

Links in a Chain

By Hap Hansen

When the politicians, economists and bean counters discuss economics, jobs and layoffs, references are always made about the 'blue-collar' and 'white-collar' workers. Who are these people anyhow? What job makes one's collar blue or white? Is that the only kinds there are? I don't think so.

First, the blue-collar worker. This individual generally uses electrified, motorized or efficient looking tools to produce, manufacture or ship goods from point A to point B. Second, the white-collar worker. These people use computers and hand tools to move paper or electronics information from point A to point B. Their hand tools are computers, pens and pencils. They usually carry fancy pens in their shirt pockets, but almost always use Bics and Pentels provided by the Company. The white-collar folks and blue-collar folks work together to make sure the information reaches point B so that goods also reach point B and are sold for a profit. When a link breaks in this chain, profits decline or losses occur, bringing on the wrath of a different kind of collar. The silk-collar. The Chairman, the Owner, the President.

Now comes recession, layoffs, downsizing and reorganization. In time, however, the link is reforged into the chain and hiring resumes. Repeatedly, the recession link breaks, is reforged into recovery and finally strengthened and rebuilt into expansion, only to break and fall again into recession, inflation or stagnation. Politicians legislate and blame the other Party for all broken links in the chain, economists predict sometimes conflicting theories and bankers raise or lower interest rates, depending upon which link is broken or rebuilt. But economic swings continue unabated, shrugging off legislation, predictions and interest rates with ease, as though it were a huge, living, breathing phenomenon setting its own course, over and over again. Surely, there is a continuing middle ground where expansion can continue, without the terrible specter of inflation. We haven't been able to sustain that middle ground for almost 150 years, but we keep trying.

Perhaps we should be like the 'no-collar' workers. This group includes some of the hard-core unemployed and a few hippies left over from the 60's. Although the hippies' numbers are decreasing, primarily because there are very few leftover old, square, 1960's Volkswagen vans to go around! But the no-collar groups also include the artists, the inventors and the writers who sometimes live in their own world, thinking thoughts and dreaming dreams that some of the rest of us cannot comprehend. Artists, teach us to dream. Inventors, show us a better way. Writers, give us your ideas. Help us get from point A to point B without breaking the links in our chain.