 **English-French Tensions**

**Introduction**

* English-French tensions have been an issue throughout Canada’s history;
* Dispute between fur trading companies led to the Seven Years’ War;
* Métis resistance led to the execution of Louis Riel;
* Laurier saw that tensions could divide the country and he wanted to find a compromise.

**The Manitoba Act**

* Manitoba Act of 1870 gave guarantees to both English and French-speaking people;
* In education, guarantees were made to both sides:
  + English and French language rights were guaranteed in the courts;
  + There would be religious schools: Protestant or Roman Catholic.
* Although language rights were not guaranteed in schools, the system did seem to satisfy both populations.

**Manitoba Schools**

* Manitoba received many immigrants during the 1880s;
* Most were English Protestant;
* By 1890 the majority of people were English speaking and demanded changes to its language laws:
  + Abolished French as official language and courts spoke in English only;
  + Removed government support from Roman Catholic schools.

**Legal Ruling and the Political Situation**

* English speakers across Canada supported Manitoba’s reforms;
* French speakers were strongly opposed;
* In 1895, the court decided Manitoba could make these changes and only federal government could overrule;
* Conservative government reintroduced the old system while Laurier and the Liberals opposed it.

**Laurier’s Compromise**

* If Laurier was elected he would:
  + Not restore the old system in Manitoba;
  + Allow French instruction if they had the numbers for it;
  + Religious instruction at the end of the day.
* This was an effective compromise;
* Laurier’s opposition forced the government to withdraw its bill and call an election;
* Laurier won majority in 1896.

**Conclusion: Reactions**

* Not everyone agreed with Laurier’s compromise;
* Others thought the issue had been blown out of proportion;
* Language and religion play powerful roles in politics;
* The ability for Laurier to find the middle ground was one of the reasons he remained Prime Minister for 15 years (1896-1911).