Freer Puerto Rico

Puerto Rico, most populous of United States territories (2,210,000 persons in an area of 3,435 square miles), has demanded and won a larger measure of self-government than any other. Puerto Ricans, like Hawaiians and Alaskans, cannot vote in Presidential or Congressional elections, but they do elect their own Legislature and Governor. (Hawaii and Alaska have Governors appointed by the President.) The Puerto Rican Legislature makes local laws, subject to repeal by Congress. The Governor appoints all the island’s officials except a few judges and an auditor named by the President.

In 1950 Congress authorized Puerto Rico to draw up its own constitution and submit it to Puerto Rican voters in a referendum and then to Congress. A special Puerto Rican Constituent Assembly recently wrote a constitution which, among other things, abolishes Congress’ right to repeal insular laws, refers to Puerto Rico as a “commonwealth” instead of a territory and leaves open the question of future statehood. Last Monday, in their referendum, Puerto Ricans approved the proposed constitution by a better than 4-to-1 vote. Prospects for ratification in Washington are considered good, but whether Congress will get around to it this session is not certain.