

The Economic and Social situation of Poland 1944-1949

RADOSŁAW DOMKE

War damage

- ▶ No war has devastated Poland as much as World War II
- ▶ The Germans turned some cities into fortresses and they were completely destroyed as a result of the Red Army offensive (Wrocław, Kostrzyn)
- ▶ Some cities, such as Kraków, escaped major destruction, but most were left in ruins
- ▶ The rich former German lands were also robbed because the Russians treated them as war spoils.

Warsaw Uprising

- ▶ At this point it is worth mentioning the most destroyed city.
- ▶ In August 1944, an uprising broke out in Warsaw, directed militarily against Germany and politically against the USSR.
- ▶ Adolf Hitler issued an order to raze Warsaw to the ground
- ▶ After more than two months of heroic fighting, the insurgents succumbed to the terrifying enemy forces



Three-year plan

- ▶ In the years 1946-1949, a three-year economic reconstruction plan was implemented
- ▶ It ended with success (the only one in all of communist Poland)
- ▶ This was related to, among others, With the great enthusiasm of a nation that wanted to rebuild its homeland

Rebuilding the country

- ▶ Work on the reconstruction of roads, bridges, cities and factories was intensified throughout Poland
- ▶ Sometimes the urban fabric was even recreated from scratch



Reconstruction of Warsaw

- ▶ Particular attention was paid to rebuilding the capital, which was completely destroyed
- ▶ Unfortunately, it was at the expense of bricks that were not used to rebuild other Polish cities
- ▶ Warsaw was to become a showcase, proof of Polish patriotic and economic deed



Nationalization of industry

- ▶ By decree of 1946, Polish industry was nationalized
- ▶ Larger plants became state property without compensation
- ▶ Nationalization for compensation concerned specific types of mining and industrial enterprises (including mines, ironworks, waterworks, sugar refineries and coking plants), as well as other enterprises that were able to employ more than 50 workers in production per shift.

An attempt to collectivize agriculture

- ▶ Already in 1944, the long-announced agrarian reform (even before the war) began
- ▶ The decree on agrarian reform established the State Land Fund, which took over all land properties with an area larger than 50 ha. In several voivodeships the limit is set at 100 ha.
- ▶ People "gifted" with land by the reform repaid it by providing quotas of rye or its equivalent in cash at a predetermined price.
- ▶ The state created state farms (equivalents of state farms) and production cooperatives (equivalents of kolkhozes) from larger areas.
- ▶ Polish agriculture was therefore not completely collectivized, even in later years

Universal free education

- ▶ Already on September 1, 1945, the first children went to school in post-war Poland, and in October, Polish students started the academic year
- ▶ The situation was difficult, there was a shortage of teaching staff that needed to be trained quickly
- ▶ The educational program was completely free, as a propaganda trick and a valuable tool in the hands of the authorities



Fight against illiteracy

- ▶ A significant percentage of Poles remained illiterate or semi-illiterate
- ▶ The state's intensified action to combat this phenomenon has brought spectacular results
- ▶ Within a few years, illiteracy was reduced to a negligible percentage



Development of youth organizations

- ▶ At the beginning, they were created in the spirit of diversification and democratism
- ▶ It can be said that each social group had its own youth organization
- ▶ ZWM, the Rural Youth Union of the Republic of Poland "Wici", the Youth Organization of the Workers' University Society and the scouting organization (ZHP) were established



