

South Korean high school students protest teachers forcing 'anti-Japan' acts

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SEOUL — Public high school teachers in Seoul forced students to engage in “anti-Japan” acts, such as holding posters that say “Japan must apologize” at a school marathon event, two of the school’s students said at a press conference they held to protest the teachers’ behavior.

The teachers belong to the Korean Teachers and Education Workers’ Union, which supports the administration of President Moon Jae-in. Local newspapers are criticizing the teachers’ behavior, with the JoongAng Ilbo daily calling it “politically biased” education.

According to South Korean media reports, teachers at Inhun High School in southern Seoul ordered students to make posters calling for a boycott of Japanese products prior to the marathon event held on Oct. 17. On the day of the event, they were forced to shout slogans such as “Abe’s Liberal Democratic Party should collapse,” referring to Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.

The protesting students revealed the situation on Facebook, saying, “Students are not political toys,” and held a press conference on Oct. 23 in front of the main gate of their school.

In addition, teachers at the school summoned students to the teachers’ room to reprimand them for criticizing the Moon administration, and called other students “dogs and pigs” because of their views of a controversy involving former Justice Minister Cho Kuk.

The students’ backlash surprised the South Korean public.

High school students in the country face fierce competition to pass entrance exams to universities. The protesting students said, “We have suffered under the ‘political teachers’ without complaining because we were worried that they might write badly about us in school recommendations to universities.”

The principal held a press conference on the same day to deny the students’ claims. The Seoul branch of the Korean Teachers and Education Workers’ Union issued a statement criticizing the school, saying, “Some students have become political toys of conservative groups.”

The problem made it clear that divided public opinions created by Moon’s state policy extend even into the classroom.