Yankees Of The North Duefully Proud
Of Constitution Offered Puerto Rico

SAN JUAN — Today, in Puerto Rico, beginning just before noon, the streets will be quite empty. For, promptly at 1 o'clock, little groups of Puerto Ricans will be locked up, 160 to a schoolhouse or office building, to vote on one of the most important documents in the Western hemisphere — the new Puerto Rican constitution.

The voters will be locked in the buildings and schoolhouses in order to prevent their repeating at the polls. They sit quietly waiting their turn to vote while a great calm settles down over the island. This calm is so intense that you can almost hear thousands of pencils scratching crosses on thousands of ballots in this American plebiscite on self-determination of peoples.

This unique balloting is taking place in the oldest part of America, yet is one of the newest experiments in self-government.

It was just a few miles from here that Christopher Columbus first poked the nose of his Santa Maria into the mysteries of the new world. The turret tower of the governor's palace at San Juan from which this new constitution will be administered was built only 40 years after Columbus' arrival here.

And, as Columbus pioneered a new world, so Puerto Rico and the United States may be pioneering a new governmental system which may set a pattern for the Western hemisphere.

FRIENDLY TO U.S. — In actual fact the so-called "damn Yankees of the North" can be proud of what's happening in Puerto Rico. Here is an island which for four long centuries was under the rule of Spain, yet in exactly 50 years it has become vigorous, self-respecting, completely democratic, loyal, and friendly to the U.S.A. In contrast, the mother country, Spain, is still under a dictatorship, has suffered a recent bloody revolution that permits no freedom of the press, freedom of speech or religion.

The contrast is interesting in other respects. The dictator of Spain, Francisco Franco, has recently paid a powerful lobby in Washington to push a $100 million outright gift to Spain through Congress.

The man who governs Puerto Rico, on the other hand, Luis Munoz Marin, first Puerto Rican governor to be elected by the people, is able to get few gifts from Congress. Yet Governor Munoz Marin, educated at Georgetown university and living much of his life in the U.S., is such a vigorous champion of civil liberties that he even gives the Puerto Rican educational paper-printing contract to the low-bidding San Juan newspaper which is his severest critic.

UNIQUE DOCUMENT — It is Governor Munoz Marin who largely pioneered the new Puerto Rican constitution being voted on today. This is a unique document, for it provides neither statehood nor independence for Puerto Rico but makes it "the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico." The exact language is a "free associated state." What this means is that Puerto Rico will remain associated with and part of the United States, free to govern itself on local problems but subject to the tariffs of the United States and other U.S. laws which Congress specifies should apply to the island.

However, Puerto Rico will fix its own taxes, thus preserving the right held dear to our founding fathers of no taxation without representation but it will receive the protection of the American armed forces, which will use Puerto Rico as a base, and in most other respects the island will continue to be a part of the United States.

This compromise of a commonwealth or free associated state was worked out by Democratic Sen. Joseph O'Mahoney of Wyoming, Republican Sen. Guy Gordon of Oregon and other congressmen in cooperation with Puerto Rican leaders for two reasons:

1—Puerto Ricans did not have sufficient wealth to become a state, they could not afford to pay personal taxes as do Hawaii and Alaska. And 2—The island could not afford to lose the benefit of its economic ties with the United States which would be severed if it obtained complete independence.

Thus a course was adopted midway between that of the Philippines which sought and obtained independence and Alaska and Hawaii which seek complete full-fledged statehood.

If the constitution being voted on today is adopted by the people, as seems likely, it then goes to the U.S. Congress for approval and, if approved by Congress, Puerto Rico becomes a commonwealth associated with the United States of America.

HEMISPHERIC TIES — Though continental Americans, engrossed in Korea, domestic corruption and presidential politics, have paid little attention to the new look in Puerto Rico, it has aroused great interest in Latin America.

For various countries of the Caribbean—Cuba, Panama, Central America, Venezuela—are tied to the United States both by commerce and friendship. These ties are so close that their economy is almost completely dependent upon the U.S. and the U.S., in turn, is dependent upon their raw materials.

Therefore if some loose association of commonwealth nations could be worked out for the Caribbean area whereby these nations would retain their independence yet be "free associated states" with the United States, it might have great advantages both for them and for the U.S.

Some friendly Latin-Americans see the day when the Panama Canal could be just as thorny a political problem between the United States and Panama as the Suez is today between British and Egypt. But, if an association of free states including Panama was linked with the United States in a league of friendly Pan-American nations, this problem would be solved before it ever got started.

That is why the Puerto Rican balloting today is being watched throughout the Western hemisphere. It's also why the balloting may set a new milestone in American relations.