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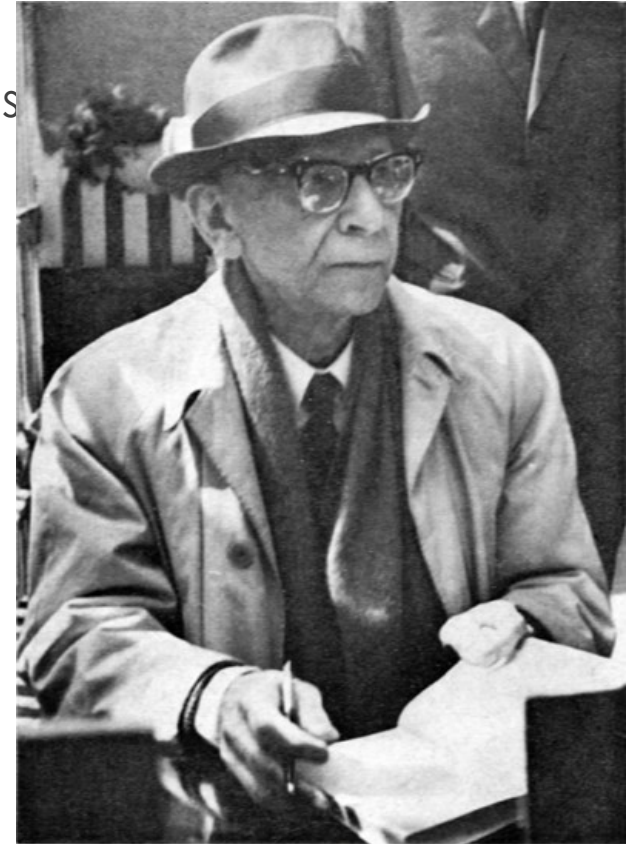
Gradual reconstruction of the social structure

- ▶ Polish society remained peasant in its structure
- ▶ Industry had to be built and corporation workers



The decline of the importance of the intelligentsia and the bourgeoisie

- ▶ The intelligentsia and traders were pushed into the background, as the bourgeois world
- ▶ Battle of Trade (1947)

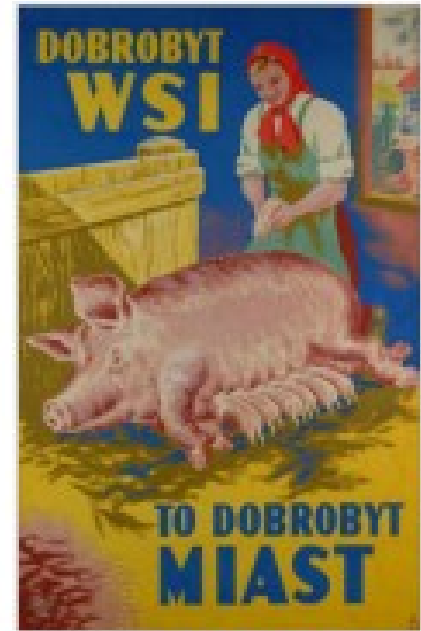
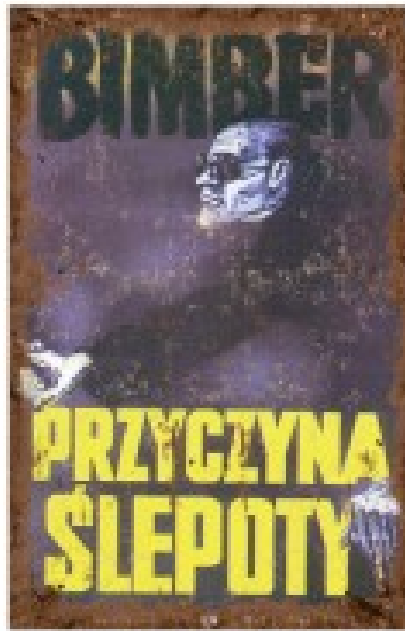
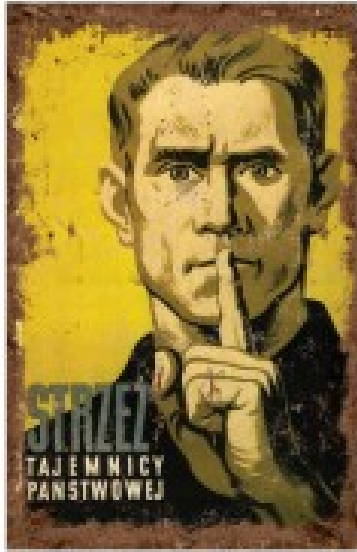


Antonio Starace

Worker-peasant propaganda

- ▶ The entire country was full of slogans and posters promoting the alliance of peasants and workers
- ▶ In this respect, the propaganda of the USSR was followed
- ▶ "Working people of cities and villages"
- ▶ "Proletarians of all countries and nations - unite"





Marxism-Leninism the official ideology

- ▶ Although various philosophical schools, even those related to Catholicism, were not defended, the ideology of Marxism-Leninism was increasingly promoted.
- ▶ Matter was promoted at the expense of spirit
- ▶ It was agreed that the socialist revolution should be achieved through the dictatorship of the proletariat

