

WINNIPEG (CP) — In languages ranging from Ojibwa and Cree to Gitksan and Mohawk, the six people vying for the leadership of the Assembly of First Nations shouted a chorus of defiance Monday.

"The white man . . . leads a different life, but he does not control us," Ovide Mercredi said in Cree to applause from more than a thousand people jammed into the Winnipeg Convention Centre.

"I will not tolerate an intrusion any further on our people's rights, upon our culture, upon our language," said Bill Wilson, the assembly's outspoken vice-chief from British Columbia.

The leadership candidates gave their wrap-up speeches Monday night.

They promised to deal strongly with provincial and federal governments to defend native rights.

Wilson won applause and laughter with the most forcefully delivered speech of the night. But he tempered it by telling non-native Canadians not to be afraid.

Natives could help save Canada now just as their North American home provided safe haven for the original European settlers, said Wilson.

"Just as we were the life raft when you were lost at sea, so too now in your confusion with the Constitution, we represent a life raft for this country," he said.

Wilson said the assembly can serve as an example, since it accommodates 57 distinct native societies with different languages and cultures.

#### **'Never go backwards'**

"We are gaining and we should never go backwards," said Mitchell.

Other candidates were less strident.

Bill Montour, a Mohawk from the Six Nations reserve near Brantford, condemned the ad-

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*June 11/91*

versarial approach and "negativism" of many native leaders.

He said it has produced a severely strained relationship with non-native politicians.

Neil Sterritt, a hereditary Gitksan chief from British Columbia, said the assembly must find a way to address concerns in native communities instead of concentrating on constitutional issues.

"The reality in 1991 is that the Constitution is important and so are social conditions," said Sterritt.