Whatever can go wrong
will go wrong.

attributed to Edward A. Murphy

Murphy was an optimist.

authors of lock-free programs

LOCK FREE KERNEL

Literature

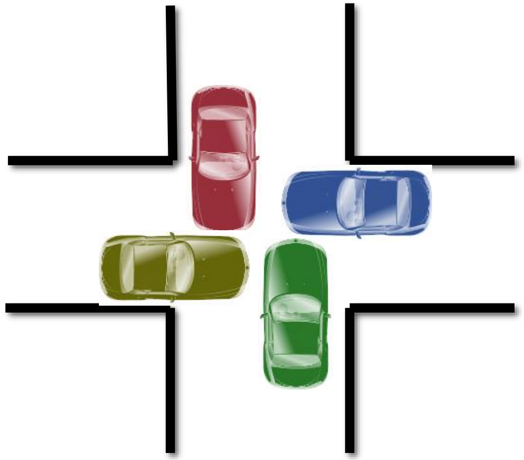
Maurice Herlihy and Nir Shavit. *The Art of Multiprocessor Programming*. Morgan Kaufmann Publishers Inc., San Francisco, CA, USA, 2008.

Florian Negele. *Combining Lock-Free Programming with Cooperative Multitasking for a Portable Multiprocessor Runtime System.* ETH-Zürich, 2014. http://dx.doi.org/10.3929/ethz-a-010335528

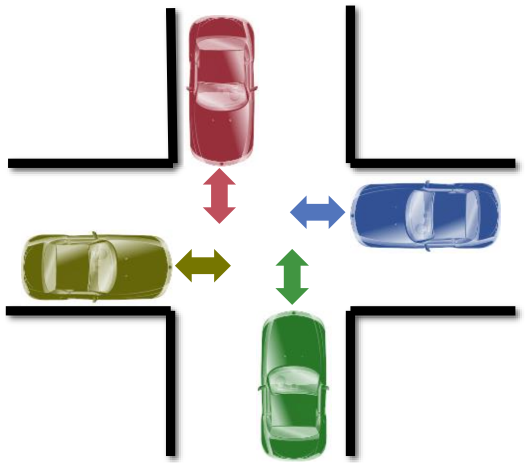
A substantial part of the following material is based on Florian Negele's Thesis.

Florian Negele, Felix Friedrich, Suwon Oh and Bernhard Egger, *On the Design and Implementation of an Efficient Lock-Free Scheduler,* 19th Workshop on Job Scheduling Strategies for Parallel Processing (JSSPP) 2015.

