

Soviet legislature approves land-leasing law

MOSCOW - Legislators overwhelmingly approved a bill Wednesday that allows Soviets to acquire land and bequeath it to their children, a major modification of decades of state control of land.

The law, however, stops short of legalizing full private ownership of property by strictly forbidding the sale of land. Under the new law, plots can only be leased, and the lease prices will be set by the state.

The measure was part of a comprehensive package designed to give the force of law to the economic and social reforms championed by President Mikhail Gorbachev. The official news agency Tass called it "a major

legal document of Soviet economic reform."

The law is to serve as the basis for further legislation by each republic to regulate land distribution.

State ownership of land, inscribed in the Soviet Constitution, has been a cornerstone of communism since the 1917 revolution. But reformers and economists repeatedly have called for allowing private ownership as a way of spurring growth in the troubled economy.

In a commentary in Wednesday's edition of the newspaper Komsomolskaya Pravda, economist Pavel Voshchanov welcomed the reform as a first step to reversing a situation in

which the Soviet Union, with some of the richest farmland on Earth, has become a net importer of food.

The Soviet Constitution says "the land, its minerals, waters and forests are the exclusive property of the state." The Congress of People's Deputies, the Supreme Soviet's parent body, will be asked to change the Constitution when it meets March 12.

By altering the Constitution and allowing the roughly 23 million people employed on the 26,000 collective and 23,000 state farms to acquire plots, the Kremlin leadership hopes to raise farm productivity, which is notoriously low on those farms.

The Supreme Soviet legislature first

voted separately on each chapter of the 52-article measure, then approved the entire law 349-7 with 12 abstentions. The full Congress of People's Deputies must now approve it.

Under the law, land is not actually purchased but leased, and is subject to taxes. Lease prices will be set by the state and sale of the plot will be strictly forbidden, the law says.

The land may be bequeathed to the holder's children. But the children would not be allowed to divide the plot, and the land may be revoked if the state determines that it has not been utilized in a "rational" way or if the holder seriously pollutes it.

Daily Nebraskan

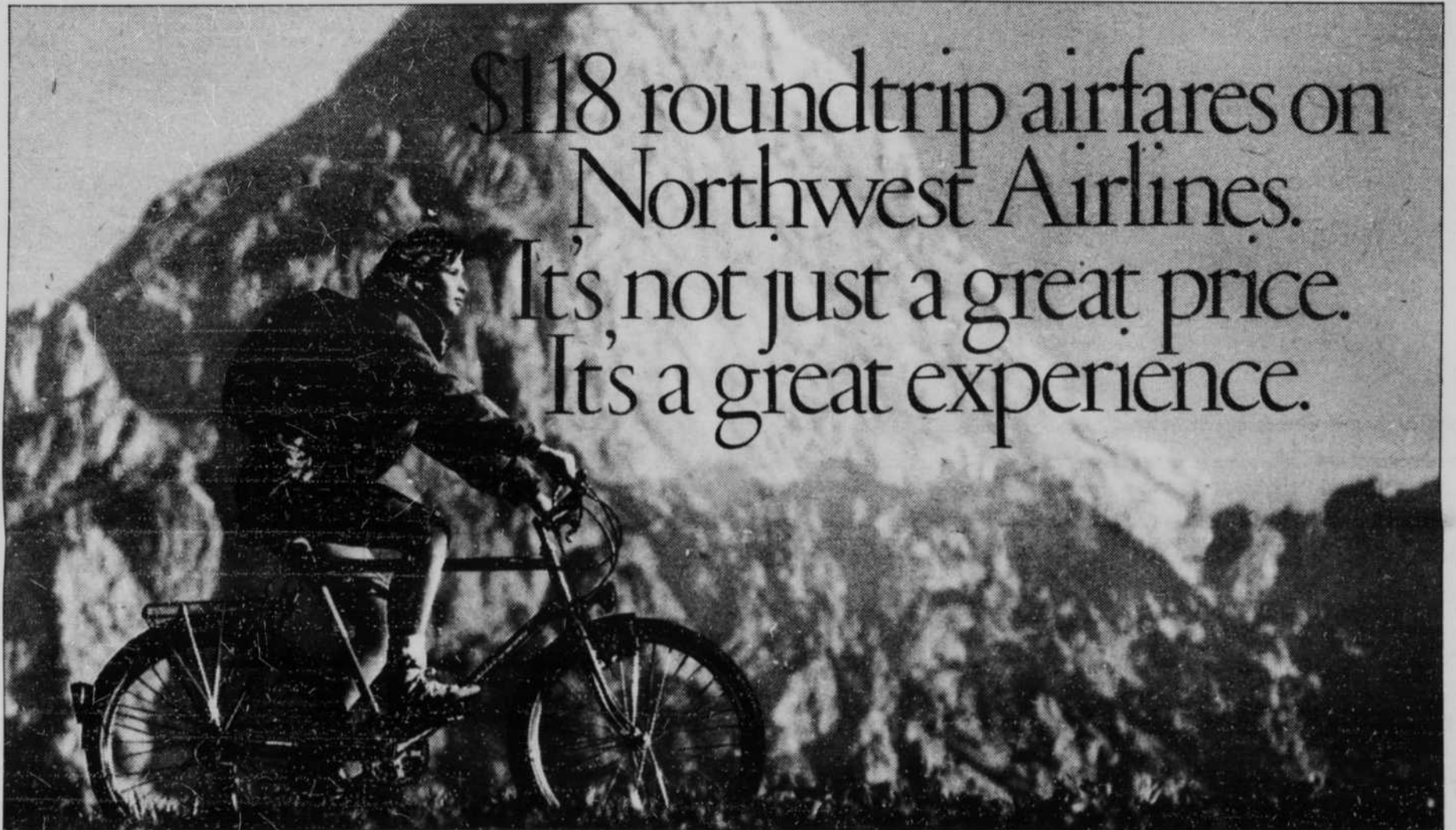
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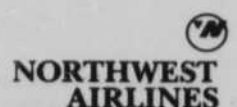
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