

Matter of Fact

A Senate Ballet Over Cambodia

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AT THE MOMENT, the Cooper-Church amendment restricting the President's powers as Commander-in-Chief, in Cambodia and elsewhere, is the prime topic of every political gathering in Washington. Eventually, the chances are strong that the Cooper-Church amendment will pass the Senate.

But with all due respect to two very fine men, John Sherman Cooper of Kentucky and Frank Church of Idaho, the amendment might better be called the Nijinsky-Nureyev amendment. In other words, these two high-minded Senators have been leading their colleagues in a species of splendid ballet, to rounds of ringing applause from the ballet-lovers. But when the curtain goes down, and no one is any longer striking beautiful poses, there will be nothing left but air.

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PERHAPS the Congress has entirely abandoned its legislative function. Perhaps making public demonstrations is the highest remaining congressional function. On these terms, no doubt, the Cooper-Church amendment is a useful exercise.

But if the purpose of a congressional vote is to achieve a practical result, a rather different standard has to be applied. Where the vote is to forbid the President to do this, that, or the other, the House of Representatives has to concur with the Senate. And in this case, the chances of House concurrence are remote.

If the Cambodian gamble is judged to be a disaster by the time the matter comes up before the House of Representa-

tives, the foregoing forecasts will have to be scratched. But if the President's gamble in Cambodia is then seen as a major victory, or even a moderate success (as is far more likely), the Cooper-Church amendment will have about the same chances as a snowball in hell.

One reason is the character of the House Foreign Affairs Committee. The chairman, Representative Thomas Morgan of Pennsylvania, might be described as a kind of anti-Fulbright.

Unlike Senator J. William Fulbright, Morgan does not deliver powerful, high level, prepared speeches, whose authors then devote acres of newspaper space to lauding the statesmanship of their own elegant words. Morgan is a sturdy, old-fashioned, uncolorful fellow. He has high views of the U.S. and its role in the world and rather low views of his senatorial opposite number.

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ULTIMATELY, the Cooper-Church amendment to the Military Sales Bill must go to a House-Senate conference, unless it goes to the floor of the House. If it goes to conference, the chances of House concurrence in the Senate's action will be just about zero.

If the House chairman gives way to the Senate chairman, the House itself will still have to concur.

The best forecast at the moment — barring a disaster across the Pacific — is that the Cooper-Church amendment will be flatly rejected, by a majority of rather more than three-to-two.