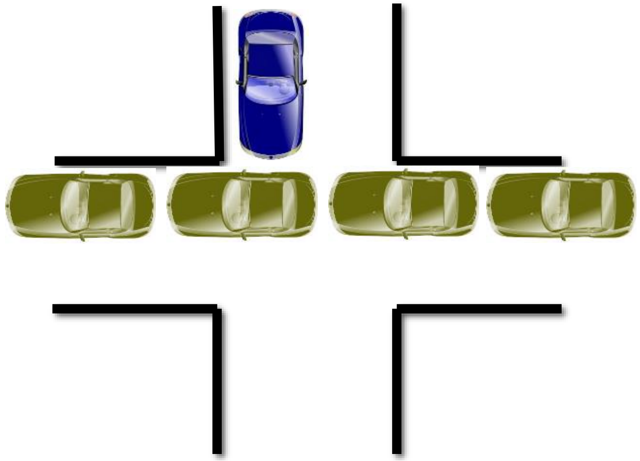
Problems with Locks



Deadlock



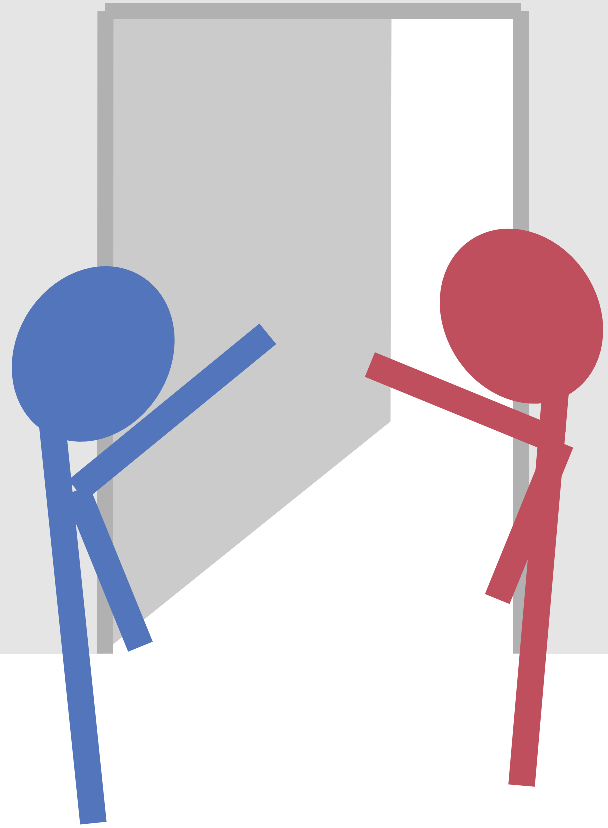
Livelock



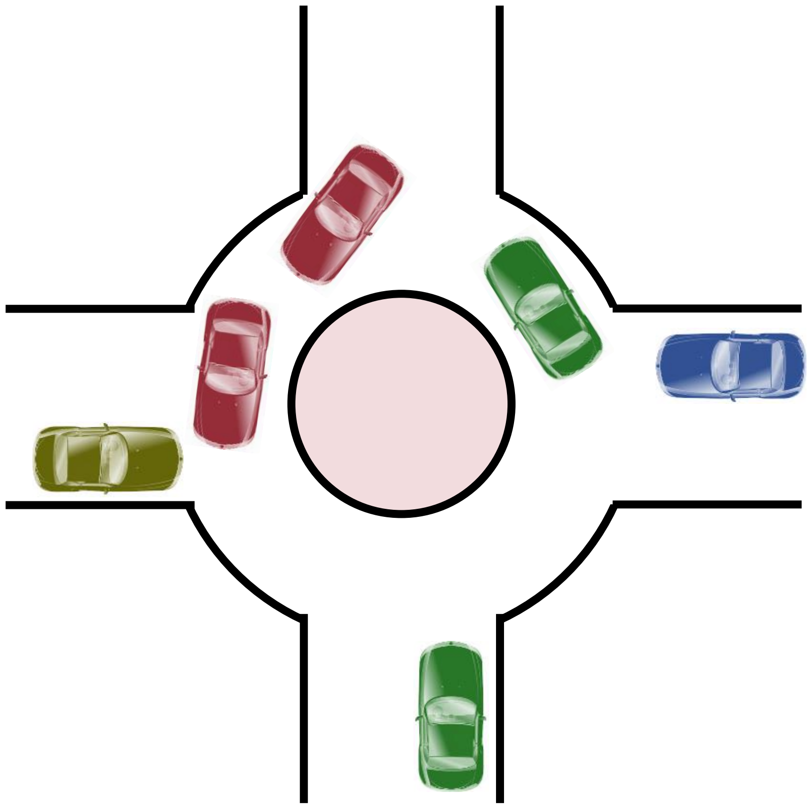
Starvation

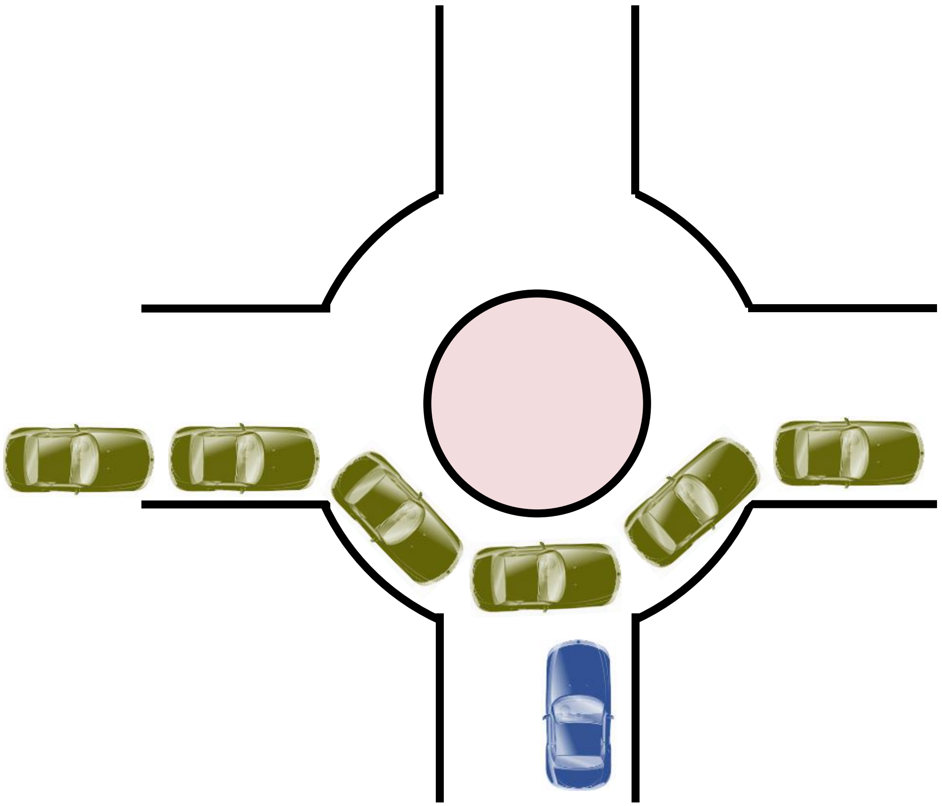
Parallelism? Progress Guarantees? Reentrancy? Granularity? Fault Tolerance?

Politelock



Lock-Free





Definitions

Lock-freedom: at least one algorithm makes progress even if other algorithms run concurrently, fail or get suspended.
Implies system-wide progress but not freedom from starvation.

↑ implies

Wait-freedom: each algorithm eventually makes progress.
Implies freedom from starvation.

Progress Conditions

	Blocking	Non-Blocking
Someone make progress	Deadlock-free	**Lock-free**
Everyone makes progress	Starvation-free	Wait-free

Goals

Lock Freedom

- Progress Guarantees
- Reentrant Algorithms

Portability

- Hardware Independence
- Simplicity, Maintenance

Guiding principles

1. Keep things **simple**
2. Exclusively employ **non-blocking** algorithms in the system

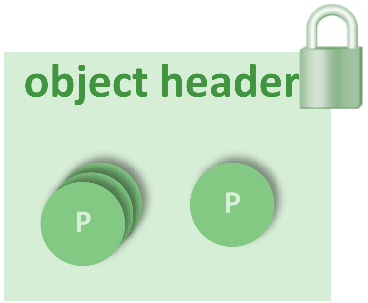
→ Use **implicit cooperative multitasking**

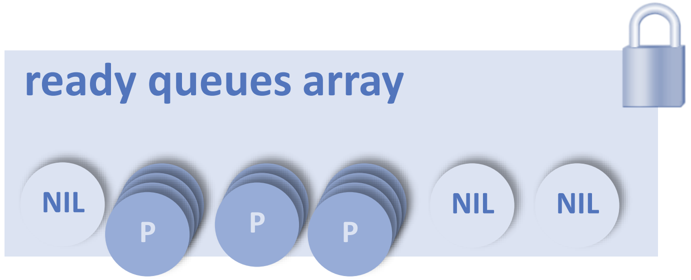
→ no virtual memory

→ limits in optimization

Where are the Locks in the Kernel?

Scheduling Queues / Heaps





Memory Management

CAS (again)

- Compare **old** with data at memory location
- If and only if data at memory equals **old** overwrite data with **new**
- Return previous memory value

int CAS (memref a, int old, int new)

atomic

```
previous = mem[a];
if (old == previous)
    Mem[a] = new;
return previous;
```

CAS is implemented wait-free(!) by hardware.

Memory Model for Lockfree Active Oberon

Only **two rules**

1. Data shared between two or more activities at the same time has to be protected using exclusive blocks unless the data is read or modified using the compare-and-swap operation
2. Changes to shared data visible to other activities after leaving an exclusive block or executing a compare-and-swap operation.

   Implementations are free to reorder all other memory accesses as long as their effect equals a sequential execution within a single activity.

Inbuilt CAS

- CAS instruction as statement of the language

```
PROCEDURE CAS(variable, old, new: BaseType): BaseType
```

  - Operation executed atomically, result visible instantaneously to other processes
  - CAS(variable, x, x) constitutes an atomic read
- Compiler required to implement CAS as a synchronisation barrier
  - Portability, even for non-blocking algorithms
  - Consistent view on shared data, even for systems that represent words using bytes

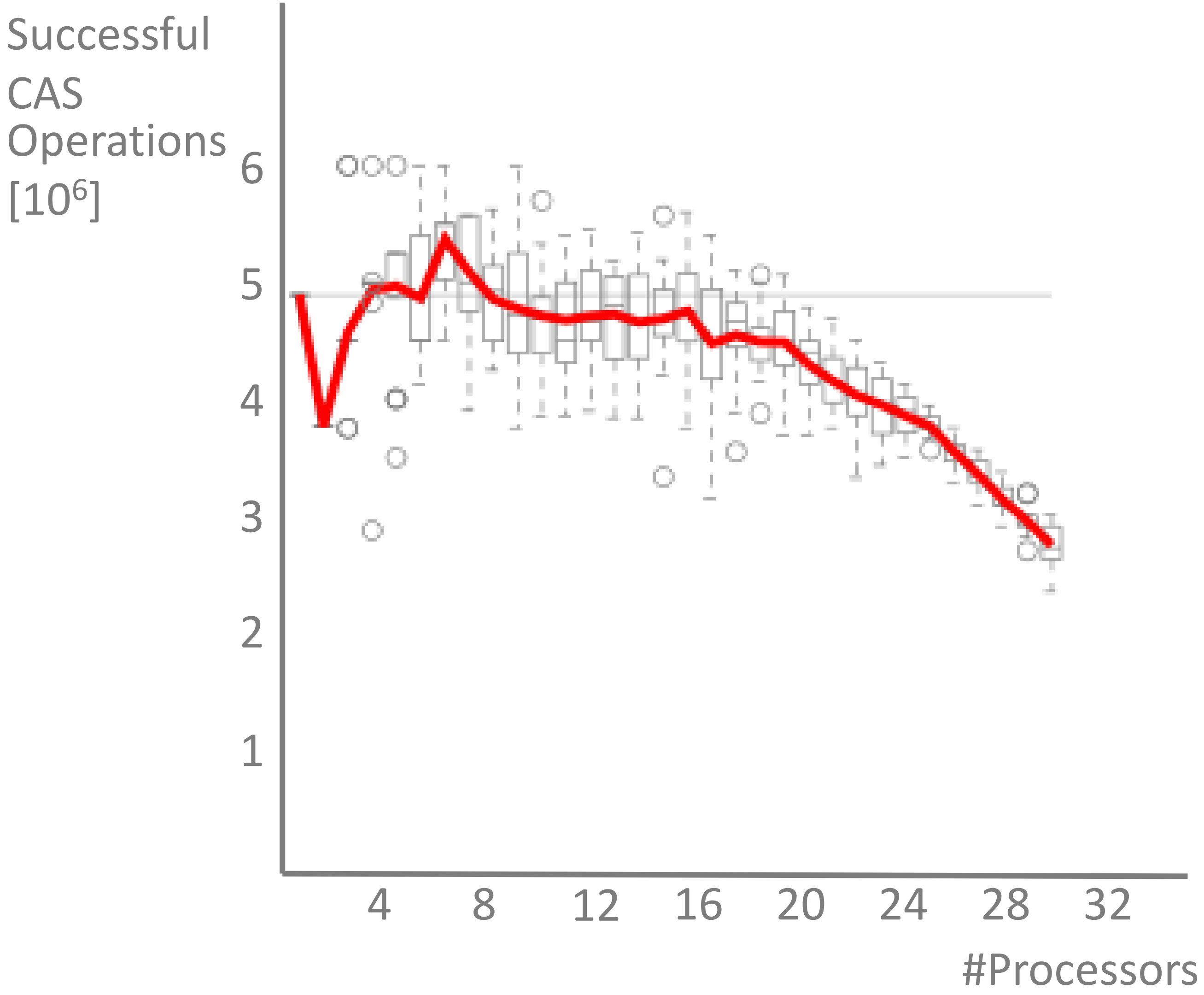
Simple Example: Non-blocking counter

```
PROCEDURE Increment(VAR counter: LONGINT): LONGINT;
VAR previous, value: LONGINT;
BEGIN
   REPEAT
      previous := CAS(counter,0,0);
      value := CAS(counter, previous, previous + 1);
   UNTIL value = previous;
   return previous;
END Increment;
```

