

LETTERS

Age, The (Melbourne, Australia) - Thursday, February 20, 2003

Maths I: add up all the numbers I was at the Melbourne rally last Friday, and unlike Pat Minihan (19/2), took the time to walk through backstreets to estimate the crowd size.

Let us accept Minihan's estimates of 25,000 people in Federation Square, and 50,000 for the section of Swanston Street between Federation Square and the State Library. I checked, and both these areas were full after Federation Square overflowed - and, indeed, there were still new crowd movements crossing La Trobe Street from the north and overflows down St Kilda Road in the opposite direction. I also checked the crowd density during the walk to Federation Square, which varied between two and four people per square metre.

On Minihan's own conservative estimates, and using the lowest of the crowd density figures I measured, there was a minimum of 75,000 people - not counting the flows in from the north and south after Federation Square was full.

Clearly, those who wish to play down the significance of such a large, peaceful (and largely unadvertised) assembly, would seek to minimise the numbers involved and the effort required to attend.

But this is no reason to fail in the most basic of arithmetic questions: add up all the numbers!

Marcus Wigan , professor of transport systems, Napier University, Edinburgh