

## Seminar on Palestine

### Introduction to the papers contributed

By Mike Phipps, Chair of the LRC Anti-war Commission

On Tuesday 10<sup>th</sup> March, the Labour Representation Committee Anti-war Commission organised a seminar in Parliament on Palestine, chaired by John McDonnell MP, the chair of the LRC. The aim of the seminar was to explore both solutions to the long-standing conflict and avenues for exerting influence over the shaping of British policy in the region.

It may be premature to speculate how far the inauguration of President Obama in the US may mark a new departure in the search for a lasting peace in the Middle East. What is far clearer is that the horrific bombardment unleashed on the people of Gaza at the end of 2008 has caused outrage around the world and this has in turn put pressure on western governments to reconsider its wholehearted support for Israel, which in Britain's case includes the sale of armaments. It's a chilling thought that only the death of so many innocents can create an opportunity where Britain's longstanding bipartisan policy might be challenged with some effectiveness.

The Foreign Office has historically justified its commitment to Israel on the grounds that it is the only democracy in the region. Even this pretext looks threadbare, given that two significant Arab parties were banned from participating in Israel's recent elections.

The attack on Gaza was long-planned and may have had a lot to do with the timing of these elections. Now that these are over, there can be no return to normalcy. The urgent need to resolve the issues behind the conflict and to move British government policy in a positive direction underpinned the LRC Seminar on Palestine and the papers contributed to it, which are now available on the website. As usual, feedback is warmly welcomed.