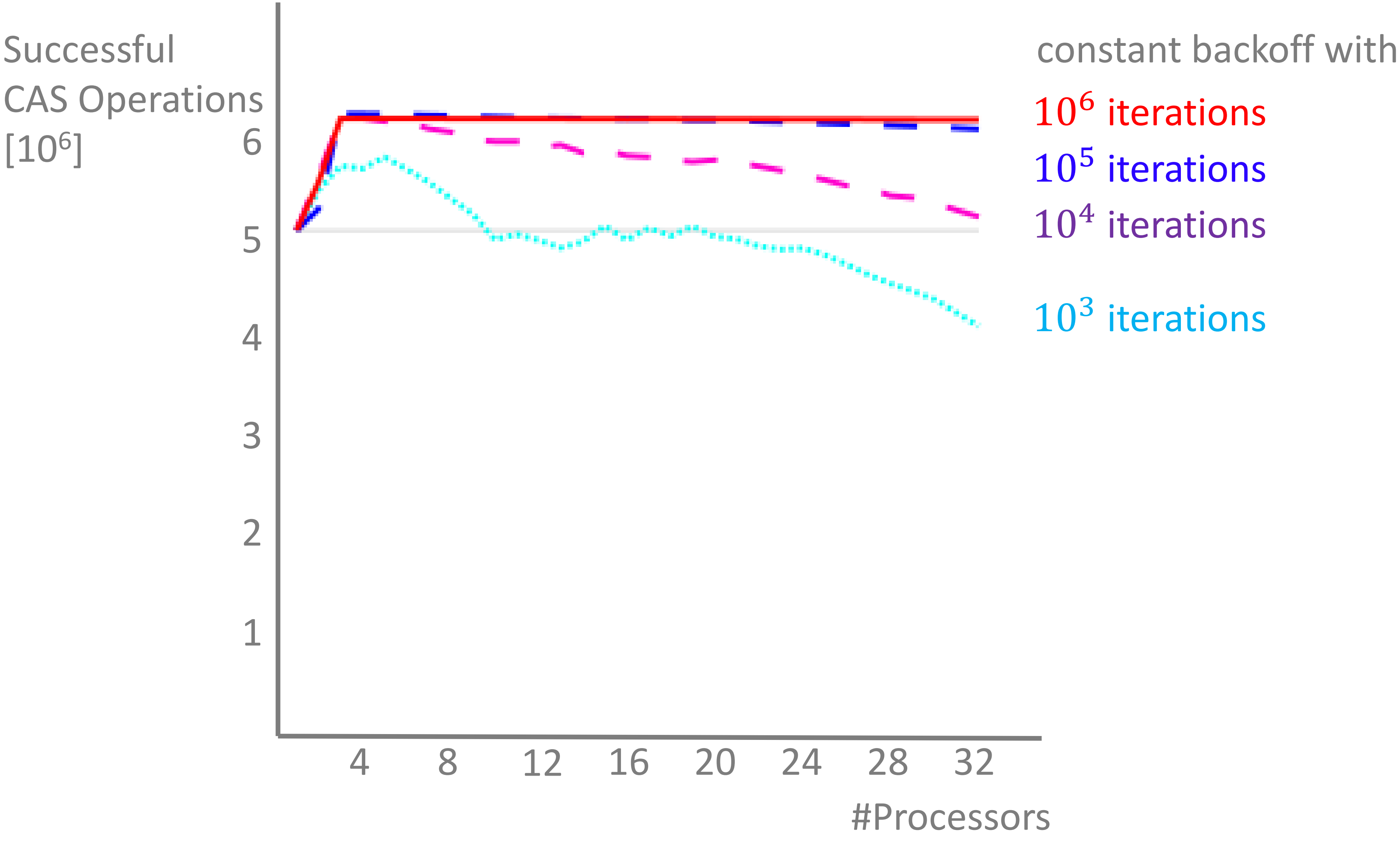
Lock-Free Programming

Performance of CAS

- on the H/W level, CAS triggers a memory barrier
- performance suffers with increasing number of contenders to the same variable



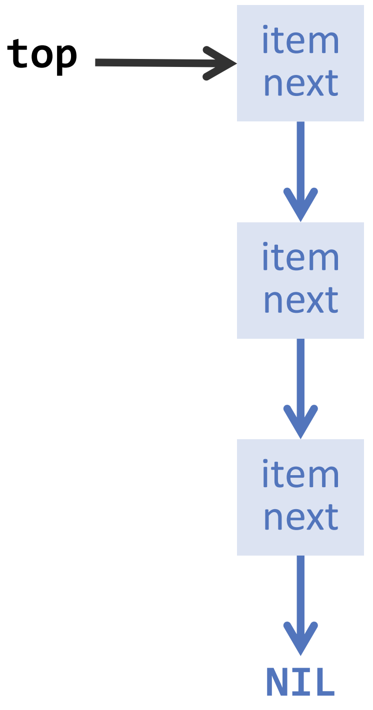
CAS with backoff



Stack

```
Node = POINTER TO RECORD
  item: Object;
  next: Node;
END;

Stack = OBJECT
VAR top: Node;
  PROCEDURE Pop(VAR head: Node): BOOLEAN;
  PROCEDURE Push(head: Node);
END;
```



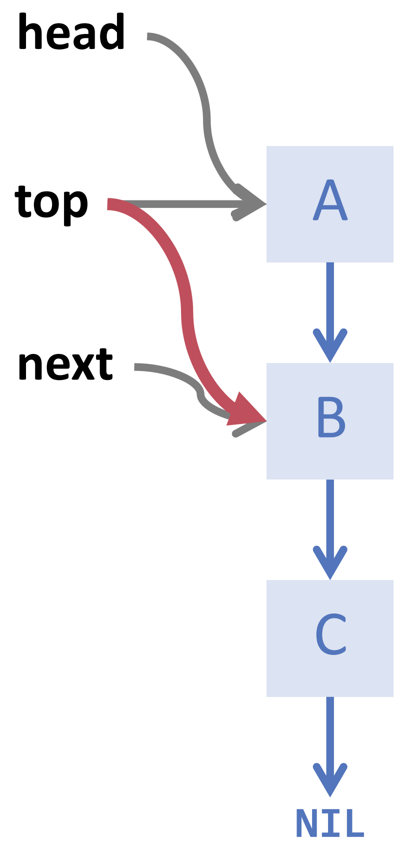
Stack -- Blocking

```
PROCEDURE Push(node: Node): BOOLEAN;
BEGIN{EXCLUSIVE}
   node.next := top;
   top := node;
END Push;

PROCEDURE Pop(VAR head: Node): BOOLEAN;
VAR next: Node;
BEGIN{EXCLUSIVE}
   head := top;
   IF head = NIL THEN
      RETURN FALSE
   ELSE
      top := head.next;
      RETURN TRUE;
   END;
END Pop;
```

