Interview with Manuela Esteva
By B. Jesse Clarke

Manuel Esteva is a San Francisco resident and mother of three; a child care worker, and a member of the community organization POWER. She joined POWER three years ago after hearing a presentation at her church. She was interviewed in the studio of Radio RP&E.

Clarke: Tell us why you are interested in climate change. Why does POWER connect transit and climate?

Esteva: (Tr.) The connection really started [with] the campaign for young people to be able to travel around the city without having to pay.

We started realizing that not only would this benefit youth, but we could also [help] the environment.

A lot more natural disasters are affecting people in cities, like the one that just hit New York. And this is caused by global warming. What cities like ours can do is take these small steps that, over time, can have a large impact on the climate.

San Francisco is a small city that can have a national and global impact. It’s a city that sees itself as a green city, always trying to make strides in terms of community health. We can serve as an example to other cities when we create policies that eliminate dependence on cars.

We know that cars create 20-percent of the pollution in the city. When public transit is made accessible, people use it more. So we can achieve big things when we create [these] policies.

Clarke: So what would POWER do if you had power at City Hall?

Esteva: (Tr.) We know that federal funding prioritizes the creation of highways at the cost of public transit. Only 20 percent of federal funding goes toward public transit. So at the local level, we can encourage people to use public transit [by lowering] the cost, [and making] it more accessible. Other city priorities, like creating car-free zones, can also help.

Clarke: Are the people in your community seeing this connection between climate, transit, and the rights of low-income people?

Esteva: (Tr.) When I’ve done outreach in the community, I’ve talked about this connection between public transit and climate. A lot of people don’t really believe it at first but in followup conversations when we ask, “How would the world be different if people relied on public transit more than vehicles?” there’s more of a response. A lot of people became involved in the campaign through [this] outreach.

They’re really moved by this idea of creating a new generation who can live in a healthy city. A lot of young people become involved because of their desire to live on a healthy planet, to have a positive impact on the environment.

One of our members is Adelia, and she has felt the effects of pollution. You know, she’s part of a family of seven, and five of her family members have asthma from living near a freeway, a highly contaminated area. She has fought really hard [for] this policy. Not only will her children benefit, she’ll benefit from not having to make as many hospital trips and trying to get help for a child who’s having an asthma attack.

This is true for many families in the city. So we want to invite people to join the fight and support this cause.

B. Jesse Clarke is the editor of Race, Poverty & the Environment
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