



THE IMPETUS OF FRANCOPHONE

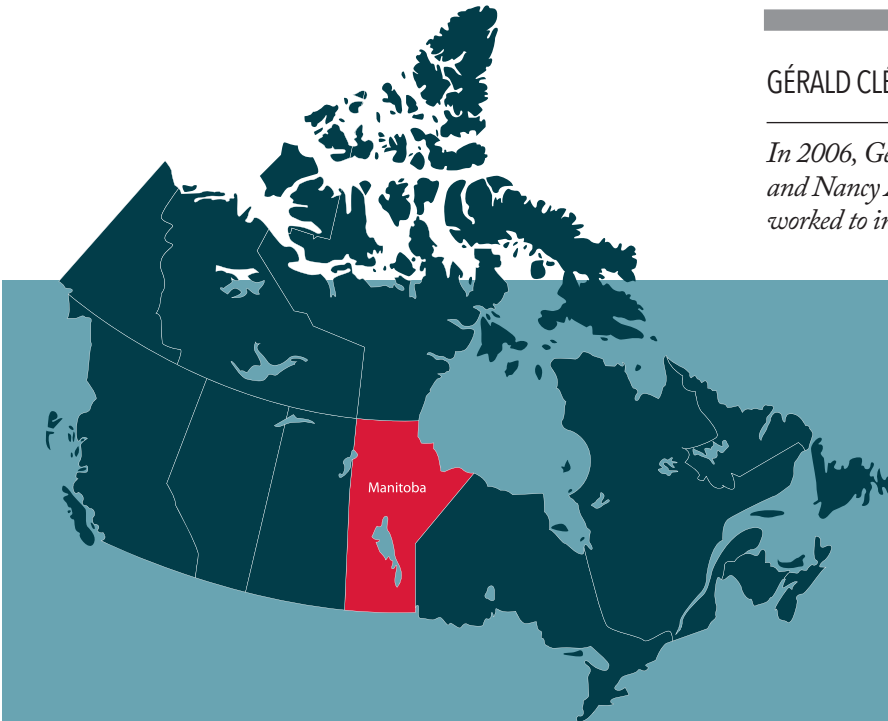
Communities



photo: Archives La Liberté

GÉRALD CLÉMENT AND NANCY ALLAN

In 2006, Gérald Clément, Deputy Minister of Labour and Immigration, and Nancy Allan, Manitoba Minister of Labour and Immigration, worked to increase Francophone immigration to the province.



While immigration has long been seen as an asset, even a necessity, for both Canada and Manitoba, Francophone immigration was not particularly targeted by governments until 2000.

Rather, it was the communities that provided the impetus for it.

BY CAMILLE HARPER

Canadian immigration policies no longer hold any secrets for Gérald Clément. Assistant Deputy Minister of Immigration for Manitoba from 1997 to 2007, Clément has spent a total of more than 30 years in the field. He recalls that in the 1980s and 1990s, Manitoba did not specifically seek to recruit Francophone immigrants, even though newcomers' guides were published in both official languages.

When the first agreement between Canada and a province, Manitoba, was signed in 1998 between the federal government of Jean Chrétien and the provincial government of Gary Filmon, "Gary Filmon's goal was to increase Manitoba's demographics through immigration in general. It did not include a specific number of Francophones."

Louis Allain, Executive Director of the Conseil de développement économique des municipalités bilingues du Manitoba (CDEM), confirms the authorities' lack of interest in the Francophone character of immigration at the time. For example, "Manitoba received an influx of Francophone immigrants from Laos in the 1980s. But neither the province nor Manitoba's Francophone community was able to seize the opportunity that presented itself, and these French-speaking Laotians assimilated among Anglophones."

A Strategy for Francophone Immigration

In 2000, the Fédération des communautés Francophones et acadienne du Canada (FCFA) established Francophone immigration as a priority for Francophone minority communities in Canada and encouraged the federal government to create strategies and policies to attract, recruit and settle French-speaking immigrants.

Manitoba immediately embraced this priority and translated it into its own strategy (see articles on Manitoba on pages 10 and 11). Gérald Clément, then in charge of provincial immigration: "As a bilingual person, I myself pushed Manitoba to include strategic selection criteria for the Francophone community in its Manitoba Provincial Nominee Program for immigration.

"I received good support from the governments. It was in their interest to support the vitality of official language minority communities because it is in the *Official Languages Act*, and immigration was a good tool for that." Gérald Clément was notably the first Chair of the Implementation Committee of the Steering Committee for Francophone Immigration in Canada from 2007

to 2011. "The goal of this committee was to reflect on how to concretely increase Francophone immigration, with the help of the provinces and organizations. As early as the 2000s, the federal and provincial governments were really aware of the importance of Francophone immigration."

The Target Has Yet to be Reached

Despite the recognition by governments and the community of the strategic importance of Francophone immigration, neither Canada nor Manitoba has been able to achieve its objectives.

Mamadou Ka, lecturer in the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences at the Université de Saint-Boniface: "In 2002, the FCFA lobbied the federal government and obtained a 4% quota for Francophone immigration outside Quebec.

"This 4% target is far from being reached. Less than 2% of immigration outside Quebec is Francophone. Government efforts to attract French-speaking immigrants are not enough."

However, Mamadou Ka remains hopeful that Francophone immigration will take off. Indeed, he notes, "the federal government is starting to go to Africa, particularly Senegal, for immigrant recruitment missions. It is a new wind that is blowing today." Sub-Saharan Africa is the largest pool of Francophones in the world.

Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) spokesperson Béatrice Fénelon confirms that one of the three main objectives of the Francophone Immigration Strategy announced on March 13, 2019, is "to increase Francophone immigration to Canada, outside Quebec, to reach a target of 4.4% by 2023.

"To do so, 14 communities across Canada, including the Seine River region of Manitoba, have been identified to receive funding that will allow them to create programs and support to offer a warm welcome to French-speaking newcomers and help them integrate into Francophone minority communities.

"This \$12.6 million initiative over three years will promote the integration and retention of French-speaking newcomers to Canada," said Béatrice Fénelon. ▀