Albert Romana 1948–2005

Albert Romana passed away on 14 December 2005, on the eve of his 58th birthday. He made his entire career at the Laboratoire Leprince-Ringuet at Ecole Polytechnique, where he was deputy-director from July 1990 to June 1998, then interim-director up to November of the same year.

Most of Albert Romana’s scientific activity is closely linked to experiments done at CERN, where he used to spend long periods every year and where he met many colleagues and collaborators who also soon became friends. More recently, his physics interests led him to Brookhaven where he became involved in an experiment at the Relativistic Heavy Ion Collider at Brookhaven.

As a student, Albert started by participating in an experiment with a hyperon beam at the CERN Proton Synchrotron, looking for leptonic hyperon decays in a streamer chamber. He wrote his “thèse de 3ème cycle” on the subject. After his military service, he moved to an experiment on the Omega Spectrometer at the Super Proton Synchrotron (SPS) – the so-called beam-dump experiment – to study the hadroproduction of the newly discovered charmed particles, $J/\psi$ and charmed mesons, with incident protons, antiprotons, pions and kaons; this was the subject of his “thèse d’Etat”. He then made significant contributions in the new NA10 experiment, studying prompt muon-pair production with a high-intensity pion beam and testing, in particular, Drell–Yan scale invariance.

By the end of the 1980s, the acceleration of ions in the SPS opened the field to quark–gluon-plasma observation. Albert contributed greatly to modifying and adapting the NA10 muon spectrometer for the new difficult environment of the high-intensity incident heavy-ion beams. He then played a key role in the NA38 experiment and later in NA50, the latter leading to widely publicized evidence for the quark–gluon plasma. Some years before, Albert had made a significant personal contribution to the first measurement of the asymmetry of the sea-quarks of the nucleon, analysing the data collected specifically for this purpose in the NA51 experiment, once again based on the NA10 muon spectrometer.

After being at the CMS experiment for some time, Albert soon came back to heavy ions and became deeply involved in the PHENIX experiment at Brookhaven, which was emerging as a proper continuation of NA50. For several years he led the PHENIX group of Ecole Polytechnique.

Albert played a fundamental role in all the experiments mentioned here, often volunteering for tasks of general interest for the collaboration, such as designing, tuning and providing basic tools and also managing and organizing the data to enable a coordinated and coherent data analysis. This led him to interact continuously with most of his colleagues, both with the data-taking and hardware experts on one side and with the teams analysing the data on the other. Because of his extensive skills as an experimentalist, of his personal modesty and his always optimistic and smiling approach to any problem, he was the ideal introducer and guide for newcomers, such as new groups or young students joining the experiment. For everybody, it was always a real pleasure to work and collaborate with him.

We will remember Albert as a kind and dedicated friend and colleague, always ready to listen, to discuss and to help with an open mind, at both the professional and personal level. We will miss him.

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