

DONALD TRUMP, MAKING CANADA GREAT AGAIN!

It hasn't taken long for tech companies to react strongly against President Trump's assault on one of their key advantages: international labor. Tech companies are dumping money into pro-immigrant funds, and challenging legal cases, even while advising their foreign-national employees to stay put in case Trump does something else rash with immigration laws.

The WSJ has a piece that suggests Canada will benefit from this, as tech companies locate their foreign national employees there to avoid dealing with Trump's capricious immigration actions.

[P]ast issues with U.S. immigration laws pushed Microsoft to open a satellite office in Vancouver in 2007, explicitly as a place for engineers it wanted to hire but couldn't get into the U.S. In 2009, Bill Gates held up Microsoft's Canada office as an example of how limits on the number of H-1B visas in the U.S. threatened America's pre-eminence in tech.

A spokesman for Microsoft says that, while immigration laws haven't been a primary driver of the company's investment in Canada, they've certainly been a contributing factor.

Microsoft is hardly alone—Apple, Google, Facebook, Cisco and dozens of other large U.S. tech companies have established offices in Canada for the same reason they build them all over the world: Tech talent is so valuable that when companies aren't able to get it to come to them, the companies will go to the talent.

Admittedly, this is, thus far, corporate posturing, an attempt to fearmonger back at Trump.

But it is posturing I'd love to see a lot more of. I have said repeatedly that, in addition to all the other responses to Trump's attack on immigrants, Tim Cook or – even better – Sergey Brin should make a very public real estate shopping trip to Ireland.

As the spouse of an Irishman, I'm admittedly biased (even while I recognize the tech companies are only in Ireland because, in addition to being English speaking, it is also a tax haven). I wouldn't mind seeing Ireland benefit if the US had to lose.

But threatening to move key facilities, or even headquarters, to Ireland would have another benefit, even over threatening Canada. Because it is in and undoubtedly will remain in the EU, location in Ireland would serve as a lily pad that would make compliance with EU data protection laws far easier (though the tech companies would have to get better at protecting their users' data, which would also be welcome).

More importantly, unlike Canada, Ireland is not part of the Five Eyes data sharing agreement. If the tech companies were to move outside of the Five Eyes – and therefore outside the realm where US spies can access the content of much of the world with a few keystrokes – it would undercut the power that Trump will almost assuredly abuse.

It may take more to cause tech companies to really respond: they'll surely be happy with Trump's assault on regulations. But they do have leverage over Trump that is meaningful.