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THE most revealing indicator of reaction's oozing self-confidence to date is Mr Minoo Masani's decision to train his pop-gun on the Congress Party in the next Lok Sabha rather than to state what his own gang will do in it. His assessment now is that Mrs Gandhi will not get the single-party majority of which she has so often spoken in recent days, and the differences within the Congress and between it and its allies being what they are, she might not be able to secure the necessary number of votes in the two Houses to bring about worthwhile changes in our cumbersome Constitution. Not satisfied with boosting his own and his friends' (if not his family's) morale with such arithmetic, Mr Masani has also called upon the people to realize that they alone constitute the true element of sovereignty in our society and not parliaments and legislatures. This jejune essay in casuistry is necessary because Mr Masani and other political brokers of vested interests are realizing that most political parties that are or want to look progressive are getting more specifically committed to a rational redistribution of concentrated economic power.

The abstract people and the ghostly words of the Constitution have become supremely important categories because the assumption is that they can, at least for a time, be used against institutions and ideas that appear to threaten wealth and the sordid power it gives to Mr Masani's masters. The people however are not an abstraction. They are concretely real and the hungers in their bodies and the ideas in their minds are the essential substance of our politics and our economic and social institutions and should be the governing force of all our laws including our fundamental law. The people's sovereignty cannot be expressed except through these institutions and laws, and it is because the people are supreme that our Parliament should be the ultimate and unquestioned arbiter in all their affairs. It is political chicanery to seek to separate legislative houses elected on the basis of adult suffrage from the people themselves. Attempts to do so are invariably inspired by the hope that the people as a whole can be confused and tricked into attitudes obstructive to collective economic and cultural progress. It is true that in the last few years individuals and groups bent on such mischief have achieved a degree of success. Otherwise such political atavisms as Mr Masani and his alliance friends would not have been in a position to poison the democratic atmosphere in India. A measure of their success is the confused picture the election-eve scene presents. In spite of the people's increasing desire to separate the reactionaries from the democrats, the confusion and individual and group ambitions could be slaked.

This picture, however, is evanescent. It will indubitably be replaced by one of greater purpose and stability. The next Lok Sabha may not see a road-roller majority party; but it certainly will see the long-awaited process of socialist and democratic unification without which vitally necessary changes in the Constitution cannot be implemented.