

Mercredi says PQ offer is PR

LAC-DELAGE, Que. (CP) — A Parti Quebecois' promise to give natives royalties from natural resources is probably a "public relations gimmick," aimed at winning support for their sovereignty option, Ovide Mercredi said Wednesday.

"For us the question is still out there on whether it (the offer) was meant for us or meant for the referendum," the head of the Assembly of First Nations said.

PQ Premier Jacques Parizeau has said Quebec natives could get royalties from mining or timber operations on their lands.

"It is my sense — and I could be wrong — that it's more public relations than a genuine offer," Mercredi said at a meeting of the Quebec branch of the AFN.

"The strategy of PQ may well be that they will try to give the impression they will be very good friends of the Indians."

Mercredi said Quebec natives are right to be skeptical about the offer if the PQ won't start paying up until after sovereignty.

But he said if Parizeau — who is also Quebec's native affairs minister — is serious it could spur change for natives across the country.

The Quebec branch of the AFN has been meeting just outside of Quebec City to come up with a position on how to deal with the sov-

ereignist PQ government. A general declaration is expected today.

Mercredi wasn't the only native expressing doubt about the new PQ government's commitment to natives.

Matthew Coon-Come, the grand chief of the Cree, said his people are concerned the PQ's sovereignty plan could lead to violence if Quebec doesn't respect their right to self-determination.

The Cree of northern Quebec plan on holding their own referendum on whether to join an independent Quebec, remain in Canada or go it alone.

"I'm concerned. Wouldn't you be? The stakes are high," he said.

Coon-Come said there will be plenty of carrots dangled before the first nations to try to win their support before the referendum.

But he didn't sound like the Cree would be willing to bite.

"There are too many ifs. There is no guarantee that the constitution we would negotiate would not be changed or amended," he said.

He called on Parizeau to fulfil the province's commitments under the James Bay and Northern Quebec agreement. Only then will the Cree talk sovereignty, he said.

The 12,000 Cree are key to the PQ's independence plans. Their land in the northern half of Quebec is home to Hydro-Quebec's most important dams.



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Ovide Mercredi (left), Chief of the Assembly of First Nations, talks to Max Gros-Louis, chief of the Hurons of Wendake, Wednesday during a meeting of Quebec natives in Lac Delage.