By the end of the summer of 1936, the war was not going well for the Republic: it had failed to gain even a single substantial victory over the rebelling military, while the rebels themselves had managed to link the army in Africa with that of the North in order to ‘liberate’ the Alcázar in Toledo (in the process creating an important myth for Franco), to establish positions on the Peninsula, and to halt or defeat every Republican military offensive. In the face of a war that looked as though it would drag on, the need for a unified command was obvious. At the beginning of September, Prime Minister José Giral announced his resignation, and on 4 September a new cabinet was formed, presided over by new Prime Minster Francisco Largo Caballero, a left socialist, with a collection of ministers representing political parties and trade union organisations. In a note made public on 4 September, Giral’s government explained in no uncertain terms the intentions behind their resignation: ‘The grave circumstances the nation is experiencing and the duration of the civil war we are enduring, which it appears will be long, leads the present government to desire and advise that a replacement government be created that will represent each and every one of the political parties and worker and trade union organisations of recognised influence among the Spanish people, from whom power always originates’.1

1. La Vanguardia, 5 September 1936.
The new government was formed by Largo Caballero (President and War Minister), Julio Alvarez del Vayo (State Minister), Indalecio Prieto (Sea and Air), Angel Galarza (Interior), Juan Negrín (Treasury), Vicente Uribe (Agriculture), Jesús Hernández (Education), José Antonio Aguirre (Public Works), Mariano Ruiz Funes (Justice), Anastasio de Gracia (Industry and Commerce), Bernardo Giner de los Ríos (Communications), Josep Tomàs i Piera (Labour), and José Giral Pereira (minister without portfolio). In all, there were six socialist ministers, three left republicans, one Basque nationalist, and one Esquerra member. The big news was the presence of two Communist Party members – Uribe and Hernández. Meanwhile, for the moment, the anarchists of the CNT continued their traditional apoliticism, choosing not to participate.

The formation of Largo Caballero’s government in Madrid made it easier to form a new government in Catalonia. There, the CNT did break with tradition when they joined the new Unity Government, created on 26 September, presided over by Josep Tarradellas. Tarradellas was Minister of Finance as well as Prime Minister, and he was joined by Felipe Díaz Sandino (Defence); Andreu Nin from the POUM (Justice); the Esquerra’s Ventura Gassol (Culture); Artemi Aiguader, also from the Esquerra (Internal Security); three CNT members: Joan P. Fàbregas (Economy), Josep Joan i Domènech (Supplies), and Antoni García i Birlán (Health and Social Assistance); two from the PSUC, Joan Comorera (Public Services) and Miquel Valdés (Labour and Public Works); Rabassaires member Josep Calvet (Agriculture); and Rafael Closas from the ACR as a minister without portfolio.

The formation of Catalonia’s new government brought an end to the governments controlled exclusively by the Esquerra since the beginning of the war. It had two significant new features: first, it brought under one unified government the full plurality of anti-fascist organisations and parties, and second, as has been mentioned, it gained the participation of anarchist leaders, who were departing radically from their usual rejection of political power. But the demands and exigencies of the moment made participation in government more opportune since, as the manifesto of the new cabinet explained, the new basic objectives were to identify strategies to better wage the war, to establish new economic norms, and, above all, to resolve the problems caused by lack of discipline and control. Among other things, the manifesto declared:

Fascism has raised arms against the Republic and mired the country in the horrors of civil war. Hoping to save the privileges of the traditional castes and of big capitalism, fascism has destroyed them and added to the anguish of war

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2. There is a sizable debate among anarchist ranks about their participation in government. See Lorenzo 1969.