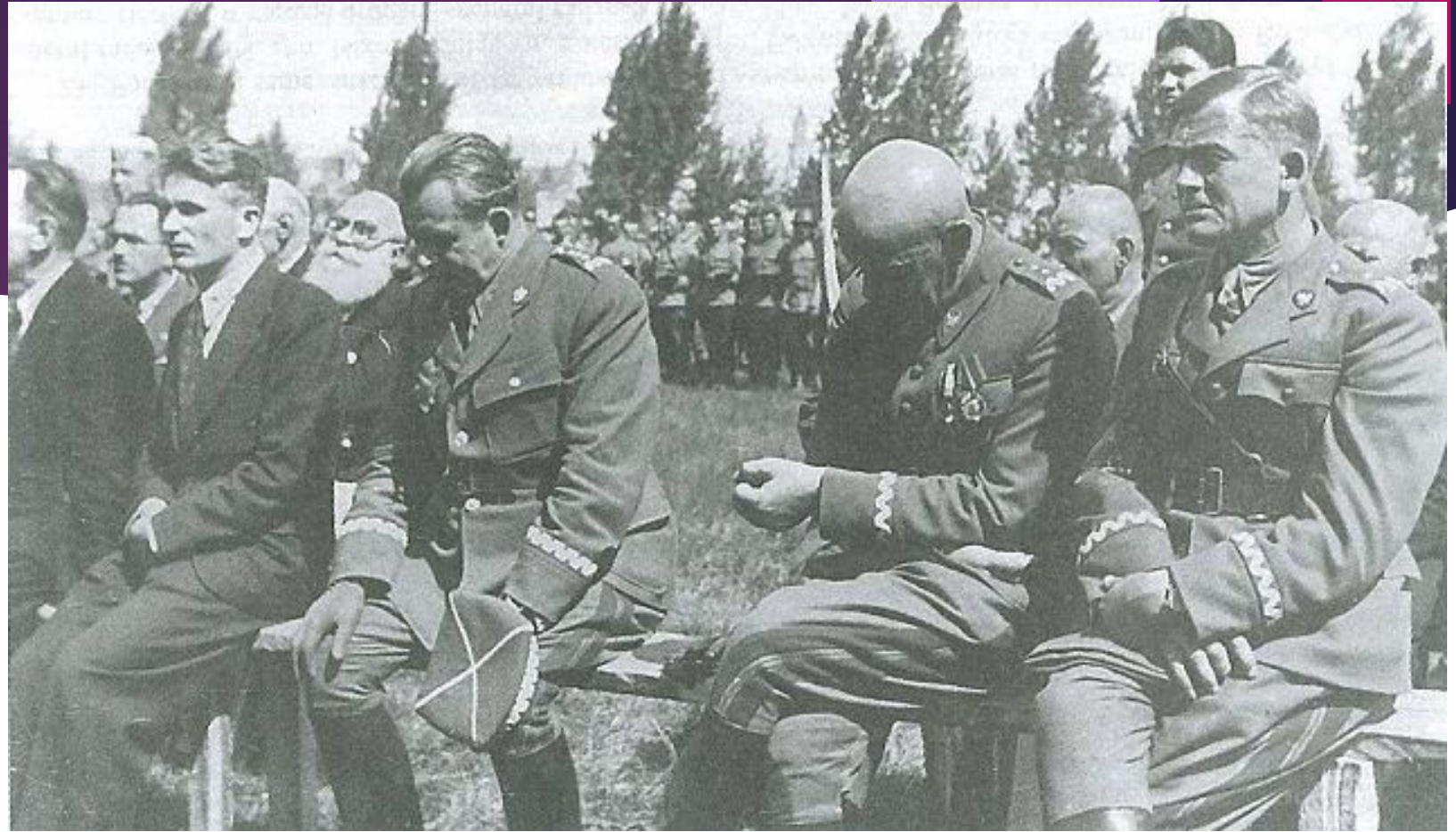
A temporary "alliance" with the Church

- ▶ In order not to alienate society, the Catholic Church, which was the main religious center in the country, was not attacked in the initial period.
- ▶ Priests had enormous authority, role models in society, and their attack could not simply be liquidated and the churches closed
- ▶ To avoid being recognized, even Bolesław Bierut knelt during processions organized by the Church