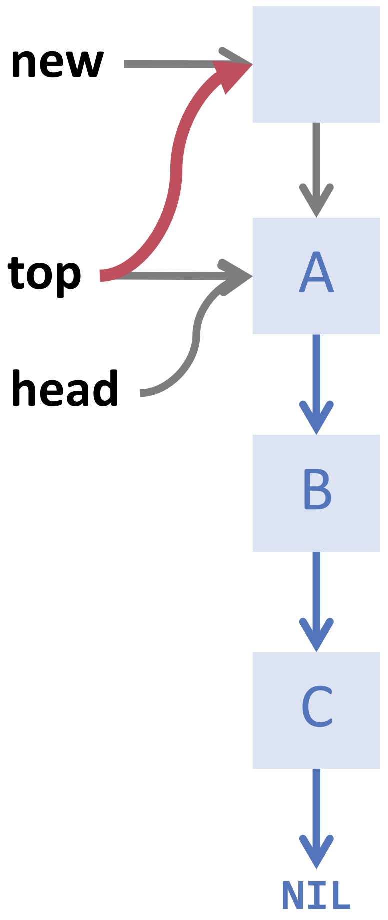
Stack -- Lockfree

```
PROCEDURE Pop(VAR head: Node): BOOLEAN;
VAR next: Node;
BEGIN
   LOOP
      head := CAS(top, NIL, NIL);
      IF head = NIL THEN
         RETURN FALSE
      END;
      next := CAS(head.next, NIL, NIL);
      IF CAS(top, head, next) = head THEN
         RETURN TRUE
      END;
      CPU.Backoff
   END;
END Pop;
```



Stack -- Lockfree

```
PROCEDURE Push(new: Node);
BEGIN
   LOOP
      head := CAS(top, NIL, NIL);
      CAS(new.next, new.next, head);
      IF CAS(top, head, new) = head THEN
         EXIT
      END;
      CPU.Backoff;
   END;
END Push;
```

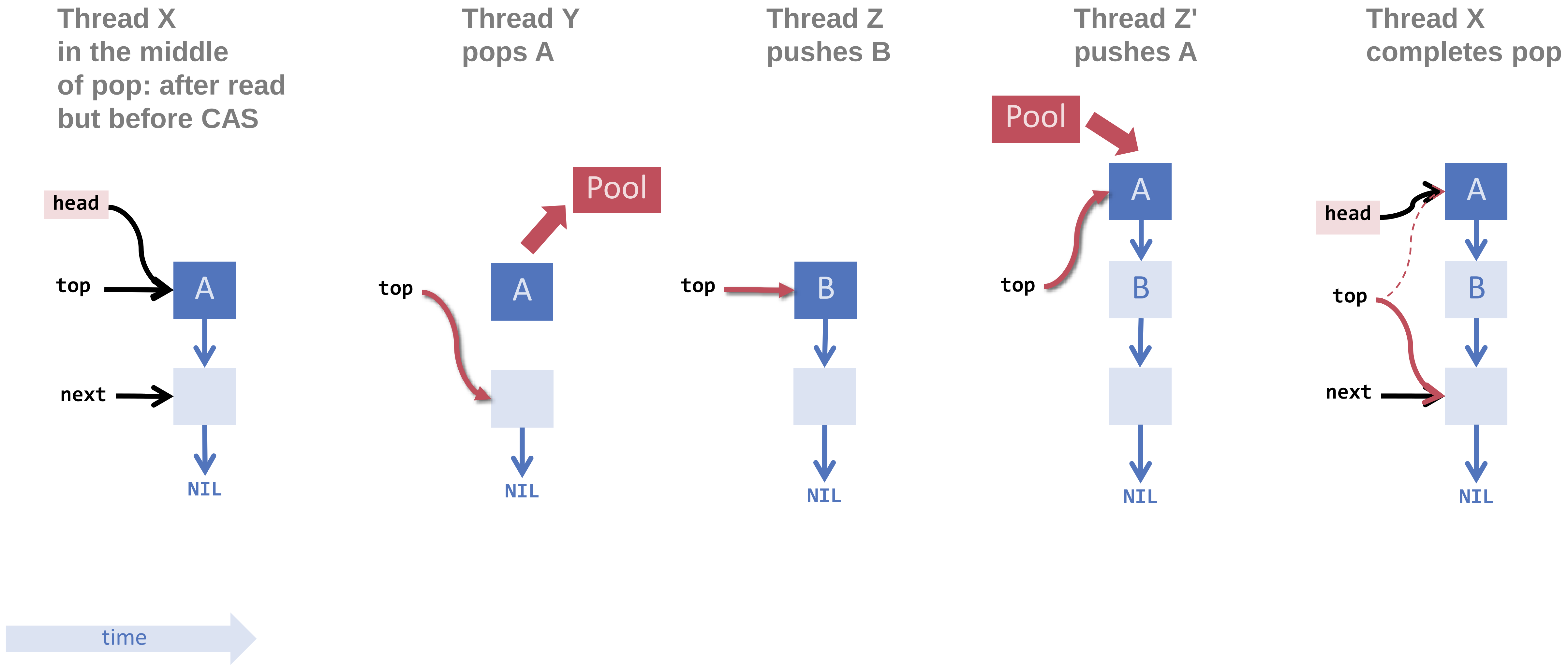


Node Reuse

Assume we do not want to allocate a new node for each Push and maintain a Node-pool instead. Does this work?

NO ! WHY NOT?

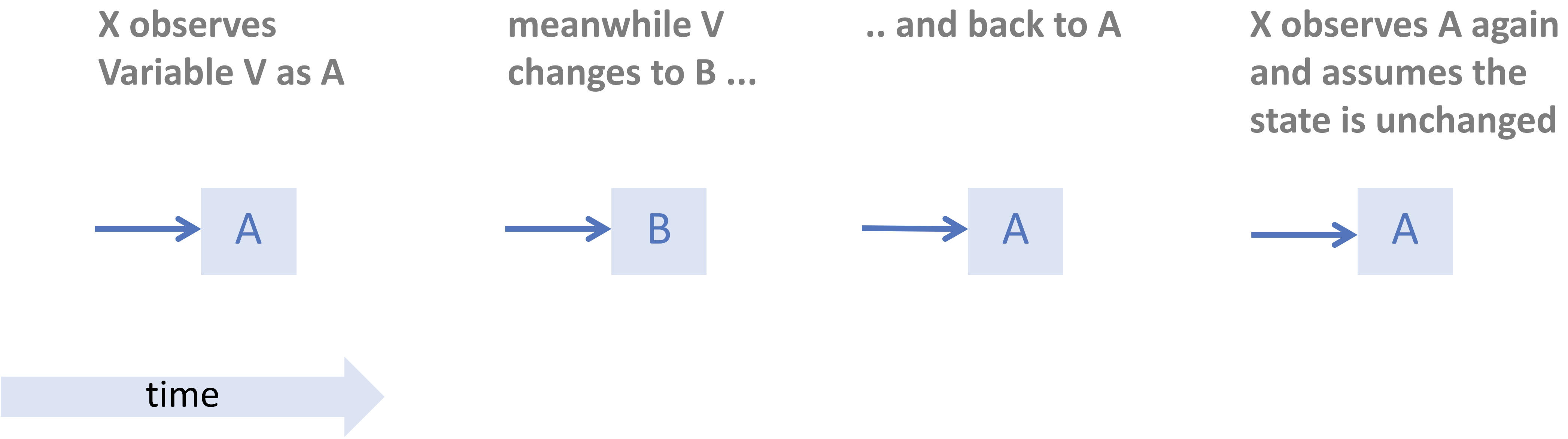
ABA Problem



Thread X
in the middle
of pop: after read
but before CAS
Thread Y
pops A
Thread Z
pushes B
Thread Z'
pushes A
Thread X
completes pop
head
top
A
next
NIL
top
A
Pool
NIL
top
B
NIL
Pool
top
A
B
NIL
head
A
top
B
next
NIL
time

The **ABA**-Problem

"The ABA problem ... occurs when one activity fails to recognise that a single memory location was modified temporarily by another activity and therefore erroneously assumes that the overal state has not been changed."



How to solve the ABA problem?

- DCAS (double compare and swap)
  - not available on most platforms
- Hardware transactional memory
  - not available on most platforms
- Garbage Collection
  - relies on the existence of a GC
  - impossible to use in the inner of a runtime kernel
  - can you implement a lock-free garbage collector relying on garbage collection?
- **Pointer Tagging**
  - does not cure the problem, rather delay it
  - can be practical
- **Hazard Pointers**

Pointer Tagging

ABA problem usually occurs with CAS on *pointers*

Aligned addresses (values of pointers) make some bits available for *pointer tagging.*

Example: pointer aligned modulo 32 → 5 bits available for tagging

MSB	...	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	0	0	0	0	0

Each time a pointer is stored in a data structure, the tag is increased by one. Access to a data structure via address x – x mod 32

This makes the ABA problem very much less probable because now 32 versions of each pointer exist.

