

Paris, June 20, 2008

To: Editor and Board of IJSS, J of Mech of Mat and Struct, Int J Fatigue  
Cc: Editors of other Elsevier Journals  
Cc: Zhigang Suo, editor of iMechanica

Dear friends of IJSS board, and distinguished colleagues

**Re: letter of resignation/exclusion from IJSS, and suggestions for coordinating action (setting a forum or a web site?) for scientists to take control over commercial interests of Elsevier, and its battle against the open access journals, with the general intention to improve widespread diffusion of Science at reasonable costs**

it is with great displeasure that I announce you that I have stepped down (or maybe I have been “forced to step down”, or even just “been «*informed*» to have stepped down”!) from the board of IJSS (Int Journal of Solids and Structures”), after some polemics I generated over a rejected paper on Int J Fatigue another Elsevier journal (see appendix I). But I feel much better since only after this event did I realize for which bad cause I was working: I thought it was an honour and a prestigious activity (certainly not for my finances) that I was part of the board of a Elsevier journal, but after few investigations I realized (mainly from wikipedia, see Appendix 1, but also Nature, and in general the web) the following appalling information I was completely unaware of:-

- 1) **Elsevier is a group making huge profits** (£1.5 billions in 2006, with operating profits £395 millions! Adjusted operating profits have risen by 10% between 2005 and 2006)
- 2) **This creates budget problems even to top Universities libraries, let alone third world ones!** Subscription rates charged by the company for its journals (some as high as \$14,000 per year!) are being more and more criticised not just by advocates of a switch to the so-called open-access publication model, but also by universities whose library budgets make it difficult for them to afford current journal prices. Not poor universities, we are talking of *Stanford, University of California, Harvard University and Duke University (see appendix)! I suspect the vast majority of other libraries do not complain as they are not vocal about it, but I am sure Universities in Europe, in eastern countries, let alone Africa and third world, cannot have access to this expenses. So why stop distribution of journals? And access to science, only because a group wants to make huge profits? I felt immediately out of place in the board of IJSS. I am very happy to be out of Elsevier system now.*
- 3) **Elsevier's parent organisation's involvement in weapon shows has raised even more scandal:** in the March 2007 issue of the *The Lancet*, leading medical centers including the UK Royal College of Physicians urged Reed Elsevier to sever weapons ties. Elsevier has not solved the issue, apparently for lack of possibility to sell (do we believe this?)
- 4) **The top scientists refuse to be editor of Elsevier journals at their conditions,** which means that today being an Editor of a Elsevier journal immediately classifies you as a *lower class scientist or a weak man who prefers to have his name temporarily well known rather than combat for the real advancement of science*, as this means bending to their conditions. In 1999 the complete Editorial Board of the *Journal of Logic Programming* (50 persons in total) collectively resigned. At the end of 2003, the entire editorial board of the prestigious

Journal of Algorithms resigned. The same happened in 2005 to the International Journal of Solids and Structures whose editors resigned to start the Journal of Mechanics of Materials and Structures. However, a new editorial board was quickly established and the journal continues in unaltered form (apparently....????) with Editors David Hills from Oxford and Stelios Kyriakides from U Texas. On August 10, 2006, the entire editorial board of the distinguished mathematical journal Topology handed in their resignation, again because of stalled negotiations with Elsevier to lower the subscription price. This board has now launched the new Journal of Topology **at a far lower price**, under the auspices of the London Mathematical Society. The French École Normale Supérieure has stopped having Elsevier publish the prestigious journal Annales Scientifiques de l'École Normale Supérieure.

