righteousness rather than reasoned debate cannot serve the public interest and will not command public respect."

Blau applauds the assistance NCTE currently offers to teachers and schools facing irresponsible censorship attempts and would like to see the Council's efforts to defend literacy and academic freedom broadened. □

● *The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), the world's largest subject-matter educational association, is dedicated to improving the teaching and learning of English and the language arts at all levels of education. Its membership is composed of elementary, middle, and high school teachers, supervisors of English programs, college and university faculty, teacher educators, local and state agency English specialists, and professionals in related fields.*

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## Terrible events

In his July 95 editorial HARRY BRENT, Editor of the *Quarterly Review of Doublespeak*, made the following observations on doublespeak as used in the heated American debate on abortion:

Some readers have asked me what I thought the most important doublespeak topic of the year. This is a hard question to answer, but if pressed I would probably have to point to the language used in the debate surrounding abortion, since in the context of that debate several people have been murdered by anti-abortion zealots. *QRD* readers may have noted

that the runners up for the Doublespeak Award last year included some anti-abortion activists who equated abortion with murder and who thus concluded that "murderers" should themselves be murdered. Although this material appeared in the January issue of *QRD*, the award itself was given the previous November, and the nomination (which I myself wrote and submitted) was written in September, well before a series of new acts of violence against abortionists, including murder, took place. I do not want to sound like Louis Rukeyser who likes to say "I told you so" about the stock market, and I would gladly have all of this material erased from *QRD* if any one of the individuals who were killed could be brought back to life. But it is almost as though this