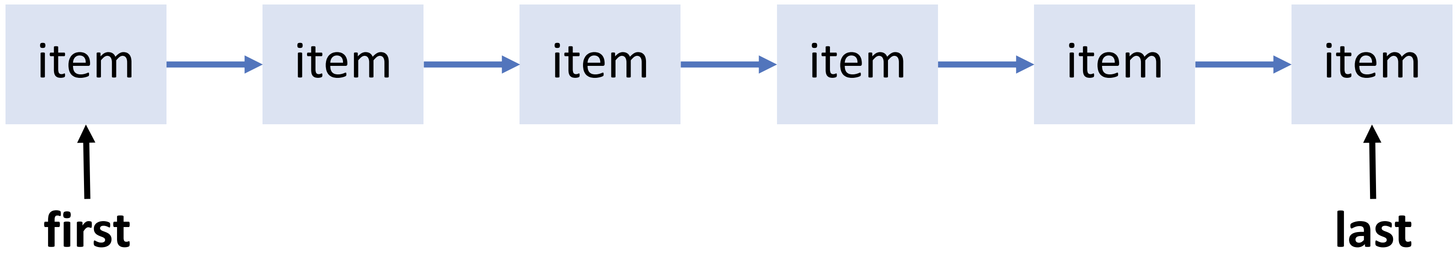
Hazard Pointers

The ABA problem stems from reuse of a pointer P that has been read by some thread X but not yet written with CAS by the same thread. Modification takes place meanwhile by some other thread Y.

Idea to solve:

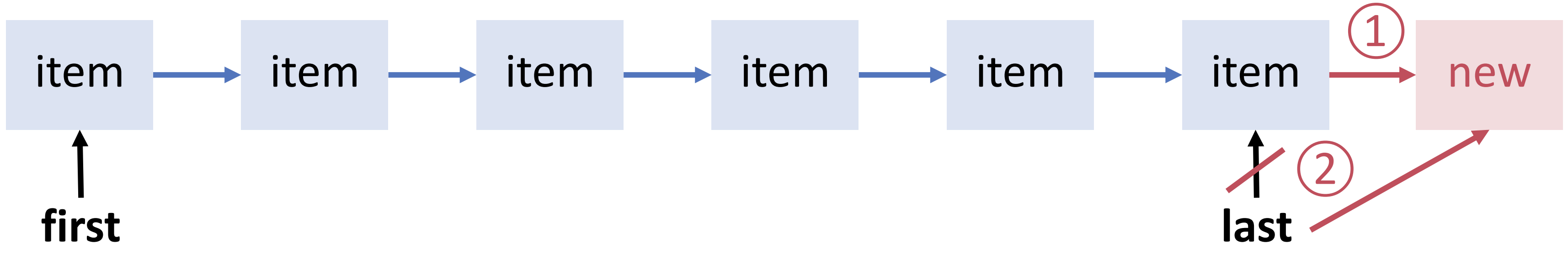
- Before X reads P, it marks it **hazarduous** by entering it in a thread-dedicated slot of the n (n= number threads) slots of an array associated with the data structure (e.g. the stack)
- When finished (after the CAS), process X removes P from the array
- Before a process Y tries to reuse P, it checks all entries of the hazard array

Unbounded Queue (FIFO)

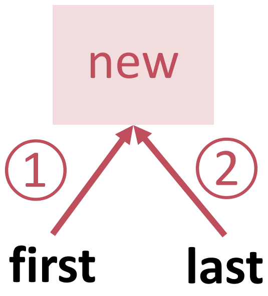


Enqueue

case last != NIL

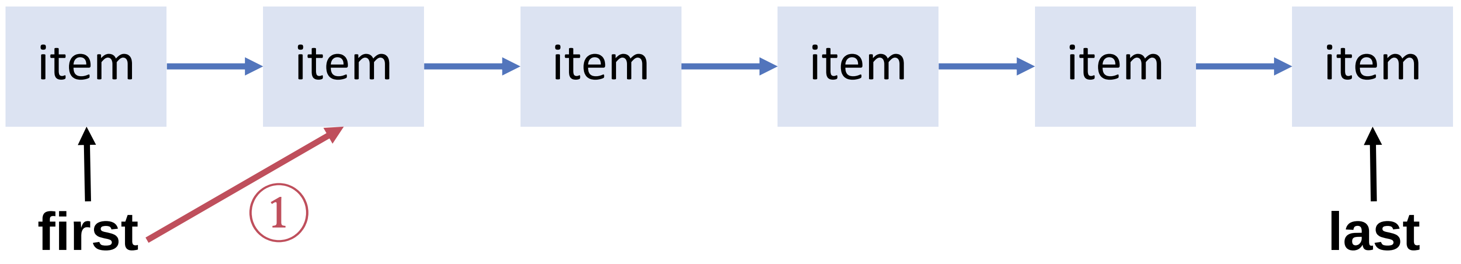


case last = NIL

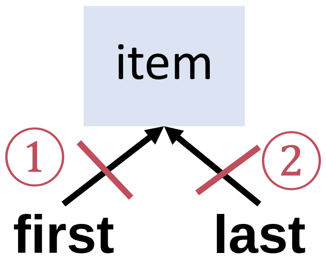


Dequeue

last != first



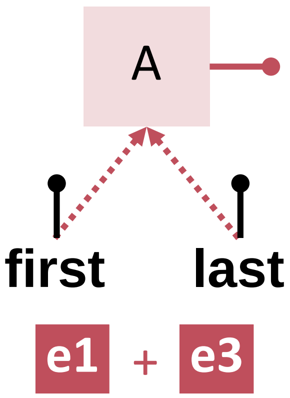
last == first

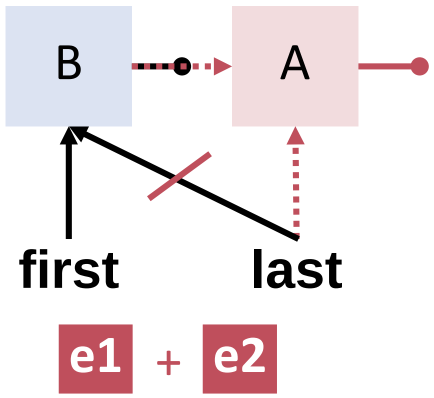


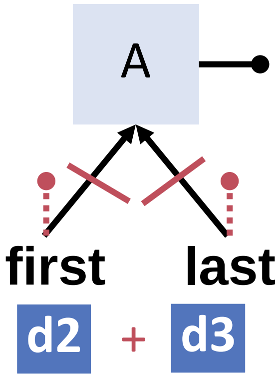
Naive Approach

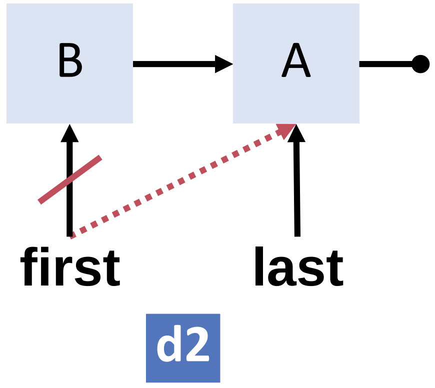
```
Enqueue (q, new)
       REPEAT last := CAS(q.last, NIL, NIL);
e1     UNTIL CAS(q.last, last, new) = last;
       IF last != NIL THEN
e2         CAS(last.next, NIL, new);
       ELSE
e3         CAS(q.first, NIL, new);
       END
```

```
Dequeue (q)
       REPEAT
           first= CAS(q.first, null, null);
d1         IF first = NIL THEN RETURN NIL END;
           next = CAS(first.next, NIL,NIL)
d2     UNTIL CAS(q.first, first, next) = first;
       IF next == NIL THEN
d3         CAS(q.last, first, NIL);
       END
```