- 5) **Elsevier is trying to stop open access journals as obviously this will reduce their profits**, see:- 'PR pit bull' to take on open access? January 25th, 2007 by Kaitlin Thaney <http://sciencecommons.org/weblog/archives/2007/01/25/dezenhall-takes-on-open-access/>  
*In particular, ...Dezenhall, more widely known for his work protecting and un-tarnishing companies and celebrities' reputations, ..used money from ExxonMobile to fight the environmental group Greenpeace, as well as worked for former Enron chief Jeffrey Skilling, who is now serving a 24-year sentence for fraud. According to e-mails passed to Nature, Dezenhall employees spoke to employees from Elsevier, Wiley and the Association of American Publishers, who appear to be exploring extreme measures to help reinstate their livelihood, which they claim open access publishers have stripped away. Giles writes: "A follow-up message in which Dezenhall suggests a strategy for the publishers provides some insight into the approach they are considering taking. Dezenhall also recommended joining forces with groups that may be ideologically opposed to government-mandated projects such as PubMed Central, including organizations that have angered scientists. One suggestion was the Competitive Enterprise Institute, a conservative think-tank based in Washington DC, which has used oil industry money to promote sceptical views on climate change. Dezenhall estimated his fee for the campaign at \$300,000 – 500,000."* Needless to say, Editors and scientists in the boards of Elsevier journals are paid peanuts, most likely in terms of Elsevier discount books, orders of magnitude far from Dezenhall's fees !
  
- 6) **Elsevier is not even open to debate from their Editors or member of editorial boards, so they use their powerful organization as intimidation.** In fact, see my personal story recollected in Appendix I. The truth is that I only wanted to raise the question that I was getting increasingly frustrated about how science works. Too much of everything. Conferences, students, papers, journals, everything is working on a system that is centuries old, and is about to collapse.
  
- 7) **Because my posts to imechanica in few hours reached immediately many readers, crashing the system**, my rôle in imechanica is now partly «censured» by Zhigang Suo, Imechanica's editor, after being one of the moderators for more than 1 year, now I a simple user with no possibility of the front page. To my protest to Suo, which contained also some reference to his h-factor (which in Engineering is about  $h=17$ ), Suo only responded correcting his h-index. This shows a sign again of fierce competition in USA, which obscures our real rôle in science. Paradoxically, Suo prefers to censure me, someone very willing to expand Imechanica and other open press and open access journals and forums more, while he hosts in imechanica what are already enemies from Elsevier as moderator!!! Can you think of this as an intelligent strategy? Elsevier people are really good at confusing

naïf scientists. The truth is that Elsevier people are in imechanica to watch development, and lately hope to crash this system.

- 8) **I am surprised Charles Steeles and the JMMS don't enter the discussion.** Some people have written to me that after all Charles's battle against ELSEVIER ended up simply by funding his own journal, suggesting his own profit? I believe Steeles' battle was a healthy one, but now you need to take action or these people will think they are right...Unlike medicine, where the problem of ethical and commercial interest has been treated and discussed for many years, see <http://www.sciencebasedmedicine.org/> Promoting Ethics in Science <http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2006/12/07/publishing> The Real Science Ethics Issues <http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2006/04/24/science>
- 9) **Elsevier is using therefore scientists not too good to be strong to refuse the visibility of being an Editor of a Journal, and does not even accept me in the board of IJSS because I speak openly.** I conclude that I will never be an Editor of a Elsevier journal, as I would need to be even weaker. These prizes set by Elsevier clearly give them visibility, not a change that Michael Ortiz opening lecture at a conference will be preceded by a speech by Elsevier's top people (Mr Chi has a strong track record in the arena of publishing services, including innovative e-publishing activities). Mr Chi was appointed to Princeton University's Board of Trustees, trustee of Princeton University Press and as a member of the Council of Princeton University Communities and the Princeton East Asian Studies Advisory Council. He holds a bachelor's degree from Princeton University, where he graduated cum laude, and an M.B.A. from Columbia University. But what has he to do with science? How clever they are to let people from management look close arm in arm with top scientists, to confuse even more the rest of the scientists that they are working for the good cause, and not simply for profit!

### Possible way forward and proposals:

In view of partial success of *collective initiatives*, like recent one in imechanica <http://imechanica.org/node/1531> we need to force ELSEVIER to take action in these directions

- 1) lower all his journals fees by large factor, for example the 40% of the profit margin
- 2) make zero the fees in third world countries
- 3) invest all its profit into good causes, particularly not in USA where salaries of scientists are good, but in third world countries, where scientists do not even have access to journals
- 4) release their opposition to open access journals
- 5) threaten them by many boards resigning from Elsevier journals, or at least Editors collectively pretend better conditions of treatment
- 6) create a blog or a common web page for Elsevier Editors and board, to share ideas and launch initiatives. Maybe [www.elsevierjournaleditors.org](http://www.elsevierjournaleditors.org)? I cannot launch the initiative alone. So await for people interested to send me feedback

These are only initial ideas, please add your comments by writing to me and help me set this forum open to discussion.

