

Kennedy Is Critical Of Pardon

By Jules Witcover
Washington Post Staff Writer

LOS ANGELES, Sept. 13— Sen. Edward M. Kennedy (D-Mass.) said today President Ford's pardon of former President Nixon "has led many Americans to believe it was a culmination of the Watergate cover-up."

But Kennedy, asked at a press conference here whether he was suggesting there had been a deal on the pardon between Mr. Ford and Mr. Nixon, said he had never made such a suggestion and added, "I have no basis of evidence to believe so."

Reports that the President had been considering pardons for other individuals involved in Watergate raised questions in people's minds, Kennedy said, until Mr. Ford disavowed those reports.

Kennedy said he did not know whether the reporters were "a trial balloon" or "the President was now backtracking," but he called any suggestion of blanket pardons "ill-conceived and poorly timed."

President's Ford's pardon of Mr. Nixon already has had ramifications in the public's attitude about justice and compliance with the law, Kennedy said.

"I was in Boston last week trying to ask people of my city to obey a court order," said Kennedy, who was booed and refused a chance to speak in Boston's school busing controversy.

"I had an extremely difficult time in expecting those people to respond to the question of why should we obey the law when it appears there's a different standard of justice for the President. I found I couldn't answer that question."

Kennedy, speaking here to the convention of the International Brotherhood of Painters and Allied Trades, was applauded when he criticized the Nixon pardon. He said the "premature pardon of the former President has sown more doubts" as to whether the country operates under "equal justice" or whether there is "one system for the high and mighty."

Recalling that Mr. Ford, in his nomination hearings for appointment as Vice President, had said the country would not stand for the pardon of a President by a man named as his successor, Kennedy said:

"I don't think the country will stand for it and I don't think that the country should have to stand for it. It was the wrong time, the wrong place and the wrong person to receive a pre-indictment, pre-conviction pardon."

Kennedy said that Mr. Ford's assumption of the presidency had given rise to renewed hopes after Watergate, but he added that in light of the pardon "it is more important than ever to assure the policies of the new President are forged in the anvil of public interest."

Signs that said "Ted for President" and "Senator Kennedy for President" were waved by the convention delegates as he walked into the hall behind a three-piece band that played "Hey, Look Me Over." Kennedy was introduced to the delegates as "the next President of the United States," but he made no reference to his 1976 plans in his speech.

Later, however, at the press conference, Kennedy said that his plans were "unchanged" about 1976.