Africa has not really given much thought to the problem of education. We know, or we think we know, that something called ‘education’ is a good thing. And all African States therefore spend a large proportion of government revenue on it. But I sometimes suspect that, for us in Africa, the underlying purpose of education is to turn us into Black Europeans—or Black Americans. I say this because our educational policies make it quite clear that we are really expecting education in Africa to enable us to emulate the material achievements of Europe and America. That is the object of our activity.

We have not began to think seriously about whether such material achievements are possible. Nor have we begun to question whether the emulation of European and American material achievements is a desirable objective for Africa. I believe that these two matters are now in urgent need of our consideration.

We are planning a thorough reappraisal of what we in Africa are doing educationally and what the alternatives are. Few things could be more useful to our continent. But although one must not be hidebound by the past, one must be very practical in one’s approach. Our peoples do have a conception of what education is; and although it might be wrong and contrary to their own real needs, this conception cannot be wished away. On the other hand, there is no point in accepting the current framework of educational policy in Africa as if it was the only conceivable concept, or necessarily the best concept.

I hope to put before you some ideas derived from our experience.
in this country. For I am becoming increasingly convinced that we in Tanzania either have not yet found the right educational policy, or have not yet succeeded in implementing it—or some combination of these two alternatives.

In 1967 I defined the purpose of education as to transmit from one generation to the next the accumulated wisdom and knowledge of the society, and to prepare the young people for their future membership of the society and their active participation in its maintenance or development.

Today, seven years later, I still think that this is a good definition. But it was a definition intended to cover all kinds of societies—it was designed to be the universal objective and descriptive. As a guide for action it therefore needs some expansion and emphasis, especially for Africa. And I believe that the necessary emphasis can be stated very simply: the primary purpose of education is the liberation of man.

To 'liberate' means to 'set free', and to 'set free from something'. It implies impediments to freedom having been thrown off; it can therefore be a matter of degree and of a process. Thus, when a man succeeds in untying his wrists and liberating his arms, he can use his hands to liberate his feet from the shackles which bind them. But a man can be physically free from restraint and still be unfree if his mind is restricted by habits and attitudes which limit his humanity.

Education has to liberate both the mind and the body of man. It has to make him more of a human being because he is aware of his potential as a human being and is in a positive, life-enhancing relationship with himself, his neighbour and his environment. Education has therefore to enable a man to throw off the impediments to freedom which restrict his full physical and mental development. It is thus a matter of attitudes and skills—both of them. Education is incomplete if it only enables man to work out elaborate schemes for universal peace but does not teach him how to provide good food for himself and his family. It is equally incomplete and counter-productive if it merely teaches man how to be an efficient tool user and tool maker, but neglect his personality and his relationship with his fellow human beings.

What I am suggesting is that a liberated nation, in Africa or elsewhere, is not just a nation which has overcome alien occupation. That is an essential first part of liberation, but it is only the first. Liberation means more than that. A truly liberated nation is a self-reliant nation, one which has freed itself from economic and cultural dependence on other nations, and is therefore able to develop itself