Looking forward to hearing from you

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## Appendix I – reasons for me to step down and Elsevier to “inform me to step down from IJSS”

I stepped down Elsevier (they maybe said they stepped me down) few days after I wrote <http://www.imechanica.org/node/3170> *A paper rejected by Int. J. Fatigue & Persistent Nepotism in Peer Reviews, and why traditional journals are dying very fast!!*, they reacted with a very clear intimidation letter <http://imechanica.org/node/3183> *ELSEVIER is attacking me with unprecedented violence, just 4 days after my reaction about the incredible treatment in Int J Fatigue.*

## Appendix II --- synthetic info about ELSEVIER from wikipedia <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elsevier>

I invite you however to read wikipedia on Elsevier <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elsevier> and in particular:-

**1) Elsevier is part of the Reed Elsevier group.** In terms of revenue, it accounts for 28% of the total (£1.5b of 5.4 billions in 2006). In terms of operating profits, it represents a much bigger fraction of 44% (£395 of 880 millions)[3]. Adjusted operating profits have risen by 10% between 2005 and 2006

### **2) Petition against Elsevier's parent organisation's involvement in weapon shows**

An editorial in the medical journal The Lancet in September 2005 sharply criticized the journal's owner and publisher, Reed Elsevier, for its participation in the international arms trade.[16] Specifically, one of Elsevier's subsidiaries organized the Defence Systems and Equipment International Exhibition(DSEi), a large arms fair in the U.K. The authors, appealing to the Hippocratic oath called for the publisher to divest itself of all business interests that threaten human, and especially civilian, health and well-being.[17]

In the March 2007 issue of the The Lancet, leading medical centers including the UK Royal College of Physicians urged Reed Elsevier to sever weapons ties. Doctors spoke out against Reed's role in the involvement of the organizing of exhibitions for the arms trade.[18] Reed Elsevier's chief executive responded in June 2007 with a written statement[19], welcomed by authors of the petition,[20] announcing that it would sell the part of the company which handled military trade shows. **Elsevier failed to sell off its exhibitions arm by the end of 2007!!!**

### **3) Criticism**

In recent years the subscription rates charged by the company for its journals have been criticised; some very large journals (those with more than 5000 articles) charge subscription prices as high as \$14,000, far above average. The company has been criticised not just by advocates of a switch to the so-called open-access publication model, but also by universities whose library budgets make it difficult for them to afford current journal prices. *For example, a resolution by Stanford University's senate singled out Elsevier as an example of a publisher of journals which might be "disproportionately expensive compared to their educational and research value" and which librarians should consider dropping, and encouraged its faculty "not to contribute articles or editorial or review efforts to publishers and journals that engage in exploitive or exorbitant pricing".[8] Similar guidelines and criticism of Elsevier's pricing policies have been passed by the University of California, Harvard University and Duke University*

### **4) Several entire editorial boards left Elsevier in protest**

In November 1999 the complete Editorial Board of the Journal of Logic Programming (50 persons in total)

collectively resigned after 16 months of unsuccessful negotiations with Elsevier Press about the price of library subscriptions. This editorial board created a new journal (Theory and Practice of Logic Programming) with a lower priced publisher, and on its side Elsevier continued the publication of the journal with a completely different editorial board and a slightly different name (The Journal of Logic and Algebraic Programming). At the end of 2003, the entire editorial board of the prestigious Journal of Algorithms resigned to start Transactions on Algorithms with a different, lower priced publisher[10], at the suggestion of Journal of Algorithms founder Donald Knuth[11].

The same happened in 2005 to the International Journal of Solids and Structures whose editors resigned to start the Journal of Mechanics of Materials and Structures. However, a new editorial board was quickly established and the journal continues in unaltered form.

On August 10, 2006, the entire editorial board of the distinguished mathematical journal Topology handed in their resignation, again because of stalled negotiations with Elsevier to lower the subscription price.[12] This board has now launched the new Journal of Topology at a far lower price, under the auspices of the London Mathematical Society.[13] The French École Normale Supérieure has stopped having Elsevier publish the prestigious journal Annales Scientifiques de l'École Normale Supérieure[14]