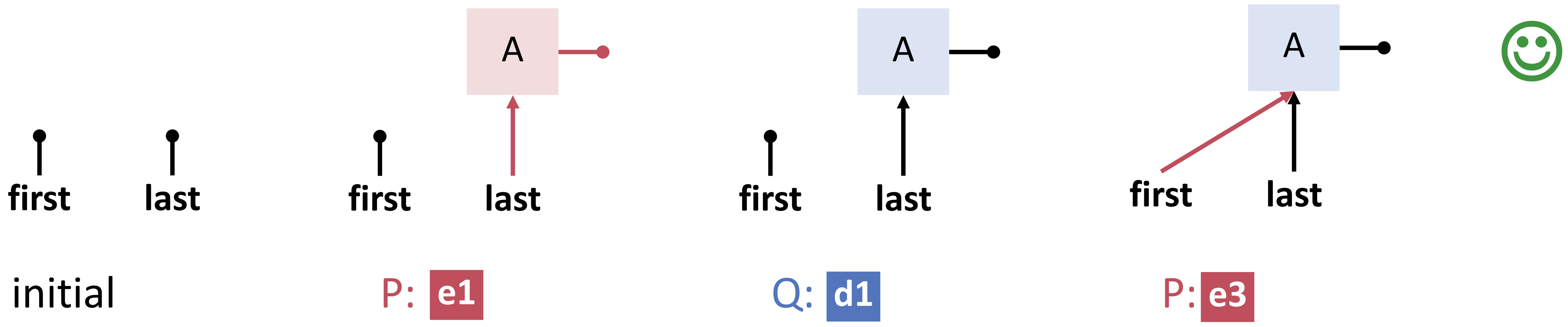






Scenario

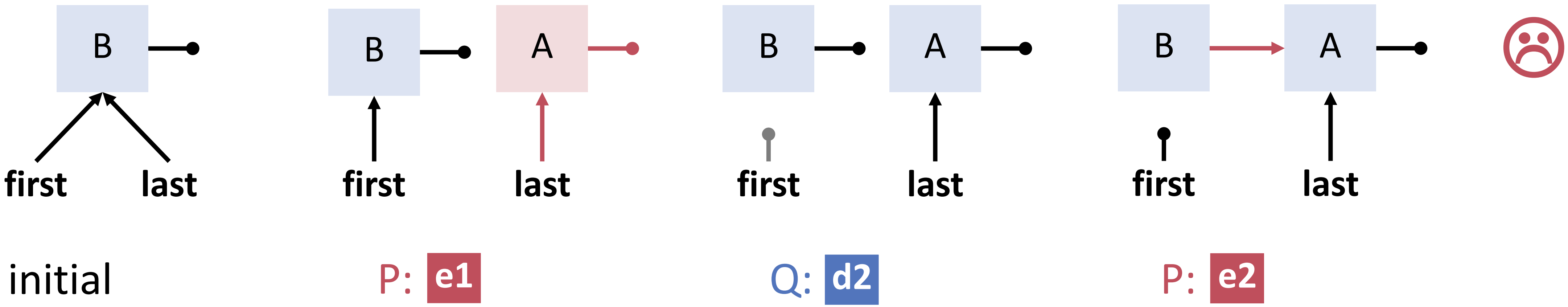
Process P enqueues A
Process Q dequeues



Scenario

Process P enqueues A

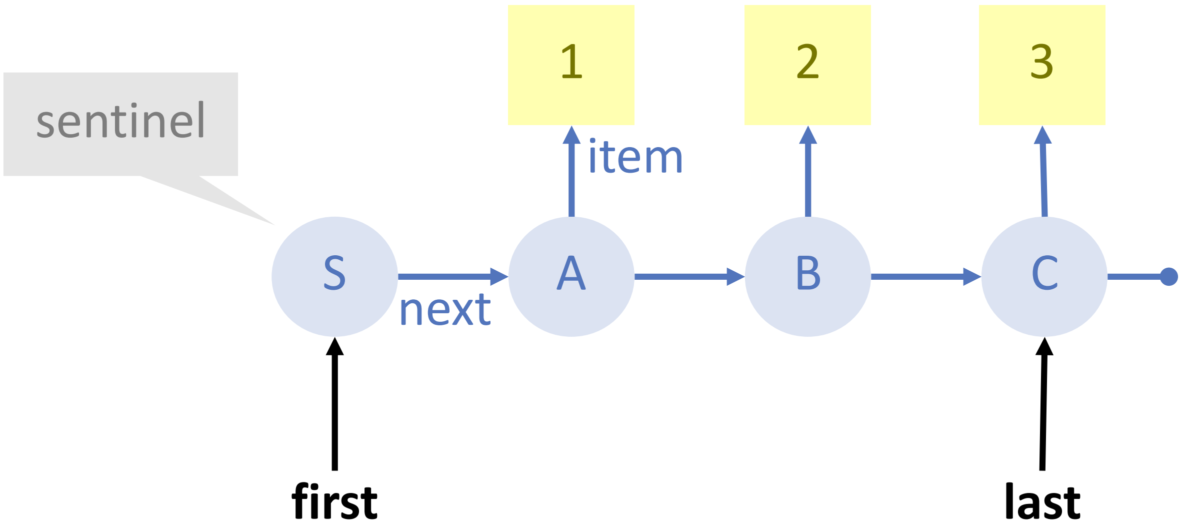
Process Q dequeues



Analysis

- The problem is that enqueue and dequeue do under some circumstances have to update **several pointers at once** [first, last, next]
- The transient inconsistency can lead to permanent data structure corruption
- Solutions to this particular problem are not easy to find if no double compare and swap (or similar) is available
- Need another approach: Decouple enqueue and dequeue with a sentinel. A consequence is that the **queue cannot be in-place.**

