

# OSWALD MEETING NEARLY CANCELED

Town Hall, Fearing a Melee,  
Insists on \$25,000 Bond

2/19

By PETER KIHSS

Town Hall acknowledged yesterday that it had sought to cancel a public meeting involving Mrs. Marguerite Oswald on the ground that her appearance "could be incendiary."

The hall, a part of New York University since 1958, allowed the meeting to go on last night only after The National Guardian weekly, sponsor of the meeting, deposited \$25,000 in cash to cover any damages to Town Hall premises.

James Aronson, the weekly's editor, called the episode "a disgrace to the concept of free speech and free inquiry."

Town Hall spokesmen contended that the sponsors at first had not told them that Mrs. Oswald, the mother of President Kennedy's accused assassin, was to appear.

The spokesmen said Town Hall "would prefer not to have further dealings with The National Guardian."

### Bonds in 3 Previous Cases

James V. Edwards, assistant director of Town Hall, said bonds had been required in at least three previous cases.

A \$25,000 bond, he said, was required from the Student Committee for Travel to Cuba, whose meeting last Sept. 15 caused thousands of anti-Castro demonstrators to mill around Times Square. Phillip Abbott Luce, that group's spokesman, said this had been an insurance policy.

Fifteen-hundred persons were reported to have bought all available tickets for last night's meeting at prices from \$1.50 to \$5. In addition to Mrs. Oswald, speakers included former Assemblyman Mark Lane, whom she has named unpaid defense counsel for her son, Lee H. Oswald.

Town Hall occupies a 42-year-old structure at 123 West 43rd Street. Its slogan, "You Shall Know the Truth and the Truth Shall Make You Free," appears on the front of the building.

Mr. Aronson said National Guardian's \$600 rental had been confirmed by a letter and check on Jan. 14 after arrangements had been made over the telephone. Town Hall confirmed that its director, Ormond J. Drake, associate dean of the N.Y.U. Division of General Education, wrote in a letter on Jan. 28 that the understanding had been Mr. Lane would speak, but that an article in The New York Journal-American had then announced Mrs. Oswald would appear "to proclaim her son's innocence."

### Terms Are Held Altered

"The terms of the proposed lease have been materially altered," Mr. Drake wrote. He continued:

"In our opinion Mrs. Oswald's appearance could be incendiary. Town Hall does not choose to be a party to the airing of a case that is presently being studied by the Presidential commission."

"In view of the importance of the investigation now in progress by this high-level judicial committee, Town Hall does not believe that the appearance of Mrs. Oswald on a public platform would serve any useful purpose."

The National Guardian, Mr. Aronson said, got the aid of Edward J. Ennis, general counsel of the American Civil Liberties Union.

Mr. Drake wrote the weekly a letter on Feb. 4, enclosing a lease form but demanding "a bond of \$25,000 to protect the physical property at Town Hall in the event of material damage."

Mr. Ennis replied on Feb. 5, objecting to "the onerous condition of a large bond as security against completely improbable physical damage."

"Such a general requirement," Mr. Ennis wrote, "suggestive of an unconstitutional condition, would penalize proponents of a peaceable assembly rather than its opponents unlawfully threatening physical disturbance, and would subject the peaceable assembly to the veto by commercial surety companies which might exact the deposit of full cash collateral for a bond or refuse it altogether in the case of unpopular meetings."

### Insists on a Bond

Mr. Drake insisted on a bond. The National Guardian, Mr. Aronson said, submitted a one-day \$25,000 insurance policy on Feb. 12, but this was rejected.

After rejections from bonding companies, Mr. Aronson reported, \$25,000 in negotiable bonds and cashier's checks was raised from four persons he preferred to leave unnamed, and the money was deposited on Monday in a bank against any Town Hall claims.

Queries to the Police Department, Town Hall and The National Guardian yesterday afternoon brought disclaimers from all quarters on knowledge of any threats to disturb the meeting.

David Haber, professor of law at Rutgers University was chairman of the meeting. Other speakers included Staughton Lynd, professor of history at Spelman College, Atlanta, and Jack Minnis, former research director of the Southern Regional Council's Voter Education Project, who had collaborated in a New Republic article on the Oswald case entitled "Seeds of Doubt."

Lane

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