Integration of the Recovered Territories with the rest of the country

- ▶ The Western and Northern Territories of Poland (former German lands, Recovered Territories) were associated with German material culture
- ▶ Architecturally, they were significantly different from Polish cities
- ▶ The structure of farms was also different
- ▶ This huge territory (100,000 km²) had to be integrated with the rest of the country (over 200,000 km²)
- ▶ Poland gained the rich areas of Lower Silesia and the return of the entire Upper Silesia, wide access to the sea and numerous agglomerations (Wrocław, Gdańsk, Szczecin, Opole, Olsztyn, Zielona Góra, Gliwice)





Mass migrations

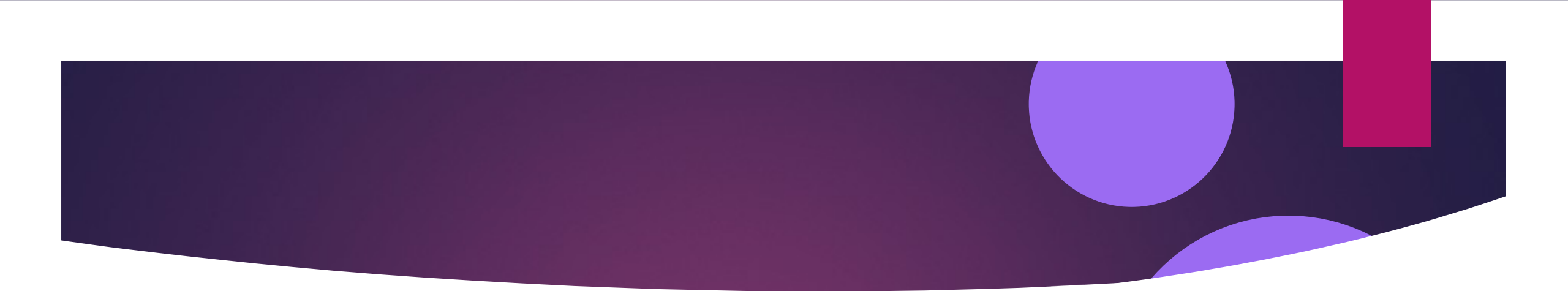
- ▶ The lands in the west were virtually depopulated
- ▶ The Germans fled or were killed
- ▶ Millions were forcibly relocated to Germany's occupation zones (only a handful of essential specialists left behind)
- ▶ Poles from the Eastern Borderlands left the USSR and settled in the new Poland (repatriates)
- ▶ Reemigrants were returning from the West
- ▶ People were looking for places for a new, better life

The threat of German revisionism...?

- ▶ In 1946, American Secretary of State James Byrnes questioned the legality of Poland's western borders
- ▶ This caused more or less real fears about the return of the Germans to the Oder and Neisse
- ▶ People feared another war, this time viewing the Germans as possible allies of the West
- ▶ All this pushed Poland even further into the hands of the Soviets, as the only guarantors of the border in the West

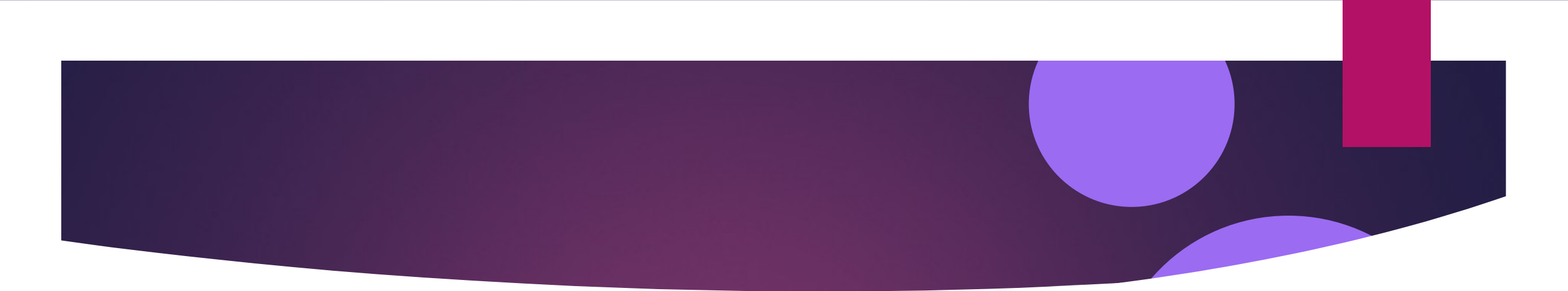
Conflict with Czechoslovakia over Kłodzko and other territories