Queues with Sentinel



Queue empty: first = last

Queue nonempty: first # last

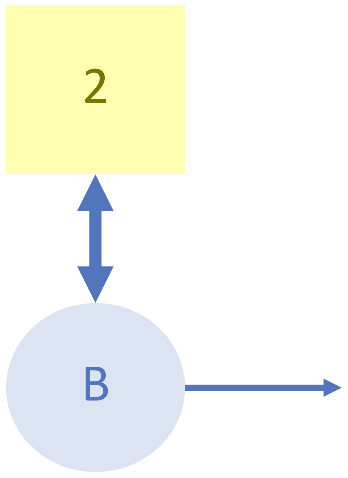
Invariants: first # NIL

last # NIL

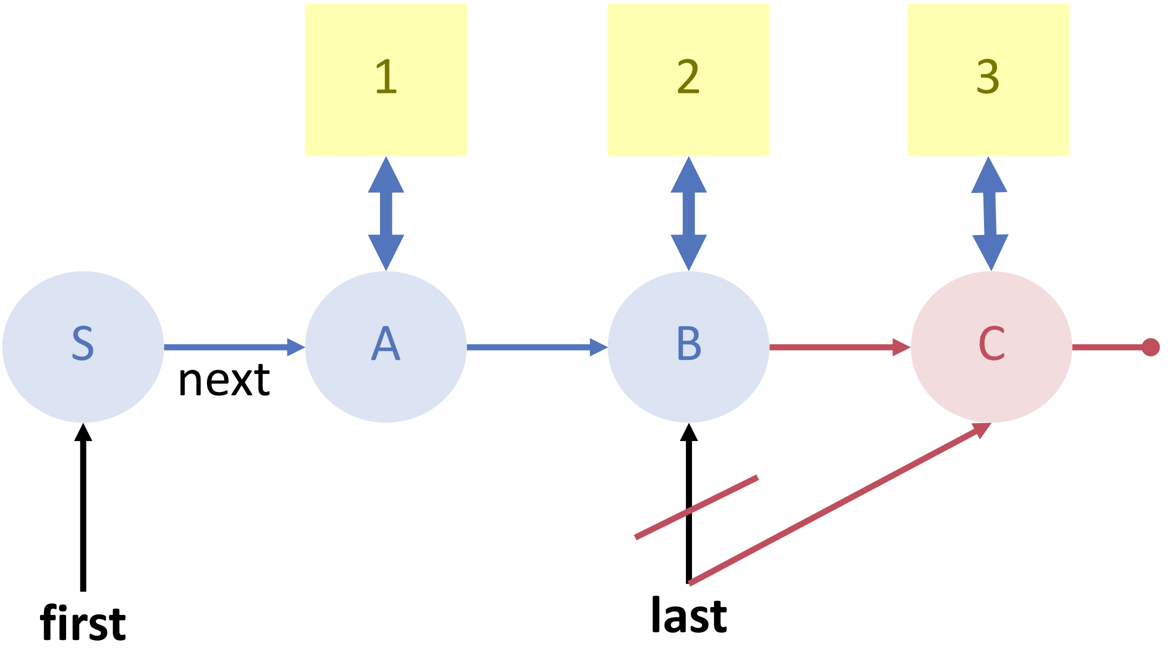
Node Reuse

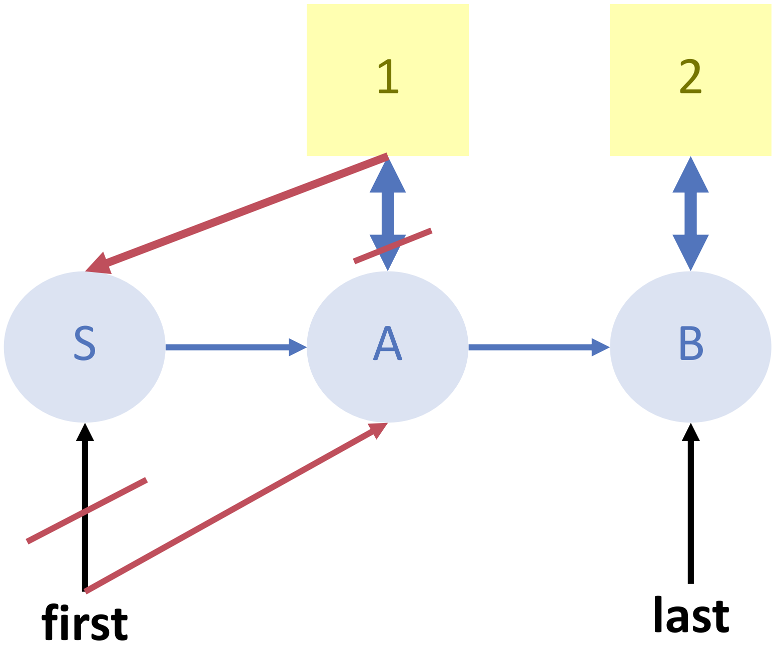
simple idea:

link from node to item
and from item to node



Enqueue and Dequeue with Sentinel

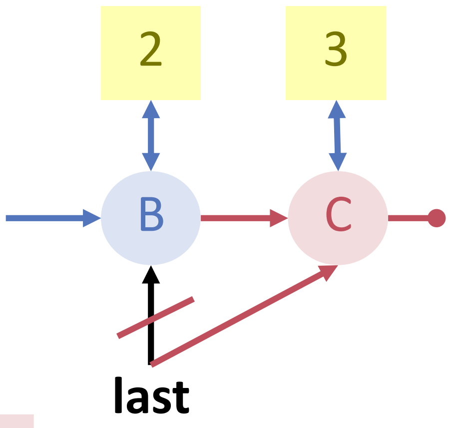




Item enqueued together with associated node.

A becomes the new sentinel. S associated with free item.

Enqueue



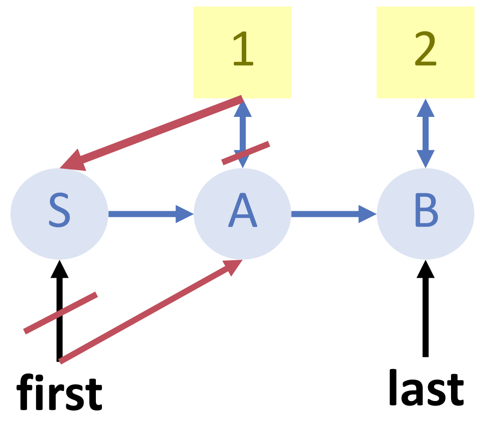

```
PROCEDURE Enqueue- (item: Item; VAR queue: Queue);
VAR node, last, next: Node;
BEGIN
   node := Allocate();
   node.item := Item:
   LOOP
      last := CAS (queue.last, NIL, NIL);
      next := CAS (last.next, NIL, node);
      IF next = NIL THEN EXIT END;
      IF CAS (queue.last, last, next) # last THEN CPU.Backoff END;
   END;
   ASSERT (CAS (queue.last, last, node) # NIL);
END Enqueue;
```

Set last node's next pointer

If setting last pointer failed, then **help other processes to update last node → Progress guarantee**

Set last node, can fail but then others have already helped

Dequeue




```
PROCEDURE Dequeue- (VAR item: Item; VAR queue: Queue): BOOLEAN;
VAR first, next, last: Node;
BEGIN
   LOOP
      first := CAS (queue.first, NIL, NIL);
      next := CAS (first.next, NIL, NIL);
      IF next = NIL THEN RETURN FALSE END;
      last := CAS (queue.last, first, next);
      item := next.item;
      IF CAS (queue.first, first, next) = first THEN EXIT END;
      CPU.Backoff;
   END;
   item.node := first;
   RETURN TRUE;
END Dequeue;
```

Remove potential inconsistency, **help other processes to set last pointer**

set first pointer

associate node with first

ABA

Problems of unbounded lock-free queues

- unboundedness → dynamic memory allocation is inevitable
  - if the memory system is not lock-free, we are back to square 1
  - **reusing nodes** to avoid memory issues causes the **ABA problem** (where ?!)

- Employ **Hazard Pointers** now.

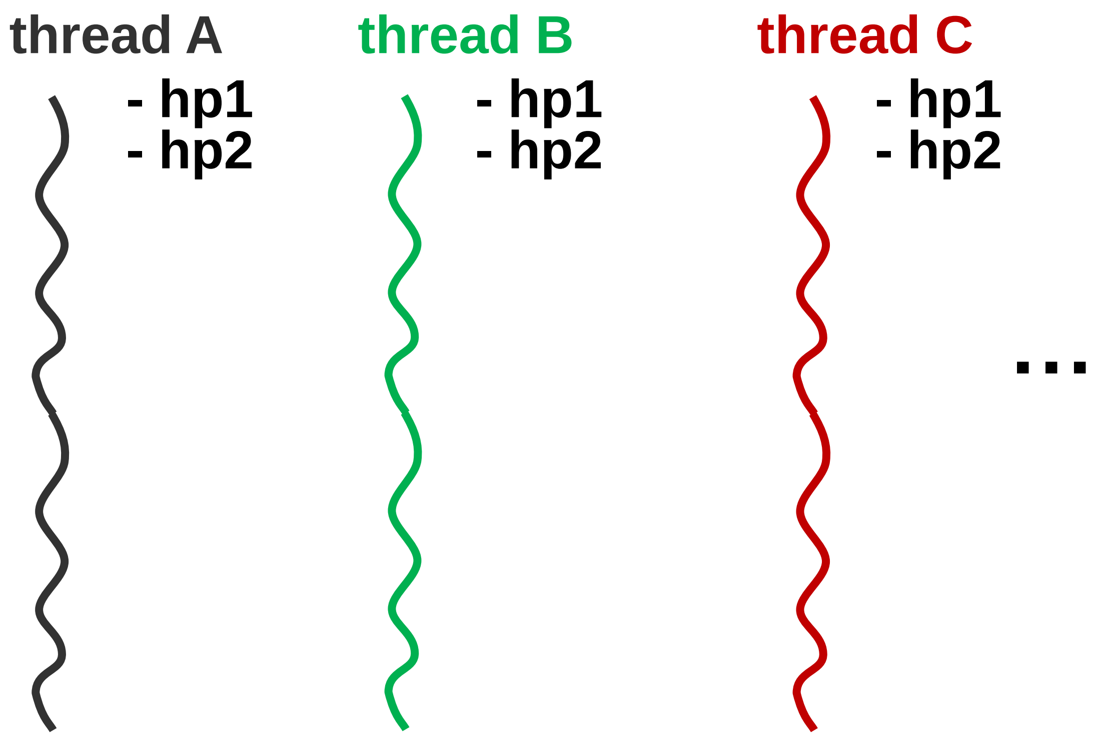
Hazard Pointers

- Store pointers of memory references about to be accessed by a thread
- Memory allocation checks all hazard pointers to avoid the ABA problem

Number of threads unbounded

→ time to check hazard pointers also unbounded!

