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Page 2

IRA divided over future of ceasefire

THE IRA is divided over whether to continue its renewed ceasefire and could order a resumption of violence in the coming months if further political concessions are not granted to Sinn Fein, intelligence sources have disclosed.

Around 50 key IRA members held a secret meeting in the west of Co Donegal 11 days ago and voted to maintain the ceasefire.

More than a dozen of those present, however, believed a "return to war" would bring them closer to a united Ireland than political talks.

Among those who opposed the truce were the IRA's chief of staff, a farmer from close to the South Armagh border, his predecessor, a Co Tyrone man now living in Co Monaghan, and the head of the IRA's southern command, a jail

escaper whose brother was shot dead by loyalists.

All three men are wanted for terrorist crimes in Northern Ireland. They are believed to be supported by about 30 per cent of IRA "foot soldiers". Also at the meeting were senior representatives of Sinn Fein, who argued that the talks were the way forward.

"The ceasefire is still very well-controlled and there is no sign of a split in the republican movement," a senior intelligence officer told *The Daily Telegraph*. "But this meeting showed that the ceasefire is by no means permanent. Violence is still a weapon that can be used tactically and the ceasefire will end if Sinn Fein cannot secure major con-

By Toby Harnden, Irish Correspondent

stitutional change at the talks." Intelligence reports suggest the IRA units in the Irish Republic, South Armagh, North Armagh, East Tyrone and pockets of Belfast are most hostile to the ceasefire.

A further meeting to review the ceasefire is likely to be held before Christmas, with a full-scale IRA Army Convention involving representatives from units all over Ireland due to take place in the spring.

An Army Convention is the only body with the power to make peace permanent. Royal Ulster Constabulary officers believe this is unlikely without an end to British jurisdiction in Northern Ireland in sight.

Security sources said that while there was no imminent danger of an IRA split there was increasing concern about the activities of the Continuity Army Council, a splinter group which has "some cross-over" with the IRA.

The CAC bomb which devastated the town of Markethill, Co Armagh, last month is believed to have been authorised personally by the IRA's chief of staff.

It is feared that a leading IRA member from Armagh whose two brothers were shot dead by the security forces may have defected to the CAC. He has been seen visiting at least one IRA member in South Armagh, where last month's Markethill bomb emanated.

In Tyrone, the leaders of IRA units have been seen with Irish

National Liberation Army members, prompting fears that the INLA could be used to carry out proxy attacks on the security forces.

This would be seen as a way of applying political pressure at the Stormont talks without risking the expulsion of Sinn Fein.

A rifle, handgun and ammunition was seized and a suspected INLA member arrested in west Belfast last week and there was an intelligence warning of a possible "imminent attack" by the INLA.

Although the IRA is not believed to be carrying out "dummy runs" in preparation for attacks, several members have been observed conducting what some security sources describe as "passive surveillance" on intended targets.