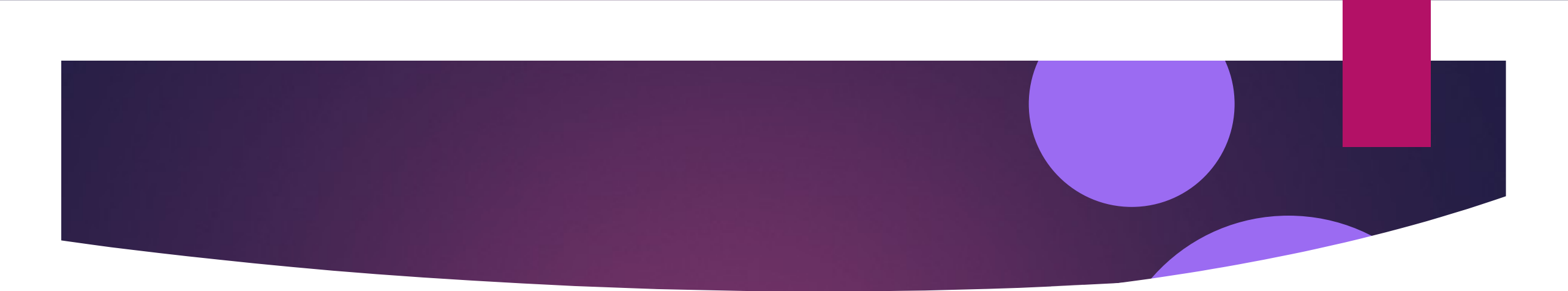
- ▶ Historically, Kłodzko was almost not Polish at all
- ▶ However, due to the historical Prussian-Austrian border, these areas remained outside Czechoslovakia in the interwar period.
- ▶ World War II created opportunities for the Czechs to claim their former heritage
- ▶ Let us remember that the border in the south was not marked at the conferences of the Big Three, with the hopes that the allies would reach an agreement on this issue.
- ▶ However, no one risked war, and Stalin did not openly support any of the sides in the conflict

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- ▶ Stalin first promised Kłodzko to the Czechs and then to the Poles
 - ▶ The Czechs made claims to the Kłodzko land and the counties of Prudnik, Głubczyce, Racibórz and Koźle
 - ▶ In June 1945, there was a one-day mutual shelling of positions.



NAŠE KLADSKO

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- ▶ Polish-Czechoslovak negotiations were planned for February 1946 in Prague on the course of the border line.
 - ▶ However, during the negotiations in Prague (February 16–25, 1946), no exchange could be agreed and the above Polish proposals remained only on paper.
 - ▶ Due to pressure from Moscow, Czech troops withdrew behind the Opava River.

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- ▶ On March 10, 1947, under pressure from Moscow, a friendship treaty was signed between Poland and Czechoslovakia, but the border issues (Kłodzko Land, Zaolzie) were left unsettled.
 - ▶ Only on June 13, 1958, the governments of the Polish People's Republic and the CSR signed an agreement closing the border disputes:
 - ▶ in Cieszyn Silesia, the Polish-Czech border from 1920
 - ▶ in Spisz and Orawa, a line established in 1924
 - ▶ in the remaining part, the pre-1938 border line with the Kłodzko Land on its northern - then already Polish - side
 - ▶ border correction with Czechoslovakia in 1958.

Polarization of Polish society

- ▶ In the first post-war years, Polish society was divided into supporters of the new order and those who dreamed of the return of the old, pre-war world.
- ▶ Millions of people with nothing to lose, often lower classes wanting advancement, supported the communist government
- ▶ The historical division into the left and the right took on a different meaning, as the left was now associated only with the alliance with the Soviet Union and the right with the Sanation and the Polish government in London.