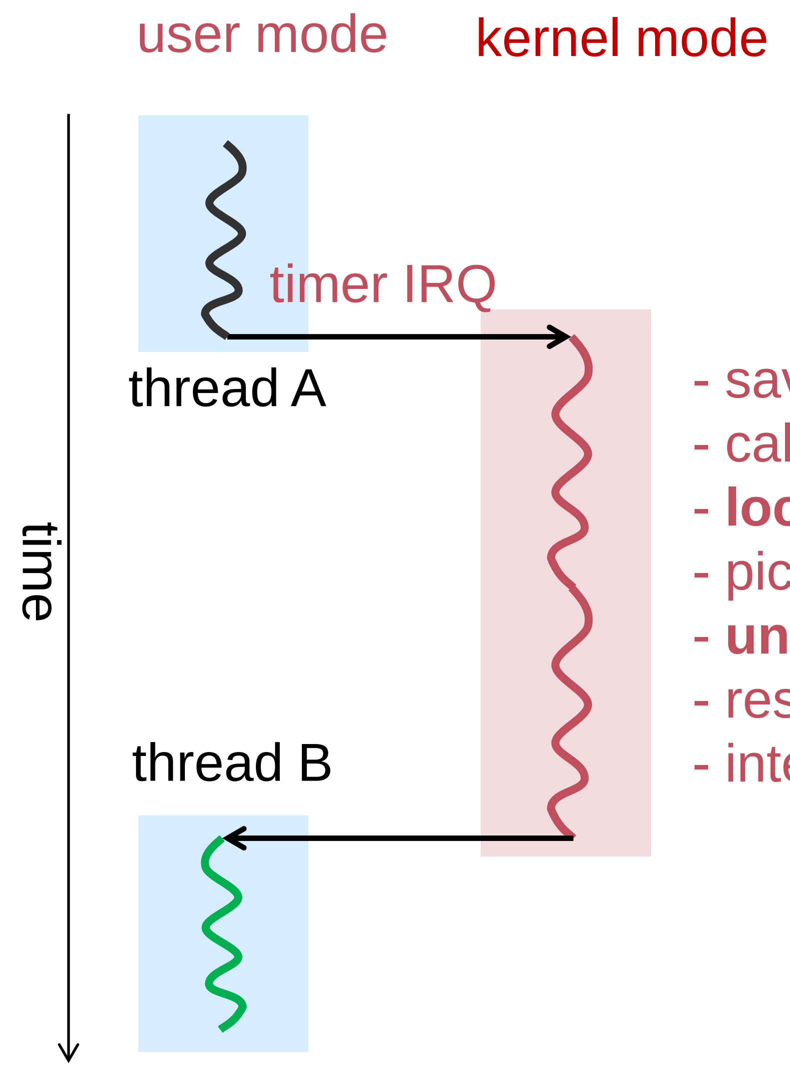
→ difficult dynamic bookkeeping!



Key idea of Cooperative MT & Lock-free Algorithms

Use the **guarantees of cooperative multitasking** to implement efficient unbounded lock-free queues

Time Sharing

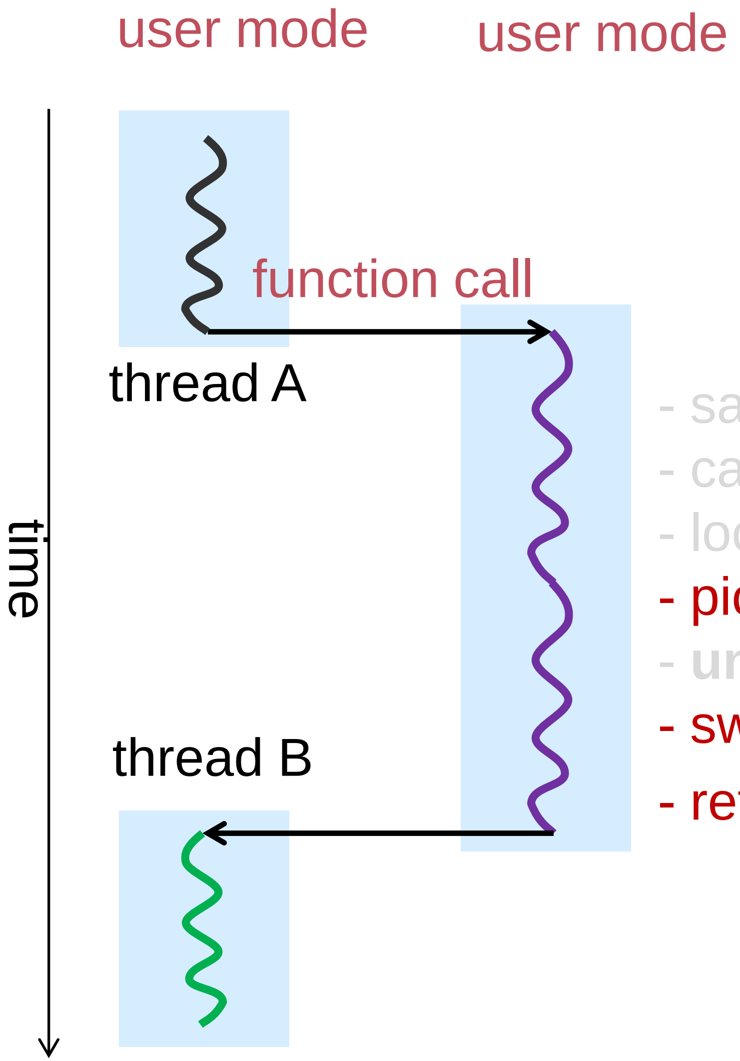


- save processor registers (**assembly**)
- call timer handler (**assembly**)
- **lock scheduling queue**
- pick new process to schedule
- **unlock scheduling queue**
- restore processor registers (**assembly**)
- interrupt return (**assembly**)

inherently hardware dependent
(timer programming
context save/restore)

inherently non-parallel
(scheduler lock)

Cooperative Multitasking



- save processor registers (assembly)
- call timer handler (assembly)
- lock scheduling queue
- pick new process to schedule (lockfree)
- unlock scheduling queue
- switch base pointer
- return from function call

hardware independent
(no timer required,
standard procedure calling convention takes care of register save/restore)

finest granularity
(no lock)

Implicit Cooperative Multitasking

Ensure cooperation

- Compiler automatically inserts code at specific points in the code

Details

- Each process has a quantum
- At regular intervals, the compiler inserts code to decrease the quantum and calls the scheduler if necessary

```
  sub   [rcx + 88], 10   ; decrement quantum by 10
  jge   skip             ; check if it is negative
  call  Switch           ; perform task switch
skip:
```

implicit cooperative multitasking – AMD64

uncooperative

```
PROCEDURE Enqueue- (item: Item; VAR queue: Queue);
BEGIN {UNCOOPERATIVE}
   ...
   (* no scheduling here ! *)
   ...
END Enqueue;
```

zero overhead processor local "locks"

Implicit Cooperative Multitasking

Pros

- extremely light-weight – cost of a regular function call
- allow for global optimization – calls to scheduler known to the compiler
- **zero overhead processor local locks**

Cons

- overhead of inserted scheduler code
- currently sacrifice one hardware register (`rcx`)
- require a special compiler and access to the source code

Cooperative MT & Lock-free Algorithms

Guarantees of cooperative MT

- No more than M threads are executing inside an `uncooperative` block (M = # of processors)
- No thread switch occurs while a thread is running on a processor

→ hazard pointers can be associated with the processor

- Number of hazard pointers limited by M
- Search time constant

thread-local storage → processor local storage

No Interrupts?

Device drivers are interrupt-driven

- breaks all assumptions made so far
  (number of contenders limited by the number of processors)

Key idea: model interrupt handlers as virtual processors

- M = # of physical processors + # of potentially concurrent interrupts