



UPI FILE PHOTO

MILESTONES:The 20-year-old MP Sean O'Sullivan stands with his mentor John Diefenbaker, left, in Ottawa. The



TORONTO STAR FILE PHOTO

newly ordained Father O'Sullivan leaves Toronto's St. Michael's Cathedral with Emmett Cardinal Carter, right.

Rev. Sean O'Sullivan once touted as future prime minister of Canada

By Jim Foster Toronto Star

Sometimes Rev. Sean O'Sullivan would introduce himself with a grin: "No, I'm not the boxer. But I am a fighter."

Once the boy wonder of Canadian politics, touted by John Diefenbaker as a future prime minister, he gave up his House of Commons seat for the priesthood in 1977.

In 1983, a year-and-a-half after he was ordained, he learned he had leukemia and might die within six weeks.

A born politician

He told friends he didn't fear death but wouldn't surrender. While chemotherapy held his blood cancer at bay, he ran the weekly Catholic Register, published his memoirs, advised Ontario on protecting those too weak to protect themselves.

Now the fight is over. He died yesterday at the age of 37.

Many called him a born politician. Certainly he was one by age 11 when he met Prime Minister Diefenbaker in Hamilton's Royal Connaught Hotel, where young Sean's father was general manager.

Impressed by their chat and an

Obituary

earlier fan letter, Diefenbaker made the boy an honorary Young Progressive Conservative — honorary because he was five years too young.

By 13 he had been elected to the executive of the Hamilton area Young PCs. At 15 he was the youngest delegate to the 1967 leadership convention that deposed his hero. At 18 he was president of the Ontario Young PCs. At 19 he was special youth liaison officer for Premier Bill Davis, who called him a "remarkable young man."

Just before his 20th birthday he became the 76-year-old Diefenbaker's executive assistant, but for only a few months.

He ran in the 1972 election and won Hamilton-Wentworth riding by more than 4,000 votes, the youngest MP in history.

Diefenbaker predicted his dapper, right-wing protege would run the country some day.

After re-election, however, he abruptly resigned his seat. A week later he was in Rome, studying at Pontifical Gregorian University. Three years later he was a deacon and chaplain of Toronto's Notre Dame High School.

He became a priest in October, 1981.

A former Tory colleague remarked, "I had never seen him so happy. He wasn't truly happy in Ottawa."

After less than a year as associate pastor of St. Bernadette's Church in Ajax, he was appointed director of vocations to recruit priests for the Archdiocese of Toronto.

As usual, Father O'Sullivan made a splash. He launched a billboard blitz portraying a crucified Christ against a cityscape, with the legend "Dare To Be a Priest Like Me."

'Shock treatment'

"It was shock treatment, no question," he told critics cheerfully. Then he noted that the number of seminarians doubled and he was able to launch Serra House as a new residence for students interested in the priesthood.

In April, 1983, he learned he had leukemia. After months of chemotherapy he returned to work with the disease in remission.

He knew he was living on borrowed time.

"People always told me that I was a young man in a hurry. Perhaps we now know why," Father

O'Sullivan wrote in *The Star*.

He became publisher of the Catholic Register in 1985 and worked on his memoirs with Rod McQueen. They were published in 1986 as *Both My Houses — From Politics To Priesthood*. Most reviewers liked the book.

Order of Canada

In 1987 he became a companion of the Order of Canada and presented a report commissioned by the Ontario government on a million "vulnerable adults" — the frail, elderly and handicapped. He recommended a government program to train advocates who would defend their rights.

Father O'Sullivan leaves his parents, Paul and Helen O'Sullivan of Hamilton, sister, Kathleen, and brothers Joe, Jacques, Tim, Paul and Terry.

His body will rest in St. John's Chapel, St. Michael's Cathedral, Sunday from 2 to 4 and 7 to 9 p.m.

The funeral Mass will take place in the cathedral at 11 a.m. Monday. Emmett Cardinal Carter will be principal concelebrant and Father Sam Restivo of Resurrection College, Waterloo, the homilist. Father O'Sullivan will be buried in the family plot at Hamilton's Holy Sepulchre Cemetery.

Friends recall O'Sullivan's courage, humor

Rev. Sean O'Sullivan was a person of enormous courage and incredible humor, friends and colleagues said in tribute to the Roman Catholic priest who at 20 became the youngest-ever member of Parliament.

O'Sullivan was Conservative MP for Hamilton-Wentworth from 1972 to 1977 and was ordained a priest in 1981. He died yesterday in Princess Margaret Hospital after a battle with leukemia.

"During the past several years, those who knew Sean watched his struggle against leukemia with profound admiration," Prime Minister Brian Mulroney said in a letter to O'Sullivan's parents.

"We admired his courage and recognized his determination to

"His courageous battle over recent years is a symbol for us all of the meaning of faith," said External Affairs Minister Joe Clark, who, like O'Sullivan, was a protege of former Conservative prime minister John Diefenbaker.

"The Canadian community has benefited immensely from Sean's exceptional life and we all now profoundly grieve his loss."

Liberal leader John Turner, one of O'Sullivan's close friends despite their political differences, was too overcome by grief to issue a public statement, an aide said yesterday.

Bishop John Sherlock, of the London diocese, said O'Sullivan was never cynical or materialistic.

"He dealt with his sickness courageously yet realistically," Sherlock said. "He didn't expect a

the loss of someone whom I loved."

"He had enormous courage," said Conservative Senator Findlay MacDonald, a close friend from the early days in Parliament.

"But it was his incredible humor and compassion that caused people to be drawn to him. He had time for so many people, time for them all.

"And he would just brighten any room he entered," added MacDonald, who said goodbye to O'Sullivan in January after a vacation in Florida.

"It's a great loss to the community," said MP Sheila Copps, a member of the Liberal Rat Pack, who'd gone through Hamilton elementary and high schools with O'Sulli-

van, debating politics all the way.

"Sean was a man of ideas and he was always a fighter, someone who stood up for what he believed in," she said.

"I envied his youth and admired his mind," said Senator Jack Marshall, a Tory MP from Newfoundland in the 1970s, who added that despite O'Sullivan's youth "he was obviously very mature."

Steve Paproski, now deputy Commons speaker, recalled that his former colleague was "a fine and saintly individual."

"He was a fighter in politics and in sickness. He was a real beautiful person who's going to be missed by both the church and by his many, many friends."