

'Immigrants must learn to use toilets'

WELLINGTON — Minority lawmakers accused a senior New Zealand politician of racism yesterday for comments he made about Asian and Pacific Island migrant workers while campaigning for next month's elections.

Opposition National Party lawmaker Lockwood Smith — who is in line to become the Minister for Immigration if his party wins in the Nov 8 elections — said Pacific Island workers needed guidance using toilets, showers and washing machines, and that the "smaller hands" of Asians made them better for grape pruning.

Mr Smith made the remarks while campaigning in the wine producing region of Marlborough, where Asians and indigenous Pacific Islanders often number among the seasonal workers.

Mr Smith said Asians were better at pruning vines "because their hands are smaller", and some employers of Pacific Island workers were having to teach them "how to use a toilet and ... a shower, a washing machine, you name it".

Ms Tariana Turia, a leader of the minority Maori Party that represents New Zealand's indigenous minority, slammed the comments as racist and deeply offensive.

Mr Winston Peters, leader of the minority New Zealand First Party, said: "When it comes to immigration, National's racist undertones are clear."

Mr Smith said he was simply passing on the views of wine grape growers and regretted that the comments had been taken out of context. AP