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Teachers' union fights wrongful penalties issued against 89 members

Union announces plans to launch a signature campaign and lawsuit against the Education Ministries decision to strike against KTU officials



Jung Jin-hoo, the president of the Korean Teachers and Education Workers' Union (KTU, Jeon Gyo Jo) reads a press release that criticizes the Education Ministry's decision to enact heavy penalties against participants in the teachers' second emergency declaration on the current state of national affairs at their office, July 31.

The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST) made a decision to apply heavy disciplinary measures against a total of 89 officials working in the Korean Teachers and Education Workers Union (KTU, Jeon Gyo Jo) headquarters, and city and provincial chapters on July 19. The penalties include termination for Jung Jin-hoo, the highest level of punishment for the president of KTU, who is being seen as the leader of the second emergency declaration on the current state of national affairs entitled, "Teachers' Statement for the Protection of Democracy." The KTU has announced a legal fight and a launching of a signature campaign in response to MEST's decision.

MEST decided on plans to discipline teachers who had participated in the second statement during a meeting of vice-superintendents from metropolitan and provincial offices of education around the country held at the Central Government Complex on Seoul's Sejong Avenue on Friday.

In line with the MEST's former actions of taking heavy disciplinary measures against individuals who had participated in the teachers' first emergency declaration, the measure taken against Jung was raised one level from dismissal to termination, which strips him of the right to claim a pension and other benefits. Jung had been dismissed after the teachers' first emergency declaration had been publicly released in June. An additional 16 metropolitan and provincial KTU chapter heads, who had been suspended for their participation in the first statement, are also to be dismissed. Among the full-time unionists working at KTU headquarters, five central executives are to be dismissed, while the remaining 67 full-time unionists working at KTU headquarters and local chapter offices are to be suspended.

In total, 22 teachers, who are members of KTU, have been dismissed or terminated over the statements, and 67 have been suspended. Additionally, MEST plans to file a complaint with the Public Prosecutor's Office against 89 teachers for violating the State Public Officials Act. This same measure had been taken at the time of the first statement.

Unlike with the first statement, however, MEST is now deciding to table disciplinary measures against the remaining 28,000 teachers who endorsed the second statement, explaining that it is "impossible to make out their names."

When the first statement had been released, MEST issued cautions and warnings to teachers who had endorsed the statement by telling them that they would be subject to heavier disciplinary measures if they engaged in a statement like that again. "We commissioned a professional organization to decipher the names on the list and presented the findings through a video file posted on the KTU home page, but the conclusion was that the resolution was too low and they were unable to make out the names," explained Lee Seong-hee, head of MEST's School Autonomy Support Bureau. However, Lee had said the ministry plans to issue cautions and warnings for participants in the first statement whose names are legible.

In response, the KTU held a press conference and said, “Measures taken to dismiss all central executive committee members stems from a battle for loyalty, and MEST is using this petty ploy of suppressing the KTU to sidestep widespread discontent among citizens who demand working–class educational policies and changes in private education.”

“We will be engaging in an international solidarity struggle to demonstrate the wrongfulness of these penalties, and will be filing a lawsuit for wrongful labor acts,” the union representative added.

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